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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 254**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1994-95

House of Commons

Monday 6 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Disabled People (Access)

1. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on access by disabled people to transport facilities and vehicles.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): We are firmly committed to achieving fully accessible transport systems, and great progress has already been made. Hon. Members have received a copy of my mobility unit's annual review, which details many of the developments. We continue to take forward a number of initiatives to improve access to vehicles and, of course, transport infrastructure has been included in the Disability Discrimination Bill, which received its Second Reading on 24 January.

Mr. Barnes: The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which will be before the House on Friday, applies to all means of transport, including buses and trains. The Government's alternative, however, although it applies to railway stations and bus terminals, does not apply to the buses and trains themselves. How many people will be covered by the Government's legislation compared to the number who would be covered by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill? Why have not the Government written on the face of the Bill that it will apply to the means of transport as well as to the stations from which people seek to move? It will be nonsense if people can turn up at railway stations, but cannot get on the trains.

Mr. Norris: The Government take the view, I think rightly, that targeted initiatives, including specific legislation, guidelines, codes of practice and the setting of technical standards, are the best way in which to achieve workable and sustainable access improvements. Although it is, of course, always possible to set even higher standards than those to which the Government aspire, provided that one totally ignores the cost to the public purse of any possible assessment of costs and benefits, the hon. Gentleman should remember that this country boasts the best provision of disabled access for rail passengers on an inter-city system of any country in the world. He might reflect occasionally on that.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is often easier to build in proper access for the disabled when new facilities are being provided than when old ones are being converted? Does he also agree that the introduction of new systems of transport, such as the light rail proposed in Croydon, will provide not only improved transport for people but, more importantly, good and proper access for those with disabilities?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right. We have made it a principle of new projects that they are fully accessible to the disabled. My hon. Friend is equally right in his implication that simply to require retrospective accessibility for the disabled to our transport infrastructure is high-flown words, but is extraordinarily difficult to deliver in practice because much of our infrastructure is Victorian in origin. It was built at a time when, sadly, the needs of the disabled were simply not taken into account. Realistic Governments understand that and plan a programme of change accordingly.

Midland Line

2. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now make a further statement about the need for electrification of the midland line.

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): Investment priorities are a matter for Railtrack in consultation with the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the train operating companies.

Mr. Skinner: Would it not make more sense for the Government to favour rail, especially the electrification of the midland line, rather than spend billions of pounds on motorway widening? Many projects, including the widening of the M1 between intersections 28 and 31, cost millions of pounds and many people object to them. Would it not be better to spend the money on rail and to favour rail rather than to widen parts of the M1? That would be a better investment in the end.

Mr. Watts: The public expenditure settlement provides for investment in the coming year of about £1 billion in the railway network and about £1.8 billion in the trunk road network. In a balanced transport policy, it is clearly important to invest adequately in both modes. Railtrack is aware of the desire of local authorities and people in the area, in particular, for improvements to the midland main line and is about to embark on a study of the various options available for such developments. Railtrack will be working closely with train operators and local authorities during that study.

Cyclists

3. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline steps taken to improve the safety of cyclists.

Mr. Norris: Fatalities to cyclists are at their lowest since records began in 1927. We shall continue the improvement by means of education, publicity, research and advice to local authorities on cycling matters.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is it not true that the Government do not take cycling seriously, despite the fact that it is the most environment-friendly and healthy form of transport? Is the Minister aware that modern traffic conditions frequently result in the rights of cyclists as road users being totally ignored? When did he last have an invigorating ride on a bike? Will he get out of his chauffeur-driven ministerial car and experience for himself the conditions that cyclists face on the roads every day?

Mr. Norris: I contemplated and instantly rejected a number of answers to that question. I shall confine myself to agreeing with the hon. Gentleman. Cycling has been hugely undervalued for many years. Ironically, because it was potentially dangerous, we said that we would discourage people from doing it, whereas many other countries have proved that, if one creates safe cycling conditions, one can greatly improve urban transport and encourage people to do something that is healthy for them and for the environment, so there is much in what the hon. Gentleman said. That is why we have committed £3 million to taking the cycling programme forward in London, and why we are stressing the importance that we attach to cycling in transport policy and programme guidance.

Sir Terence Higgins: Has my hon. Friend noticed the extraordinarily suicidal tendencies of London cyclists, who ride around with no form of illumination at night? Once upon a time, the police would have stopped such people immediately. What measures does he propose to prevent that from happening, as it is grossly unfair on motorists who have to try to avoid such cyclists?

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend touches on an important point because there can be no excuse for cyclists not abiding by the principles of road safety, which are there entirely for their personal safety. They do cycling no good service. It is an extraordinary proposition that they can afford several hundred pounds for very expensive bicycles and even more expensive clothing, which is apparently de rigueur, but cannot afford a front light.

Traffic Speed

4. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what he is doing to reduce the speed of traffic on urban roads.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): We are taking a wide range of measures to reduce speed-related casualties on urban roads, including speed cameras, major publicity campaigns and funding for local safety schemes.

Mrs. Jackson: The Minister will be aware that a reduction of just 1 mph would lead to a major reduction in air pollution in our cities and cut fatalities by 7 per cent. and injuries by 5 per cent. He will also be aware that 92 per cent. of those convicted for speeding offences are men. Does he agree that what is required is a major public education programme directed at motorist aggression and the macho image of the man behind the wheel?

Dr. Mawhinney: Or, indeed, of the woman behind the wheel. I share some of the hon. Lady's concerns and know that she has assiduously followed up her worries after a tragic accident in her constituency last year. Speed kills and the statistics of survival, especially for pedestrians struck by moving vehicles, improve considerably as speed drops. For that reason among others, I hope that she will be pleased to know that, in this country, we have 145 different areas with a speed limit of 20 mph.

Mr. Mans: My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the huge reduction in pedestrian casualties that has resulted over the past two years from traffic calming measures. Will he ensure that his Department gives the highest possible priority to those by ensuring that local authorities carry out traffic calming measures in both urban and rural areas, because they seem to be the best way to reduce casualties and to improve the environment where people live?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I know that he has taken a lot of interest in that subject, having introduced legislation on it. It is worth recording that 85 per cent. of pedestrians will die if they are struck by a vehicle travelling at 40 mph, while only 5 per cent. will die if they are struck by a vehicle travelling at 20

mph, so there is a considerable safety issue involved, and traffic calming measures can play an important part. My hon. Friend will welcome the fact that, over the three-year public expenditure survey period, we shall increase the money made available for local safety schemes.

Mr. Tyler: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the statistics are even worse in the case of one of the most lethal threats on our roads—a heavy lorry travelling at excessive speed in urban areas, particularly if it is overloaded or has not been regularly maintained? Does he acknowledge that the inspection procedures need to be tightened up rather than relaxed? Will he now agree to meet a deputation from the all-party campaign called BRAKES—the campaign for safer lorries?

Dr. Mawhinney: I do not want to get into an argument with the hon. Gentleman in which we bandy about figures on the most dangerous form of excessive speed on the roads. Heavy lorries can be extremely dangerous but so can motor cyclists who weave in and out of the traffic in central London. We all recognise the problem and the whole House is coming together to try to find ways to deal with it. I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for local transport and road safety has already agreed to meet the deputation.

Airfields

5. **Mr. Robert Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that there should be no new airfield on a green field site in the south-east.

Dr. Mawhinney: Lord Parkinson said in 1990 that a major new airport on a virgin site in the south-east was unlikely to be realistic or acceptable. I agree with that view. Regional planning guidance holds Oxfordshire to be an area of restricted development, and it is hard to see how such a proposal could be consistent with that guidance.

Mr. Jackson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I welcome his reaffirmation of long-standing Government policy restricting growth in Oxfordshire. Will he confirm that, as it is a private proposal that is not sponsored by the Government, the developers will have no access to compulsory purchase powers?

Dr. Mawhinney: I confirm that the proposal is not sponsored by the Government. The Government do not sponsor airport proposals. My hon. Friend is right to say that the promoters which are not statutory bodies do not have compulsory purchase powers.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Secretary of State make a statement to the House on his press release last week in which he announced an intensification in the use of Heathrow airport? Are not the Government craven in their support for BAA—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes, they are. Does that not have clear ramifications for airports in the south-east? BAA, which the Government privatised, monopolises the three London airports. Stansted airport is underused and BAA is trying to get an extra terminal at Heathrow. The Secretary of State is supporting it by supporting the concept of doubling the number of aircraft coming into Heathrow. Did he not issue a press release so as not to embarrass the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) and other hon. Members with constituencies in and around Heathrow airport?

Dr. Mawhinney: I hope that the hon. Gentleman feels better for getting that off his chest. Last week, I answered a written question in considerable detail. I thought that it was quite a good answer, as did most people who bothered to read it, unlike the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Patten: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that, although his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) was extremely helpful, it leaves a question mark over the possibility of a green field international airport in Oxfordshire or any other part of south-eastern or southern England? Would not the answer be for my right hon. Friend to freshen up the noble Lord Parkinson's guidance with a fresh announcement that makes it clear that he rules out the possibility of such an airport in southern or south-eastern England?

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand clearly the worry that my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend have expressed, and indeed experienced, about that issue. Subject to the legal advice that I have received, I have been as robust as I am permitted to be.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is it not absurd to encourage more and more traffic into Heathrow and to talk about the expansion of Heathrow and Gatwick when, for example, Stansted airport, which is a great airport, is underused? Obviously we need more ministerial direction and discussion with the airlines to encourage them there. If we cannot use incentives, perhaps the Minister can use something approaching a big stick.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are those who value the importance of Heathrow and Gatwick, and the economic contribution that they make to the country. We got rid of traffic distribution rules some time ago but, subject to that, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that more use could be made of Stansted.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

6. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to specify conditions and limitations in relation to specific types of subsidies which will be available under clauses 30 and 31 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill.

Mr. Watts: The level and nature of public sector support for the channel tunnel rail link will be determined by the outcome of the competition now under way to select the private sector promoter for the project.

Mr. Shaw: Can my hon. Friend confirm that it is not the intention of the Government that clauses 30 and 31 should be used as a means of subsidising the channel tunnel, and that it is the Government's intention that the ferry industry and the channel tunnel should remain in fair competition with one another?

Mr. Watts: I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety that there should be fair competition between ferries and international rail services. I hope that I can give him the reassurance that he requires. European passenger services will be privatised as part of the competition for the CTRL.

We have no intention of subsidising the private sector operation of international rail services, and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill contains no powers to do so.

Mr. Madden: Whatever the subsidies are for the channel tunnel, does the Minister agree that many people were gobsmacked to discover at the weekend that, last month, the Secretary of State for Transport had cut the security division at the department responsible for security on the channel tunnel, airports and ports of entry throughout the country, especially at a time when the threat of international terrorism remains? What on earth is the Secretary of State thinking about by sanctioning such a disastrous cut?

Mr. Watts: No reductions are being made in any front-line security services in respect of any transport mode. I believe that much of the media coverage at the weekend, especially that on television, was visually misleading, in that it showed Metropolitan police officers and security staff checking baggage at airports. They are not employed by my Department; they are not part of Transec.

In the Department, we are considering improving the efficiency of the administration and the guidance and oversight of security measures at airports and other transport facilities. There is absolutely no impact on front-line security, which is one of our highest priorities.

South-east Railways

7. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the requirement to replace old rolling stock currently in service on south-east railways.

Mr. Watts: Estimates of rolling stock requirements for rail services are currently a matter for British Rail.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for the interest that he is showing in the future of the ABB Carriage Works in York. Will he assure the people of York, and also Kent commuters, that if, in response to British Rail's latest invitation last week, ABB makes proposals to provide new trains on the south-east region, especially in Kent, at the same cost as or a lower cost than continuing to deploy the old, clapped-out trains—some of which are dangerous, extremely dirty and not conducive to persuading commuters back on to the railway—he will do all that he can to ensure that British Rail exercises its option to build those trains, and build them this year?

Mr. Watts: On 1 February, last Wednesday, British Rail wrote to the manufacturers of Networker trains, ABB and GEC Alsthom, inviting them to say by Friday of this week, 10 February, whether they would wish to have an opportunity to submit proposals for a further tranche. BR has made it clear that any proposals must satisfy the private finance initiative criteria, recognise that the economic case for early scrapping or redeployment of existing rolling stock is weak and take into account the planned privatisation of the rolling stock leasing companies. The British Railways Board is willing to consider proposals from manufacturers which meet those criteria while recognising the order position of the rolling stock manufacturing industry. Any proposals which BR brings forward for assessment against PFI guidelines will be considered as a matter of urgency by my Department and by myself.

Mrs. Dunwoody: That is a load of claptrap. Has not ABB already submitted a detailed assessment of the amount of work which it could do? Is not ABB tooled up for an existing order? Is it not the Department—not Railtrack—that is doing those bizarre things, and forcing ABB to start all over again and submit a new tender? Why does not the Minister have the guts to admit that the Government are wiping out the manufacturing of rolling stock in this country, which will cause a horrendous loss of jobs?

Mr. Watts: The hon. Lady should know that it would never have been a matter for Railtrack. On the previous occasion we debated these matters, the hon. Lady indulged in fairy tales. She has now, in her own words, moved on to claptrap.

Commercial decisions about the replacement of rolling stock are a matter for British Rail. I have explained on many occasions that the role which I and the Department have in those matters is in ensuring that the proposals fit within the requirements of the private finance initiative so that they can be taken forward.

M1

8. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to assess the effect of widening the M1 on traffic on the surrounding road network.

Dr. Mawhinney: All my Department's road scheme proposals are supported at public inquiry by assessments of traffic levels on the roads affected by the scheme. Following the publication of the report of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, these will now take account, where necessary, of induced traffic.

Mrs. Knight: My right hon. Friend will know that whenever motorway widening is proposed, fierce dispute is never far behind. Is he aware that the three issues of particular concern in Erewash relating to the M1 widening are the need for sound barriers, the pressure of traffic on junction 25 and the village of Sandiacre and the need to connect properly the town of Ilkeston to the M1? Will my right hon. Friend's proposals take those three matters into account?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am aware of those issues, due to the diligence of my hon. Friend. As part of the scheme to shield those living in Long Eaton, Sandiacre, Stapleford and Trowell, 3 m to 4 m high noise fences and mounds are proposed. I hope that that is of assistance to my hon. Friend. Further improvements to the scheme are difficult because it is hemmed in by housing. It would be better to service Stanton from new local authority links at junction 26. I hope that that will be of some encouragement to my hon. Friend.

Mr. William O'Brien: In considering the impact of the widening of the M1 on trunk roads and urban roads, will the Secretary of State also consider the impact of the

widening of the A1 and the M62 in west Yorkshire, not only on the traffic on minor roads but on the environment of schools and properties adjacent to the roadways?

Dr. Mawhinney: Yes, because the effects on all of the roads associated with a particular scheme are taken into account before judgments are made. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point.

Mr. Robathan: My right hon. Friend will know that the M1 passes through my constituency, and particularly through the village of Leicester Forest East. Is he aware of the strong opposition among residents of Leicester Forest East and Kirby Muxloe to the widening of the M1, and in particular to the possibility that the M1 will be widened by another lane? Is he aware of the concern there is about the impact that that will have on roads in the area?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that concern to my attention. I undertake to bear it in mind as we discuss the matters further.

London Underground (Access)

9. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve access for disabled people into London Underground stations.

Mr. Norris: For a number of years it has been London Underground's policy to improve access to stations as they come up for redevelopment. All new lines and extensions will be fully accessible. In October 1993, London Underground announced the dropping of all restrictions on wheelchair users on the system.

Mr. Gerrard: Does the Minister accept that when people with mobility difficulties are asked to give 24 hours' notice of their travelling on public transport and about only 30 underground stations are wheelchair accessible, we are a long way short of a much-needed comprehensive programme? In his earlier answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), the Minister referred to the financial difficulties in meeting that programme. Under his plans, how many years will pass before the majority of underground stations are accessible to people with mobility difficulties?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important subject. Perhaps he might ask shadow transport spokesmen whether they are prepared to commit themselves to a capital programme to permit disabled people to access the public transport system. I fear that they will tell him that the problem is that a great deal of the underground system was built in Victorian times when, as I said earlier, the needs of disabled people were simply not taken into account. In many instances, remedial work will therefore be horrendously expensive. One estimate puts the cost of making London Underground wheelchair accessible at not less than £7 billion. No one could be more understanding and concerned about the needs of disabled people than me, but I think that a little realism would not go amiss.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that London commuters have seen real progress made in this area, with taxis and other parts of the transport system having been made wheelchair accessible? Does he agree that it is hypocritical of Opposition Members to say that they oppose tax increases, yet say that we should spend £7 billion?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is quite right. I hope that the Opposition will produce a costed programme—if that is what they are offering—to show the public expenditure implications of a commitment to wheelchair accessibility on London Underground within a few years. That cost will be horrendous; my hon. Friend is exactly right.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Minister accept that his replies this afternoon have been complacent and mean-minded in the extreme? How can he justify introducing legislation that allows disabled people access to stations and bus terminuses, but not to the vehicles themselves? Are those people supposed to stand on platforms and wave goodbye to trains and buses?

In the light of the figures that the Minister presented to the House, how can he justify the fact that the recent refurbishment of the Angel station has made it even more difficult for disabled passengers to access? Does he accept that he has a responsibility not only to almost 1 million disabled potential passengers in London who cannot access public transport but to ensure public access to public transport in the capital?

Mr. Norris: I fear that the hon. Gentleman's high-minded and immensely sincere words must be backed by finance. He has to be realistic. London Underground's management has taken considerable steps in that regard and I know that, in his usual fair way, he will acknowledge that.

All new transport developments and new transport systems offer full access to disabled people. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that in London we operate a largely Victorian-built system with deep tunnels, which makes it very difficult to introduce disabled access. If he can persuade his right hon. and hon. Friends to cost the programme, I would like to see that commitment. I believe that, when the chips are down, the hon. Gentleman's high words will cut no ice with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Traffic, London

11. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is proposing to speed the flow of traffic and in respect of parking in London and the surrounding boroughs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Red route measures—allied to strict enforcement of parking controls on red routes by the police—will reduce congestion on London's main roads. Elsewhere, the new local authority parking enforcement system will substantially increase the resources available for parking enforcement, and thus help to tackle the problems caused by illegal parking throughout London.

Mr. Greenway: What is my hon. Friend doing to increase the provision of parking, which is much needed in inner and outer London, especially in Ealing? Has he been caught in traffic jams on the approach to the wedding cake in front of Buckingham palace? If so, does he remember the great value to all traffic of being able to drive around the wedding cake? Is it really necessary to

block half of it for the Queen's safety? Surely she can be made safe and a right of way properly maintained to the benefit of London traffic.

Mr. Norris: This is exciting stuff, but I fear that the roads in question are the responsibility of Westminster city council. I have encountered that interesting traffic experiment, and we must all wait to see how it works in practice. As for providing more parking space in central London, which was the thrust of my hon. Friend's serious question, I cannot give the guarantee that he seeks, precisely because the provision of parking, especially for those who commute into central London by car, is the greatest invitation to commuting, which produces the congestion about which my hon. Friend and his constituents complain. The control of private non-residential parking is more likely to play a part in urban transport planning in future.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister accept that he must be much bolder if he is to reduce London traffic flows and clean up the air? He must seriously cut the number of parking spaces available in central London and, above all, of the planning permissions still being granted for new office development that include a large number of internal car parks, which are filled with the vehicles of expense-account motorists, whom we are all subsidising as taxpayers.

Mr. Norris: Stripping some of the Marxist rhetoric from the hon. Gentleman's question—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Madam Speaker, perhaps not Marxist, but then I am an amateur in such matters. The hon. Gentleman's remarks contain the germ of a perfectly sensible idea. Government planning policy note No. 13 makes the same point and emphasises the importance of the report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution. We all have choices to make about air quality, allied to our own wishes and the apparently increasing desire among the population to improve it. That is felt nowhere more acutely than in town centres.

Rail Privatisation

12. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress towards rail privatisation.

Dr. Mawhinney: Preparations are under way for the stock market flotation of Railtrack. The first franchise contracts are due to be awarded by the end of 1995 and we plan to have 51 per cent. of them in private hands by April 1996. The maintenance depots of British Rail should be in private sector ownership shortly. The three rolling stock leasing companies and the freight companies are set for sale during 1995.

Mr. Kennedy: Is the Secretary of State aware of the great concern and downright offence felt by Highland regional council because the Department has not seen fit to respond properly to the council's request, which it first made on 21 December, for a meeting arising from the franchising director's pre-emptive statement about the ending of the sleeper service to Fort William? The regional council will lobby the Scottish Grand Committee in the House on Wednesday morning, when it will meet to debate that and related matters. Will the right hon. Gentleman or one of his colleagues take the opportunity to meet a delegation from the council to explain why categorical assurances given by the previous Minister to the region about the sleeper service have not been upheld?

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand the concern that has been expressed locally but, as I want to be fair, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the taxpayers' subsidy per person for a sleeper berth on the trip to Fort William, excluding the infrastructure cost, is £180. If one adds the cost of the infrastructure, that subsidy becomes £540. Given those figures, it seems reasonable that there should be public consultation, as there will be when the franchising director produces—

Mr. Kennedy: That is wrong.

Dr. Mawhinney: I assure the hon. Gentleman, and I think that he will accept this from me, that when the franchising director produces his passenger service requirements for ScotRail, there will be consultation on whatever proposal is or is not included with respect to Fort William.

Sir Roger Moate: I welcome the progress that my right hon. Friend has mentioned towards rail privatisation, but should not we recollect that, under public ownership, the last Labour Government cut public sector rail investment year after year and that the Labour Government before that closed 4,000 miles of track? Does not that emphasise the fact that if we are to have a railway of which we can be proud, it will be achieved only through private sector investment and private enterprise?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Neither he nor I would want to add to the embarrassment of the Labour party, but, as I understand it, its proposals are to take British Rail back into the public sector, so that it can continue to decline in relative terms as it has for the past 40 years.

Mr. Meacher: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, when the Railways Bill was being considered in Committee, Ministers promised that passenger train services would be franchised on the basis of the current timetable, whereas the franchising director has now revealed that there will be major cuts; that through-ticketing stations would remain as now, yet the Rail Regulator has now revealed that there will be huge reductions; that there would be no investment hiatus as a result of privatisation, yet this year, for the first time since the war, there are no new orders for rolling stock; and that Railtrack would remain in the public sector until last, yet it is being offered first for sale to fit in with the Chancellor's Budget arithmetic? Is not it true that every single promise that Ministers have made—that services would improve under privatisation—has now clearly been shown to be false? Is not it high time that the Government listened for once to the 85 per cent. of the electorate—including a majority of Conservatives—who now demand that the crazy idea of privatising the railways be scrapped?

Dr. Mawhinney: To quote a distinguished former Prime Minister, "No, no, no." I will take time tomorrow yet again to try to explain to the hon. Gentleman—who has no idea how the private sector works, but given his background he would not—precisely the benefits that will accrue to passengers: wait until tomorrow.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Private Clegg

30. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Attorney-General how many representations he has received regarding the case of Private Clegg; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Since the House of Lords gave judgment in the case of Private Clegg, I have received as Attorney-General representations from eight hon. Members and some 23 members of the public.

Sir Michael Neubert: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the British public find it difficult to understand how in a rapid burst of fire, consisting of four shots at split-second intervals, the first three can be lawful but the fourth not, and that they may have concluded that, if guilt is established in this case, fault may lie with the law rather than Private Clegg? Will he and his colleagues in government review very thoroughly the circumstances of the case to ensure, if necessary, that the law is amended to accord more closely with the British sense of justice?

The Attorney-General: I recognise, as does everybody in the House, the very difficult position that soldiers—young and less young—in Northern Ireland face in their exacting duties. That said, the law of Northern Ireland applies to all citizens. The facts of the case were carefully and independently considered by the prosecuting authorities and then independently adjudicated upon by the courts. I would advise my hon. Friend, and anyone else who wishes to study the matter closely, to read carefully the judgments of the House of Lords to understand how the facts were deployed.

On my hon. Friend's final point, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear that this aspect of the law on murder and manslaughter is to be carefully reviewed.

Mr. Sutcliffe: In the light of the representations that he has received, will the Attorney-General make known his view on tonight's "Panorama" programme on the Lee Clegg case, involving a mock trial? Does he feel any anxiety lest, given the haste with which the programme was made, it will not consider any of the new evidence acquired by Clegg's legal advisers? Indeed, the programme has not even interviewed them. Is the Attorney-General concerned about the effect that that might have on the due process of law?

The Attorney-General: Like the hon. Gentleman, of course, I have not yet seen the programme that is to be broadcast tonight, and I shall not rush into judgment on it. Obviously, the subject as a whole is a matter of the greatest public interest, but I think that we can be confident that the Northern Ireland courts would not be influenced by such a programme.

The important questions of public law that must be considered in relation to the murder-manslaughter issue will, as I have said, be examined carefully.

Mr. Beith: Leaving aside the possibility of any retrial involving new evidence, may I ask how soon Private Clegg could be released under the present procedures outlined to the House by the Prime Minister? Does the Attorney-General not agree that many members of the public think that Private Clegg should be released very soon, given the time that he has already served and the fact that what happened occurred while he was carrying out his duty?

The Attorney-General: The case of any young soldier in this position is a matter of the greatest public concern, but the question of release by the Secretary of State is a quasi-judicial one that must be looked into very carefully in consultation with the high judiciary, and treated accordingly. It would not be for me to say more about that question.

Mr. Ashby: Like my right hon. and learned Friend, I am a lawyer. One sometimes finds that an excessively legalistic approach, such as that adopted in the Court of Appeal in the Private Clegg case, flies in the face of what the public see as common sense. The public often feel, in respect—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have not heard a question yet.

Mr. Ashby: I am just coming to the question, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It is about time.

Mr. Ashby: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the public would be anxious for that excessively legalistic approach not to be used in any way to cover up an attempt to be too political about the outcome? In other words, does he agree that Private Clegg should be treated like anyone else?

The Attorney-General: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the law applies to all citizens equally, but I do not think that he has been fair to the Court of Appeal of Northern Ireland, which examined the matter very carefully. That Court of Appeal first suggested the investigation of the area of law, which investigation my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is now arranging. My hon. Friend will wish to take that into account before issuing any further strictures.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Will the Attorney-General gently remind some of his hon. Friends that a tragic case such as this should make us all thankful that capital punishment no longer exists in this country? Will the inter-ministerial review that was announced by the Home Secretary on 24 January be restricted to the narrow question of whether disproportionate force which negates self-defence can nevertheless reduce a murder charge to manslaughter, or will it consider the wider question of whether a mandatory life sentence for murder is appropriate? Will the inter-ministerial team consider the narrow issue or the wider one?

The Attorney-General: My right hon. and learned Friend will study the hon. Gentleman's words, but I understand that the narrow aspect will be under consideration, rather than the entire question of the mandatory life sentence.

Crown Prosecution Service

32. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Attorney-General what measures are being taken to improve the efficiency of the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Attorney-General: The most significant current initiative to improve the Crown Prosecution Service is the introduction of team working, designed to give both

lawyers and support staff clear accountability and responsibility for cases from their receipt until their conclusion.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that improving the relationship between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service is crucial? Does he further agree that the recent steps to cut unnecessary police and Crown Prosecution Service paperwork are extremely welcome?

The Attorney-General: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend on both matters. A very close working relationship between police and prosecutor is obviously essential. Each has an independent function, but they must work in harmony in carrying out those functions. The abbreviated files review has been in operation on a pilot basis in six police areas over the past six months. That six-month period will shortly come to an end, when it will be possible to evaluate the review and, I hope, find a way to cut paperwork.

Mrs. Roche: Does the Attorney-General agree that another factor that would help the efficiency of the Crown Prosecution Service is better public support? Would not such support be helped if victims of crime were consulted by the Crown Prosecution Service before charges were downgraded or dropped by prosecutors? Is not it a disgrace that the Government failed to back Labour's proposals to do just that?

The Attorney-General: I think that the answer to the last part of the hon. Lady's question is no, because I do not think that the proposals, in so far as they differ from what is already happening, were necessarily fully thought through. That said, the Crown Prosecution Service aims, in close liaison with the police, to keep in close contact with victims so that their attitude and approach can properly be taken into account at the early stages and at any stage when a charge has to be reviewed and possibly downgraded.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the police need to be encouraged by the Crown Prosecution Service taking up cases that are before it? Is he aware of the case in my constituency of William Cocklin, an enraged father whose daughter had been attacked by three young men? The police were called but they said that they could not take the matter any further because they doubted that there was sufficient evidence. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that if the police had taken up that case that father would not have taken the law into his own hands and ended up on a kidnapping charge?

The Attorney-General: I am not aware of the details of my hon. Friend's constituent's case, but close harmony and close working between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service are very important to ensure that the public and justice are served.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Spending Balance

39. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his current policy on the balance between (a) bilateral and (b) multilateral spending.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): The Government will continue to deliver a large and effective bilateral aid programme and are working to ensure that our substantial and growing multilateral commitments are similarly effective.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Does my hon. Friend agree that the record tends to show that bilateral aid has been better targeted and provides better value for money than multilateral aid?

Mr. Baldry: British bilateral aid is best. It is high quality and well delivered, which is why we want a bilateral programme that is as large as possible. It is also why this year and for the next three years, year on year, we have provided extra money for the aid budget. Of course there will be times when we have to work with other countries in the United Nations and in Europe, and we need to ensure that such multilateral aid is delivered as efficiently and effectively as British aid.

Mr. Tyler: Will the Minister be a little more forthcoming about the balance that he seeks between bilateral and multilateral aid? Is there a level below which he thinks bilateral aid would not be viable?

Mr. Baldry: No, we need to ensure as large a bilateral aid programme as possible. Clearly, sometimes we shall have to work with colleagues either in the United Nations or within the European Union to deliver effective aid programmes, and we have to ensure that there is a proper balance.

Sir John Stanley: Given the huge diversion of our available overseas aid money to the European Union, does my hon. Friend agree that the imperative is greater than ever for the Government to take new steps to establish whether value for money is being obtained for this increasing share of our overseas aid budget? What steps are the Government taking to achieve that?

Mr. Baldry: We want to ensure that development aid is effective and, of course, we need to ensure that European Union aid is effective. We are determined to ensure the greatest possible effectiveness of EU aid. A Council of Ministers declaration on development policy to the year 2000 was agreed in 1992, and it set out objectives for EU aid similar to ours. We seek to ensure that those are fully reflected in all EU-funded activities throughout the world. A number of Overseas Development Administration staff are seconded to key positions in the Commission to strengthen systems and to advise on key overseas development sectors. We are always seeking to develop contacts between ODA staff and their counterparts in Brussels, to share experiences and improve co-ordination. My right hon. Friend is right: we contribute a substantial amount of money to the European Union development budget and we need to ensure that every single penny of it is spent as efficiently and cost-effectively as United Kingdom bilateral aid.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister explain why the multilateral aid with the United Nations and the European Union that we are spending in Cambodia is not matched by our bilateral aid in that country? Unilaterally, the Government have treated our own non-governmental

organisations as though they were backpackers; they have not consulted them. Will he reconsider the ODA's unilateral decision to withdraw finance from those NGOs?

Mr. Baldry: I think that the hon. Gentleman is confusing a number of issues. We support a number of projects throughout the world, including in Cambodia. Tragically, in recent months a number of United Kingdom citizens have been kidnapped and murdered in Cambodia, which has caused considerable sadness to their families and many other people. Cambodia is a distinctly dangerous country at the moment so it must behove the ODA, as a responsible employer, to ensure that those working with it are not put at unnecessary risk. The ODA has been in deep discussions with all NGOs working in Cambodia about the position—

Mr. Enright: That is not what they say.

Mr. Baldry: I assure the hon. Gentleman that there has been the clearest and closest consultation with NGOs in Cambodia. We co-operate closely and effectively with NGOs throughout the world and we want to carry them with us in our decisions. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has been inadvertently misled.

World's Children (Report)

40. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the UNICEF report on the state of the world's children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have so far received a number of letters from hon. Members concerning the UNICEF report on the state of the world's children. The priority objectives of our aid programme reflect the goals of the world summit for children. Last year we gave more than £23 million to UNICEF.

Mr. Brandreth: Does my hon. Friend recall that in 1990 the world summit for children set specific goals for reducing deaths, malnutrition, disease and disability among children in the developing world? Does he agree that the report shows that the majority of countries, including the United Kingdom, have already achieved the majority of those goals? Although the report presents many challenges, it recognises many achievements, especially in immunisation programmes.

Mr. Baldry: I certainly support what my hon. Friend says. We were all saddened by the death of James Grant, UNICEF's executive director, who did so much to promote immunisation. At the end of the 1970s, fewer than 10 per cent. of the world's children were being immunised and measles, whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria were claiming the lives of more than 13,000 children every day of every year. For a decade, we and others have worked with UNICEF to ensure the immunisation of at least 80 per cent. of the world's children. The attainment of that goal and the sustained year-on-year achievement of that target has meant the prevention of almost 3 million child deaths a year. That is an outstanding achievement, which is largely unrecognised.

Miss Lestor: First, may I join in the tribute to James Grant, whose years of dedicated service to children and children's causes have been well recognised throughout the world?

If the Minister and the Government endorse and welcome the report, and if we are to stay on target in the areas that the report highlights, how can the Minister allow the aid budget to deteriorate, as it has done, and stabilise at its current level of just 0.31 per cent., making us 14th out of the 21 development assistance committee countries—*[Interruption.]* I simply asked the Minister how he could justify that—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady and she put her question correctly.

Miss Lestor: If the Minister has read the report, I am sure that he will share my concern that overall levels of aid from industrialised nations have fallen and that a growing proportion of gross national product is going towards the cost of peacekeeping operations. That cost has risen dramatically and the shift of expenditure from the causes of catastrophe to its consequences should be considered very seriously indeed. This is a new situation. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on that?

Mr. Baldry: Let me help the hon. Lady with the various questions that she has asked. On the world summit for children report, of course alleviating poverty, especially among most vulnerable groups such as children, is the top priority of our aid programme. That is why the projects and programmes that we fund cover the range of education, health, child survival, water and sanitation, and child protection objectives that were agreed at the summit. For example, we provide assistance for street children in Brazil, Peru and eastern Europe, for slum improvement projects in India and for family and community health care in Ghana and Pakistan. Our emergency relief in countries such as Rwanda, Angola, Somalia and Sudan targets all people at risk, including mothers and children. We can be proud of that aid programme.

On the aid programme level—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady asked three questions and I am seeking to respond to them. We have been through the aid budget before. If the hon. Lady considers the figures that were announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, she will realise that he increased the aid programme: it is a plus figure. We are the sixth largest aid donor worldwide. This year, our aid budget is £2.2 billion. The latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures show that the UK was one of only seven countries to increase official aid in 1993. If the hon. Lady considers the forward spending figures, she will realise that, for the coming three years, we are increasing our aid budget year on year.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Madam Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order of which I gave you notice earlier this afternoon. You will have read reports that Lord Lester QC has submitted evidence to a Committee in the other place, in which allegations are made that hon. Members of this House received money for asking questions and promoting commercial interests. Is any action being taken by appropriate Committees in this House to invite Lord Lester to submit any evidence that he may have in support of those allegations to Committees of this House, and to invite him to amplify any evidence that he has submitted to the other place in support of those allegations? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am conscious of the allegations that have been made about Members in this House by a Member of the upper House. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) can take action himself. He can refer the matter to the Select Committee on Members' Interests. I hope that he will do precisely that.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Following the inadequate answers at Question Time, have you had a request from Ministers to make a statement about the great public concern that exists about the Government's proposals to slash expenditure in relation to airport security?

Madam Speaker: No, I have not had such a request.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the most unsatisfactory and misleading nature of the reply that I received from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, may I give notice that I wish to seek an Adjournment debate on the topic of Cambodia and non-governmental organisations?

Madam Speaker: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can put it that way as he did not have the substantive question, but no doubt he will apply for an Adjournment debate in any case.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have the Government given notice of their intention to make a statement following the extraordinary and loutish behaviour of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who is responsible for industry and local government, during an incident yesterday when he allegedly attacked a demonstrator with a pickaxe and was subsequently interviewed by Strathclyde police? That behaviour was unbecoming of a Minister. Are we entitled to a statement in the House?

Madam Speaker: I have not received any indications from the Government to the effect that they are seeking to make a statement of that nature.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will of course be aware that on Friday the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), who is the parliamentary private secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, effectively obstructed any discussion of a Bill designed to protect calves. He was not in his place today for the questions that he had tabled and I assume that he had not the guts to respond to the points that would undoubtedly have been raised. Would you deprecate his discourtesy to you in that he did not even notify you that he would not be attending and did not withdraw his questions, although he had the time to come here on Friday and, with the connivance of the Secretary of State, obstruct a Bill?

Madam Speaker: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, a number of hon. Members are extremely discourteous to me and to Ministers by not informing us that they will be absent. They are always reprimanded. I was not in the Chair on Friday afternoon, but I followed *Hansard* carefully. Nothing untoward took place. The hon. Member to whom the hon. Gentleman refers certainly spoke for something like 25 minutes on Friday, but I noticed that an Opposition Member spoke on an earlier Bill for 30 minutes. I therefore think that it was even stevens.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. This matter seems to be giving rise to points of order with which I have dealt. We have urgent business before us.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Sit down. Points of order concern breaches of the procedures of the House, not political matters or point scoring. If breaches of the House's procedures are involved, I shall hear points of order.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It would have been apparent to anyone watching the BBC news on Friday evening that the appearance was given that the Bill under discussion had been talked out—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that matter. Whatever the appearance given on television, it has nothing to do with me. My concern is only for what happens in the House.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you assist by telling us what would be the constitutional repercussions, which would almost certainly be serious, if an organisation that is now £17 million in debt, which has only one asset valued at £9 million, which was about to sack a third of its staff and whose head was the Prime Minister, became bankrupt? What would be the constitutional position—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am not prepared to deal with a constitutional question of that nature across the Floor of the House without further information.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Sit down. It is a total abuse of points of order.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. One at a time.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. About a minute ago, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) attacked the reputation of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who is not

present to defend himself. Can it be said that the Under-Secretary said clearly on the radio at 1.30 pm that he had picked up the pickaxe—

Madam Speaker: Order. It is nothing whatsoever to do with me who said what on radio or television. I have enough to contend with, dealing with what happens in the House.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that you are aware that I am a co-sponsor of the Building Societies (Joint Account Holders) Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French). I am sure that you are equally aware that the Bill, which has support from all quarters and from many widows, including some in my constituency, was objected to by Opposition Members on Friday. Do you have any powers to restore the Bill to its former position on the Order Paper?

Madam Speaker: The answer is no.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In the light of your answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), and in view of the fact that all matters that arise in the House are clearly under your control, will you confirm that it is none the less in order that any procedural matters that may be regarded as bringing Parliament into disrepute can be raised with the Nolan committee?

Madam Speaker: I think that I need notice of that question. If the hon. Gentleman will permit me, I shall deal with it with all the seriousness with which it was asked.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I seek your guidance in relation to another aspect of the events on Friday, when the Building Societies (Joint Account Holders) Bill was objected to by Labour Members? On Thursday, I received from Opposition Treasury spokesmen an assurance that the Labour party would support all stages of the Bill on Friday. Would you confirm my understanding that if the Bill had passed all its stages on Friday, it would not have interfered with the progress of business in the Standing Committee considering private Members' Bills?

Madam Speaker: I cannot comment on guarantees given across the Floor of the House; that is nothing to do with the Chair. What support the two parties give or what commitment they give to a particular Bill is purely a matter of the relationships between the parties concerned.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I also seek your guidance? As you know, I do not make a habit of raising points of order unless I have a feeling of genuine grievance. Would you seek a report from Madam Deputy Speaker, who was in the Chair for the earlier part of Friday? A number of hon. Members, of whom I was one, came for an important debate on the Proceeds of Crime Bill. Several hon. Members had written to say that they wished to catch your eye, Madam Speaker. We were discouraged from speaking out of a fear that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) wished to talk out the Bill, as he had talked out, on the previous Friday, the Insurance Companies (Reserves) Bill, which was supported by a number of hon. Members. Can nothing be done to ensure that a serious Bill, which has all-party support and which is first in the list for debate, can be debated properly over three or four hours without the danger of it being talked out by Opposition Members who seek to further the progress of their own Bills?

Madam Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not criticising my Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman raised a question about the Deputy Speaker who was in the Chair. I want to be clear about the point of order that he is putting to me.

Mr. Greenway: I was not criticising the Deputy Speaker; I was making the point that she would tell you about what happened earlier on Friday. A number of us who had written to you saying that we wished to catch your eye in that important debate felt dissuaded from contributing because we wished to avoid a repetition of what had happened the previous Friday when a Bill was talked out. This is a serious problem, which the House must address. If there is all-party support for a Bill, it is surely right that we should have a proper debate without the danger that one or two hon. Members will seek to talk it out so that they can further the progress of their own Bill. You will know that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East has a Bill that will be before the House this Friday.

Madam Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. The proceedings of this House rest with hon. Members themselves. I have read carefully the whole of the debate on Friday. I shall look particularly at the points that the hon. Gentleman has put to me. I shall see whether there is anything further that I need to do.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I have finished with that point; I have dealt with it.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) spoke for only five minutes—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You gave a firm ruling—almost a rebuke—some weeks ago that in debates on education, Ministers should not seek to name the schools and sons of hon. Members, thus putting their education at some risk of media publicity. Given that the gutter press is now harping on that theme, can you at least instruct hon. Members not thus to put the children of other hon. Members in the firing line for the sake of cheap political points?

Madam Speaker: I have already given a firm ruling on that matter, on which the majority of the House supports the Chair. I am not concerned about the gutter press. Questionnaires come round to all hon. Members, including me. For some of them, I have something in my office that is called a round file, and they go there.

Orders of the Day

Agricultural Tenancies Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

3.43 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In doing so, I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests, which shows that I have an interest in a tenanted farm.

I open the debate with three facts. First, if a landowner offers an agricultural tenancy for a term of two years or more, the tenant has virtual security of tenure for life under the present law. Secondly, when agricultural tenancies terminate, it is known that, at present, about 10 per cent. of landlords choose to relet their land only on the basis of protected tenancies. Thirdly, the proportion of land that is rented in England and Wales has fallen from about 90 per cent. at the turn of the century, to about one third now. I happen to agree with Labour's spokesman in the Lords, the noble Lord Carter, that the true figure is probably lower than that.

I shall explain how those three facts are not unconnected. I shall also argue that this Bill, which has unprecedented support from within the industry, is well designed to address those problems: to tackle the decline in tenancies offered; to open up opportunities for new entrants; and to provide the flexibility for our agriculture industry to remain competitive in the face of increasing international pressures, as trade in agricultural products becomes freer.

The Bill, combined with the recent announcement of the extension of relief from inheritance tax to new lettings, will have a major effect. Last summer, it was estimated that more than 300,000 more hectares—nearly 1 million acres of land—would be let, even without tax changes. The Bill would have revitalised the tenanted sector without the level playing field between tenanted farm and vacant possession in taxation. I believe, as does the industry, that the Bill, if enacted, combined with the tax changes, may well transform the situation for the better. As the Tenant Farmers Association said today:

"it is a major step towards a revival of tenanted farms".

Since 1875, there have been more than 20 pieces of primary legislation relating to agricultural, landlord-tenant law. Of those, the most important Acts have related to security of tenure. In particular, the Agriculture Act 1947, which was introduced by a Labour Government—led by a great Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Tom Williams—heralded a major change. That was because the landlord's notice to quit was made subject to consent being given by the Minister. As such consent could be given in exceptional circumstances only, the effect of the change was to give all tenant farmers who farmed their land efficiently complete security of tenure for life. At that time, when nearly two thirds of farmers were tenants, it was believed that that would contribute to improving agricultural output—rationing was still in place and the overwhelming national interest was seen to be the increase of home food production at all costs.

The most damaging piece of legislation was that introduced by a subsequent Labour Government in 1976. During the passage of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, they introduced a series of fundamental amendments in Committee—in itself an extraordinary thing to do—which provided security of tenure, retrospectively, for two further generations of successors to an existing tenant, subject to certain eligibility conditions. I am sure that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) needs no reminding of that fact, as he piloted the provisions through the Standing Committee. By taking the land out of the landlord's control for three generations, that legislation went almost as far as it was possible to go in the direction of security, short of confiscating the legal title from the landlord and giving it to the tenant.

Reading copies of *Hansard* at the time and the background that goes with them, I find it impossible to avoid the impression that that legislation was driven through as part of the internecine left-right battles then raging in the Labour party. Let us remember that the national executive committee had proposed the nationalisation of land with support from left wingers in the Cabinet.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Minister is discussing legal title to land. Surely he must be aware that some of the largest landowners obtained that title through murder, rape, pillage and all sorts of barbaric means. I am not suggesting that that gives any Government any authority to confiscate—far from it—but the right hon. Gentleman should be equally even-handed, when he comments on the rights of tenants, as we are when we comment on those hereditary landowners.

Mr. Waldegrave: I cannot think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Co-operative Wholesale Society, which is one of the largest landlords in the country. I am sure that its title was based on other methods of acquisition. I accept his challenge that we must achieve an even-handed balance and will return to my explanation of how the Bill will do exactly that in today's conditions.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the Co-operative Wholesale Society is one of the largest owners of farmland in my constituency, is a good landlord, treats its farm workers well, is a major member of the Country Landowners Association and should not have ascribed to it the hideous activities that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) ascribed to landlords?

Mr. Waldegrave: It was to defend the CWS against the accusations of rapine and pillage that I rose to my feet a moment ago.

Be that as it may, even if those pieces of legislation were genuinely designed—I am sure that they were—to protect tenants, they have had a different outcome. The Labour Government turned out to be misguided. They ignored the crucial fact that the letting of land is a voluntary activity on the part of the landowner. The point is that the more restrictive the legislation, and the greater the security of tenure that it provides, the stronger is the disincentive to any landowners who might otherwise consider letting their land. As a result, tenants' interests suffer.

That is not just the wisdom of hindsight. The point was put fairly and squarely to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East at the time, particularly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), who later became a distinguished Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. On 3 February 1976, he asked the then Minister, the late Lord Peart:

"Will the Minister give an undertaking that that"—

that is, not detrimentally affecting the supply of farms to let—

"will be part of Government policy?"

Lord Peart replied:

"I believe that I can given that assurance".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 3 February 1976; c. 443.]

Later, on 8 March 1976, the then junior Minister, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, said:

"A major issue, which I recognise Conservative Members have raised in good faith, is the suggestion that one effect of the clauses will be to dry up the supply of tenanted farms. I cannot agree that such an outcome will be significant."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 1976; Vol. 907, c. 115.]

It turned out to be extremely significant. Having reached the position that we are in today, I very much hope, as does the industry, that the Labour party has learnt that lesson.

Although we removed the succession provisions in relation to future tenancies in 1984, it is clear that the present restrictive legislation is still gradually suffocating the tenanted sector. The supply of new full tenancies has slowed to the merest trickle and the vast majority of lettings are on short-term arrangements. If one excludes succession tenancies, 90 per cent. of new let land is let in that way. That is how the three facts with which I began my speech are connected.

Not surprisingly, almost everyone in the industry now agrees that corrective action must be taken. In response to that pressure from the industry, my Department issued proposals for reform in February 1991. There followed a long and thorough period of consultation with all the interested parties, including landowners, tenants, young farmers, land agents, valuers and others connected with the industry. In December 1993, an agreement was reached, which was supported by organisations representing all those interests, on the changes that were needed to the present system. The result is the Bill that we have brought before the House today. That consultation and continuing industry support gives us the confidence that this reform is what the industry wants and is what it so badly needs.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his colleagues on bringing the industry together in introducing the legislation. At the beginning, the industry was not in agreement. There were differences between the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union but, thanks to the hard work of my right hon. Friend and his colleagues, a great measure of consensus has been established and the Bill is now widely welcomed throughout the industry.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. It would be fair to give a good deal of the credit to my predecessor, the present Secretary of State for Education. But I hope that the action that I have taken since arriving at the Department with my hon. Friends has taken forward the work that she laid in hand.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): While my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) was nearly right to say that the entire industry is in agreement on the Bill, will the Minister bear it in mind that that is not absolutely true? In some areas, particularly Cumbria, there is a certain amount of disquiet because it is felt that the proposals will not revitalise the tenanted sector. The Minister may recall that I am a tenant of land in family ownership of which I am part. I have received a letter from the National Farmers Union saying that certain tenant members of the Cumbria NFU are concerned about

"the absence of any guaranteed minimum term since they believe that as farming is a long-term business a minimum term is essential."

Although I do not believe that that is enough to cause one to oppose the Bill, I hope that the Minister will bear it in mind throughout its passage that some farmers are worried about some of the implications.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend is right. I intended to return later in my speech to the substance of the argument made by what I think it is fair to call "the minority" in this matter, as that argument needs to be confronted head on.

My right hon. Friend knows very much better than I do, because for several years he held the office that I hold, that it is a strange idea that unanimity ever exists in the British farming industry. I have never met a roomful of farmers who would agree wholly about anything—and if they all agreed about anything, some of them would change the opinions that they had earlier expressed, to ensure that they did not.

My right hon. Friend, who was a member, will remember a famous cartoon from the Victorian "Punch" in the Farmers Club, called "The Grousing Room in the Farmers Club". So there is always a certain amount of fractiousness in our industry. I believe that he will perhaps agree with me that "an overwhelming consensus with some dissidents" would be a fair description of the position. There are also some dissidents in Wales, and I have spoken to some of them.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): There are a few in Lancashire.

Mr. Waldegrave: As my hon. Friend rightly says, there are a few in Lancashire—another county where there are people of individual opinions. It would be very surprising to me if every Lancastrian agreed about any subject.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Would it be helpful to my right hon. Friend if I described my own circumstances? When I came to the House seven years ago, it would have suited me very well to let land, but on the present basis, I am disinclined to do so, and I have not done so.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend offers himself as a witness in support of the very argument that we are making, and it is a powerful witness, which is genuine.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Mention has been made of the tremendous efforts that have been made to achieve consensus

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

throughout the industry—an admirable achievement. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) today issued a press release, stating that he will oppose the Bill?

Considerable apprehension has been caused throughout the industry about the Opposition policy towards the Bill. My right hon. Friend will be aware that, in framing the Bill, he has taken considerable trouble to ensure that it is not retrospective—in other words, Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 tenancies will not be included in the scope of the Bill. Throughout the debate, will my right hon. Friend ask the Labour party whether, if it proposes changes in the future, it will decide not to make them retrospective? That would create some stability in the industry.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend makes a powerful argument. Doubtless the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East will discuss it in due course. I was going to put that very question to him, because it would be fair. On other occasions, he has said that, should he find himself on the side of the House where I am now standing, he would inquire into how any Act that we passed was working before he amended it further. I am sure that we shall listen carefully to what he says today.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: Perhaps for the last time; then I must proceed.

Mr. Knapman: I thank my right hon. Friend, who will be aware of the speech made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) during the 1976 debate, when he said that the Conservative party, by tradition, represents the landowners and the Labour party, by tradition, the farmers. However, in the case of the Bill, the National Farmers Union, the Small Farmers' Association and all the rest support the Bill, so surely it is reasonable to suppose that the Labour party will support the Bill at this stage.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is disappointing that the Labour party does not support the Bill. I think that the historic analysis offered on that occasion by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East was wrong. The landowners were usually the Whigs and the farmers were usually the Tories, and an element of that remains in some parts of the country.

I shall now describe the main changes that the Bill will bring about. First, it will make diversification easier for tenants. Under clause 1, the parties may exchange notices before the tenancy is granted, confirming their intention that the tenancy is to be, and remain, a farm business tenancy. If they do so, the tenancy will remain a farm business tenancy if its character is primarily or wholly agricultural at the outset, and as long as the business conditions are met—that is, as long as some part of the holding is farmed for the purpose of trade or business. The effect of that will be to allow more flexibility for tenants, with the permission of their landlords, to extend their enterprise into non-agricultural areas, without calling into question the nature of their tenancy. That is useful in terms of the importance of the rural economy as a whole.

Secondly, landlords and tenants will be free to agree how long a tenancy should last. That is the key to getting more letting of land. That freedom is crucial to persuading landlords that it is in their best interest to let the land instead of taking it in hand or entering into contract farming, or some other arrangement. There is consensus on that point.

The Bill prescribes a minimum period of one year's notice to be given to end tenancies of a fixed term of more than two years. Unlike the present legislation, there will be no grounds on which such tenancies can be terminated with shorter periods of notice. Nor will there be any grounds for issuing notices to terminate the tenancy before the agreed date, or to resume possession of part of the holding, unless the tenancy agreement contains provisions that allow for the exercise of such options. The provisions will give tenants extra certainty as to where they stand.

On rent, the Bill will give parties more freedom than the present legislation to reach their own agreement as to the level of rent, subject to certain safeguards. Part II of the Bill allows the parties to agree on a fixed rent for the whole duration of a tenancy by stating explicitly that there will be no rent reviews at all, or they can agree that the rent should be adjusted according to an objective formula.

If the parties do not agree such arrangements, they will be able to provide for rent reviews at a frequency of their own choosing. If they make no such provision, either party will be able to demand a rent review every three years. When rent reviews take place, either party has the right to demand arbitration, in which case the Bill requires that the arbitrator must determine the rent on an open market basis. That is described in clause 13. One cannot have only upward rent reviews. The reviews would have to relate to the open market, where rents might well have gone down.

The Bill contains mandatory provisions on compensation for tenants' improvements. Unlike the present legislation, the provisions will override any agreement to pay less than full compensation, so there will be no scope for the "writing down" of the value of compensation, such as frequently happens now. That is a potential advantage to the tenant.

Under the Bill, the definition of a tenant's improvement is wider than the one in the present legislation. It includes not only physical improvements, but any intangible advantage obtained for the holding by the tenant that is capable of increasing the value of the holding. An obvious example would be planning permission, which is dealt with specifically in the Bill, and there may be other items which may add value to the holding but which are not physical structures or operations. Provided that the landlord's written consent has been obtained for any such improvements, he is required to pay full compensation for them at the end of the tenancy.

Mr. Foulkes: Can the Minister explain how that measure relates to milk quotas?

Mr. Waldegrave: Milk quotas are an extremely good example, since milk quotas—as opposed to other quotas—are attached to the land that might have been obtained by the tenant, which would be for the benefit of a holding. Therefore, the tenant would have a right to compensation at the market rent for the milk quotas at the time of the ending of the tenancy. That is exactly the sort of requirement that the Bill now allows for, and there may be others in the future where it would be relevant. The tenant would need the landlord's written consent to buy the quota.

The tenant has the right to demand arbitration if the landlord refuses consent for a proposed improvement—other than planning permission—or if there is disagreement after the end of the tenancy on the amount of compensation to be paid.

Finally, the Bill sets out procedures to be followed for the resolution of disputes arising under the Bill or under the terms of the farm business tenancy. The provisions provide unilateral access to independent arbitration, which represents a simpler and cheaper alternative to the courts, while at the same time leaving room for the parties to make use of an alternative disputes resolution procedure of their own choosing, if they so wish.

I have described the main features of the Bill, which is welcomed by all parts of the industry, although there are some dissidents, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale pointed out. Sadly, the Labour party does not seem able to shed the legacy of the past and to bring itself to support the Bill. Perhaps we shall hear differently today.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I take the Minister back to what he said about planning permission? What will be the position if a tenant who seeks to apply for planning permission is refused the necessary permission by the landlord? What will be his or her right of redress? I was under the impression that certain assurances were given by Ministers in the other place that the matter was being actively reconsidered. What is the current thinking on it?

Mr. Waldegrave: We may want to discuss the matter in more detail in Committee, but I think that a landlord should have the right to say to a tenant that he does not want the use of his land to change without his permission. However, he could then find himself in the odd situation whereby he might be deemed to have agreed to a planning permission that he might wish to oppose on other grounds. We must look closely at whether there is room for arbitration in such disputes and, if so, how it could be handled. It is a special and interesting area and the hon. Gentleman was correct to raise that point.

The Labour party does not seem to have adjusted or modified its attitudes on those matters. It produced a document on tenancy reform last September, which had some sensible things to say, but they are largely embodied in our proposals. On compensation, the Labour party document proposes that a landlord must pay

"compensation equal to the increase in value of the farmland brought about by the activity of the tenant".

That is precisely what part III of the Bill achieves. The Labour party document goes on to say—and this addresses the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale—that

"it will be in the landlord's interest to keep tenants on for the full term of their tenancy agreement, thus both boosting the tenant's security and encouraging the tenant to improve the environmental aspects of the farm".

That is exactly right and the Bill provides for it. If we combine the greater freedom to set terms that are agreed between the two sides with a strengthening of the tenant's rights to compensation, the balance will be right. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) was correct when he intervened earlier to say that we should seek an exact balance. If the tenant is to be repaid for his investment, the landlord will seek a reasonable length of time—it will vary according to the type of holding and so on—to ensure that the investment has been made. Equally, the tenant will be certain that, when the tenancy ends, he will receive proper compensation for his investment. The Government—and, more importantly, the industry—believe that that balance has now been set correctly.

On rent, the Labour party document proposed a system of rent assessment to prevent tenants from being exploited and it claimed that

"upward-only rent rises are enshrined in the Tory plan".

That is wrong. As I explained, the Bill gives the landlord or the tenant the right to demand that an arbitrator should set the rent on an open market basis, which clearly could not be an upward-only review.

Lastly, the Labour document mentions the fiscal system. It is fair to say that here it has been overtaken by subsequent events. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced last week that we shall introduce the level playing field between vacant possession and tenanted land for which the Labour party called. However, we are doing that by lowering the inheritance tax on tenanted land, not by increasing it on owner-occupied land, as I suspect Labour's rather opaque commitment meant.

As hon. Members know, we have decided to extend the 100 per cent. relief from inheritance tax on agricultural land to all new tenancies granted on or after 1 September 1995—the date when I hope that the Bill will come into force. I join my right hon. and learned Friend in hoping that the Labour party will at least feel able to welcome that measure, since its document states that such reform will be "very beneficial".

Mr. Mark Robinson: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. The Opposition are always telling us about the importance of new jobs, and the Bill will be important to new entrants to the industry. Surely that is a good reason for the Opposition to support the Bill in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Waldegrave: I genuinely believe that that is so. I hope that, even at this late stage, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East will show a willingness to listen to the debate. I do not know precisely what his position is, as we have yet to hear from him.

Many of the reasonable objectives set out in the Labour document have been achieved. The fiscal change is the icing on the cake, which is intended to help the revival of the tenancy sector and make it easier for people to enter the industry, to support the family farm and to increase jobs.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): In my county of Wiltshire there are 12,500 acres of county council tenancies, which are occupied by about 126 farmers for an average length of more than 20 years. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Bill will apply to county council tenancies? If it will, does he believe that it will breathe new life into a system that is not working at present?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Bill will apply to all new tenancies after 1 September. Although county council tenancies have often been valuable in particular areas, I hope that the revitalisation that we shall see in the rented sector will mean that, if we can get the whole tenancy sector

[Mr. Waldegrave]

moving again, it will become less necessary for local authorities to intervene in an area that is not their natural habitat.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Two or three minutes ago, the right hon. Gentleman described circumstances in which the landlord and tenant would decide that it was in their mutual interests to think long term and to plan over 10 or 20 years. However, when introducing the Bill, he said that all new lets tend to be short term. Why is he confident that the industry will think long term, when the history of the industry and the free market is of short-termism?

Mr. Waldegrave: The present arrangement offers only life terms, which are too long and under which virtually no one lets, or Gladstone and Bower. With all the convenience of the latter tenancies, which are for only 18 months, people are not turned out after 18 months, but I believe roll on for 10 or 15 years—it has not been possible to make a proper survey.

Another source of evidence is Scotland. The Bill does not cover Scotland, but the different partnership law in Scotland means that there is probably no need for it there—although there have been some calls for reform. One can arrive at the same effect using Scottish partnership law. The average length of Scottish partnerships is 10 to 15 years. When there is effectively a free market, as there is in Scotland with use of partnership laws, that is the average length of tenancy. It would be wrong—and I apologise for going on so long, Madam Speaker, and must try to make myself wind up—to set a single target in the Bill because it would by definition be wrong in more than half the cases.

Mr. Foulkes: Once again, the right hon. Gentleman points out that Scottish law is a great deal better than English law in this as in other respects. I note from the schedules that the Bill amends the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 and the Opencast Coal Act 1958, which apply equally to Scotland as to the rest of the United Kingdom. British Coal, which is a major landowner having a number of tenant farmers, is in the process of selling off its land—and unfortunately, not giving the first option to purchase to its tenants. Although this is not strictly covered by the Bill's provisions, is there any way that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry can persuade British Coal that it is in the interests of British agriculture to sell its holdings to tenants who have farmed them for a lifetime?

Mr. Waldegrave: I must not go too wide of the Bill, but I have been engaged in discussions about that matter, relating to England, with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. Steps have been taken, which largely meet the concerns that many tenants feel. Perhaps I may write to the hon. Gentleman about that.

Mr. Gill: Is my right hon. Friend prepared to give an assurance that he will consider tabling an amendment in Committee, to allow members of the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers the same status in clause 34 as members of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, in terms of drawing up tenancy agreements?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am biased in my hon. Friend's favour, but there are other professional views on that matter. Perhaps it should be considered carefully in Committee, but we shall give a fair wind to discussion of my hon. Friend's suggestion.

I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East will show today that he can listen to the industry—I know that he can—and at least confirm that the Labour party will not once again damage tenant farmers with threats of retrospective legislation. Existing tenancy agreements are not affected in any way by the Bill. More rented land will become available both for existing tenants and for people who want to enter farming and get a start on the ladder. The package of reforms is workable and fair and is supported by the main industry organisations. It provides a flexible framework, which will create opportunities for new entrants, encourage investment and benefit the rural economy. It will also put British agriculture in a stronger position to adapt to the inevitable changes that lie ahead.

The measure carries through an explicit commitment that my party included in its previous election manifesto. It has the warm and active support of the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs, the Tenant Farmers Association Ltd., the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union. It is the right thing to do and I commend it to the House.

4.15 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): The legislation that should govern the relationship between a landlord and an agricultural tenant is a matter that the House has addressed regularly for well over a century. Indeed, in years past—certainly in previous centuries and at the beginning of this century—that relationship was a large factor in major social developments. I refer to the enclosures, the highland clearances and the development of crofting, where people were driven off their land and moved to other areas of land. I think even of the Irish question, where that relationship has been an ingredient in Irish history over the past century.

The number of people directly involved in those matters has fallen dramatically over the decades. The number of landowners and farmers is relatively small, but that does not alter the fact that the proposed legislation is important to them and, indeed, to agriculture and the countryside generally.

As the Minister said, there have been major changes in agriculture, in the ownership and tenure of land, throughout the century. At the beginning of the century, there were more than 1 million farm workers in Great Britain; now the figure is down to well under a quarter of a million. At the turn of the century, there were more than half a million agricultural holdings; the figure is now down to well under a quarter of a million. As the right hon. Gentleman said—I do not disagree with him—at the turn of the century, some 90 per cent. of agricultural land was tenanted, whereas the figure now is probably less than 33 per cent. Those figures refer to England and Wales, because the Bill applies only there.

There have been important changes in the industry. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman referred to not only the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 but the Agriculture Act 1947, which, in some respects, is probably more important, not least because it has been in operation longer. Both Acts had the effect of holding in tenure land that might otherwise have gone out of tenure. The other side of the argument, which the Minister regards as a great concern to the industry, is that the existence of that

security for tenant farmers has been a major disincentive to landowners to let new land, and I shall address that issue.

It is helpful to think about our objectives. Let us take a broader view, because, after all, it is a Second Reading debate. The first objective that I suggest—I do not put them in any order of importance—is agricultural efficiency. We want a farm structure and legislation that are conducive to increased productivity, investment and efficiency. Over the decades, many hon. Members, especially Labour Members, have argued that security is a factor in the productivity of tenant farmers, because, even if compensation is to be paid, security will be needed for investment purposes.

The second objective is what I would describe as the defence of the social fabric of the countryside. That generalisation includes support for rural communities and the maintenance of rural employment. I have made the same point more than once in the last couple of years, but Labour has changed its stance. In the 1960s, a Labour Government used taxpayers' money to encourage farm amalgamations, but we no longer wish to do that; we want to encourage the maximum number of people to secure their living from the land. Most will be farmers, but we want as many farm workers as practicable, as well.

If that objective is to be fulfilled, farming decisions should be made locally. We do not want huge operations and huge estates farmed from hundreds of miles away, with few people in the community working on the land or directly involved with it. We do not dispute the fact that some big farms provide a career structure: because of the current high capital values, one way for employees to enter the industry is to obtain jobs in such farming companies. That may be easier than entering it through a holding. We want the farming pattern—the size of farms, for instance—to adjust to technological advance and market forces. That factor must be taken into account, but it is not the Holy Grail.

Our third objective—again, let me stress that I do not list them in order of importance—is social justice. The Labour party believes that the relationship between landlord and tenant is not equal, and since 1947—despite the number of Conservative Governments between then and now—the House has accepted that principle. Legislation has been needed to protect tenants, and since 1947 tenant farmers have been given security of tenure. We stand by that: we think it unjust for people to enter into tenancies without such security. Farming is a business, but it is more than a business; it is a way of life. People are investing their money in the land, and living in farmhouses. That is not just a business relationship. The Bill, however, takes us back to the days when it was treated almost as just another business transaction—almost, although not quite, a contract. The Minister made some important points in this context, however, which we support.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Given what the hon. Gentleman has just said, will he consider withdrawing his statement in a press release today that the Bill's aim was

"to end security of tenure for tenant farmers"?

As those who have tenancies will keep them, and as the tax disadvantage of letting over a longer term will be removed, how can the hon. Gentleman possibly deny that there will be increased security of tenure in the letting of farms of this kind?

Dr. Strang: I was referring to tenancies under this legislation. As the hon. Gentleman knows, if the Bill becomes law as it stands, all future agricultural tenancies will be governed by it and there will be no minimum term. That will mean that security of tenure will not be a statutory right. Some landlords will, I hope, choose to continue to let their farms on the basis of a tenancy that extends throughout the working life of the tenant. There will be no legal requirement for that; far from it, because the provisions are designed to discourage it. That is what I meant in my press release to which the hon. Gentleman kindly referred.

Mr. Knapman: In view of what the hon. Gentleman has been saying, why does he think that the Tenant Farmers Association supports the Bill's principles?

Dr. Strang: That is an interesting point. Conservative Members may laugh, but I suspect that the Tenant Farmers Association agreed with the National Farmers Union four years ago when the NFU was certainly arguing for minimum fixed-term tenancies. I do not think that the Tenant Farmers Association attacked that position, but I am happy to be corrected on that if the hon. Gentleman wishes to do so. There is not a jot in the Bill about fixed-term or minimum-term tenancies. The NFU also argued for compensation for disturbance, but there is not a jot about that in the Bill.

I hope that Conservative Members understand what compensation for disturbance means, because it is a significant issue. It applies when a tenancy comes to an end prematurely, for various reasons. There is no compensation for abandoning it in advance of the end of a contract. My next point is arguable, but it could have been addressed in a way that did not encourage the fragmentation of farms from the farmhouse, a point that the Country Landowners Association made in its briefing on the Bill. I believe that the NFU advanced the point about security of the family in the farmhouse, but I do not know whether the TFA supported that.

My question to the TFA and the NFU—but not to the CLA, because I understand the position that it has taken from the beginning—is why were those guarantees worth obtaining four years ago but not worth obtaining in the final agreement?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Strang: I give way to the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord).

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Is not the reason that perhaps the Tenant Farmers Association would rather have tenancy agreements that are slightly less than perfect than none at all?

Dr. Strang: I agree; but, under the Bill, tenancies are not just slightly less than perfect. The hon. Gentleman and the Minister have a background in farming. I did not

[Dr. Strang]

choose to farm, but I would not be happy about my son or nephew going into farming on the basis of a three-year or four-year tenancy agreement.

Mr. Garnier: I assume that the hon. Gentleman favours more let land coming on to the market. How would enforcing a minimum term encourage that?

Dr. Strang: That is a fair point. I am concerned not just about existing tenants but about future ones and their families. One must strike a balance between security and social justice for the tenant and trying to encourage the provision of more land for letting. We should address the issue of encouraging landlords to let more land. There should be some incentive and they should be encouraged to let it reasonably long term. I put it no more strongly than that.

The Bill may lead to an increase in agricultural let land. Our concern is that it may not lead to a significant increase in the number of complete agricultural holdings that are let. As the House may be aware, many critics of the legislation, and especially those farmers who have heavily criticised it—I saw one of them being interviewed on television this morning—say that much of the land will be let short term, but to neighbouring farmers. I agree with that criticism. The land will be let to people who are already in farming, rather than encouraging the letting of new holdings and the whole structure of the family farm, which the Opposition support. I think that, probably, Conservative Members also support that.

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but that is it—I will accept no more interventions.

Mr. Gill: I listened to the hon. Gentleman's description of the historic pattern of tenancies, and I understand exactly what he is saying. However, I am sure that he would not disagree with the idea that times have changed and that it might be instructive to look at the commercial letting sector of the economy. Traditionally, in that sector it would have been usual for tenants to have a 21-year lease, with rent reviews at seven years; now, we see more and more advertisements with easy in, easy out terms for tenants.

I know that the hon. Gentleman makes a distinction between commercial property and farm letting; so do I. However, times have changed and the change in the commercial sector has occurred because it clearly suits both parties, landlord and tenant. I think that the hon. Gentleman will accept that, because times have changed, there must be a new look at farm tenancies.

Dr. Strang: I shall explain to the hon. Gentleman why his argument is flawed. We cannot treat the letting of agricultural land in the same way we treat the letting of commercial property. There is a real market in commercial property: if the price is high, more is provided. That is how the market operates. That cannot happen with agricultural land because the amount of that land is fixed.

As I said, my third objective is the need to maintain the social fabric, to keep as much employment as possible on the land and to allow as many people as possible to secure their livelihood from the land.

My fourth objective goes wider. I am sure that many landowners and farmers would agree with our view that they are holding the land in stewardship for future generations. During the past decade or two, we have rightly paid great attention to conservation of the environment. I am not persuaded that the encouragement of short-term lets and the insecurity of short-termism are the best ways to secure nature conservation, preservation of natural habitats and all the long-term wider countryside issues to which farmers, to their credit, are now responding; farmers are certainly much more environmentally conscious than they were in my father's day.

I want to deal with the subject of new entrants. I appreciate the fact that the Minister referred to the consultation paper drafted by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), which was issued in September. However, only a small part of that paper related to tenancy reform. The right hon. Gentleman did not deal with the paper's main points, so I shall remind the House of them.

First, there is the question of quotas. It is no accident that the traditional way into the industry has been through milk. That was because of cash flow. An individual—perhaps a farm worker, a farmer's son or someone from the town—entered the industry through milk because he knew that if he worked hard he would receive a regular cheque. Dairy quotas have killed that. Frankly, because of the present milk quotas I would not encourage anyone to borrow money to become a dairy farmer. As the Minister knows, we have suggested a practical scheme to deal with that problem. I hope that the Government will respond to it, but there is certainly nothing about it in the Bill.

Secondly, we raised the important issue of the Government's refusal to implement the common agricultural policy retirement scheme for farmers. For Britain, we want the link between structure and retirement to be broken. It would be a positive step if we helped the older farmer to move out of the industry, thereby creating a vacancy for a new entrant.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Last year, I went to a presentation by the Farmers Union of Wales, which vigorously opposed the Bill. It forcefully made the point that the average age of hill farmers in Wales was 58. Many of those farmers cannot afford to retire. They are small farmers. They cannot afford to buy houses because they do not have the necessary equity—they are dependent farmers. Any step in the direction that my hon. Friend mentioned would therefore be a major help in relation to not only that social problem but released land for new entrants.

Dr. Strang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right. This is an important issue among farmers in the United Kingdom, especially in Wales.

A third proposal in our document on new entrants deals with what have been called smallholdings; I prefer to call them county council holdings, because there is no need for them to be too small. Traditionally, such holdings were—I am glad that the Minister raised this point—an important route into the industry. I do not exaggerate their role, but it was significant. We should resurrect the role of county council holdings as a route into the industry.

It is a matter of concern that, as a consequence, albeit an indirect one, of local government reform, the number of county council holdings may decrease further. We

should deal with that issue. If we are serious about new entrants, surely there should be something in the Bill on county council holdings. Again, not a thing is included.

We raised the question of tax. The Minister is right. On that issue, I said:

"Labour believes that we should look again at the tax arrangements for farm land. There is no doubt that some abuse is taking place and wealthy individuals are buying up farm land to reduce their tax liability. Labour is looking at how we can create fiscal arrangements which will encourage landowners to let their land under the traditional system of lifetime tenancies."

That quotation comes from my statement at the press conference that we held on the document, but the wording of the document is not too dissimilar to it. The Government have responded, but the right hon. Gentleman is keeping up with the tradition that his predecessors have all lived up to—if the Conservative Government can get it wrong on British agriculture, they will. The tax concession will be linked to the new short-term farm business tenancies—the Minister made it clear that that is the intention. I understand—I do not know whether this is deliberate—that the proposal may apply to succession tenancies under the 1976 Act. The Minister nods his head. The proposal, however, does not apply to other land that is held in tenure for a lifetime.

No doubt the right hon. Gentleman managed to persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to the proposal. It is a small advance, but, sadly, it is in the wrong direction. The Labour party wanted to consider the whole question of equalising the tax treatment of owner-occupied land and of tenanted land, but it should not have been linked to such short-termism. Under the proposed tax arrangements, a landlord has no incentive to let a farm, even for a respectable minimum term. We are interested in encouraging new entrants into farming and we do not regard the Bill as an adequate response to that challenge—it is totally inadequate. It deals only with the narrow question of making more land available for letting.

Making more land available for letting does not necessarily mean that many new opportunities will be provided for young men and young women to become farmers. We must make the distinction between letting complete holdings and simply letting a few fields, or breaking up farms between the farmhouse and the wider farm. We believe that security is fundamental. Successive Governments may not have liked the 1976 Act—they were certainly fairly quick to repeal the aspects relating to new tenancies—but the Minister also made an implied criticism of the Agriculture Act 1947.

Agriculture is not only a business. It is a way of life. Tenant farmers must have security, which is also in the interests of agriculture as a whole. Until 1875, all the legislation was intended to protect the interests of the landlords, but after that date it was recognised that protection must be given to tenants. Only if they had a reasonably long outlook would they look after the land. I heard it said on BBC television this morning that one should live as if one were going to die tomorrow but farm as if one were going to live for ever. Farming is a long-term business.

We want to encourage the creation of new tenancies. It is not only wrong and socially unjust but against the interests of agriculture itself that young people should enter into arrangements with minimum security and have an unequal relationship with their landowner, whether that landowner is an institution or an individual.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman has spoken for a long time about social justice between landlord and tenant. Does he agree that the taxation regime under the Labour Government in the 1970s, whereby landlords were taxed at 98 per cent. on their rental income, was wholly unfair? Will he pledge that, should we be unfortunate enough to have another Labour Government, they would not impose such a stringent and punitive taxation regime on landlords?

Dr. Strang: The hon. Gentleman may have noticed a certain caution and hesitancy among Opposition spokesmen about making off-the-cuff statements about public expenditure and taxation. I am happy to share that caution, but I shall say that most people believe—rightly—that a Labour Government will not return to penal rates of taxation. I would regard a rate of more than 90 per cent. as penal. That is my assessment of the general position, but public expenditure and taxation are matters for the shadow Chancellor. The Conservatives tend to think of incentives only for the better-off, but we believe that there should also be incentives for medium earners and people at the bottom of the scale.

There is a real advantage for the environment and the countryside in continuity and security. There are advantages in encouraging family farms and maintaining the social structure, for which security is needed. The problem is that the Bill will do nothing to encourage security; indeed, it implies that the Government have given up and that the land can be let for two, three, five or 10 years. We cannot support such a notion. The Bill will not result in a significant increase in the number of complete agricultural holdings let to new tenant farmers on terms that allow them to build a long-term business and to support not only themselves but their families.

We believe in security of tenure for tenant farmers, and encouraging short-termism and the fragmentation of holdings is not the right way to proceed. On the contrary, that will do real damage to the fabric of our countryside, which is why the Opposition will vote against the Bill.

4.43 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I speak in my capacity as second Church Estates Commissioner. The Church Commission is the second largest agricultural landowner in England after the Crown. We currently own 148,000 acres comprising some 500 let farms averaging about 300 acres each. The value of this holding is about £210 million. As the Church Commission is in effect a parliamentary charity, every hon. Member sitting here has a stake in that gigantic agricultural land ownership. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that only one third of the agricultural land in England and Wales is now let land. I think that he and the House can gauge what a significant proportion the commissioners represent.

I welcome the Bill and the support that the joint industry agreement managed, by a miracle, to impart to it but I must disagree with the allegation made by some critics that the Bill is a landlords charter. We do not regard that as a remotely fair criticism of the Bill. I believe that there is a genuine balance between the provisions for encapsulating security of tenure in the terms of a lease under a free contract between responsible and free parties

[Mr. Michael Alison]

to that contract and the imaginative and generous provisions for tenancy compensation covering intangible assets, which will prove very attractive.

I must say, almost in parenthesis, that because the Church Commissioners have come in for some criticism for the extent to which they are overextended in the ownership of property, it is their current policy to sell when they are able to gain vacant possession. However, there is no doubt that the freedom within a contract, introduced by my right hon. Friend, and the flexibility and encouragement that that produces for giving new tenancies, especially perhaps to younger applicants, means that when the Church Commissioners have brought their agricultural portfolio into a slightly better balance, they will be more inclined to look sympathetically at the new flexible provision.

However, speaking on behalf of probably the largest landlord of let tenancies in England, I am bound to tell the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East that if the flexibility becomes circumscribed by minimum tenancy provisions of, say, 10 years, the Church Commissioners will not readily take advantage of my right hon. Friend's provisions but will tend to return to the current policy of selling whenever we get vacant possession.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Would the right hon. Gentleman care to expatiate on how the philosophy that he has distilled to the House matches up to the description of the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles:

> "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

Mr. Alison: It was also a feature of the arrangements in the early days of the Church and the New Testament that it was made very clear to the owners of property that they did not have to pool it if they did not want to do so. It was entirely voluntary and not compelled by the collective diktat of an overbearing, authoritarian, secular authority or even, in later days, by the fairly potent directives of papal power. However, I hesitate to pursue that idea.

As I was saying, if there is to be a voluntary arrangement, the option that will continually face the Church Commissioners—whether to go for a sale on vacant possession or to turn to my right hon. Friend's admirable and flexible alternative—will depend and turn fully on whether he is able to maintain the flexibility in the Bill and resist the temptation to write in a minimum term of, for example, 10 years, as the Opposition have suggested. I hope that my right hon. Friend will bear that point in mind and that it will assist him in his policy of maintaining flexibility.

Dr. Strang: I would not like it to be implied that we had suggested 10 years as a minimum term. I know that the right hon. Gentleman did not mean to mislead the House; I think that he was probably talking about the principle of a minimum term. I would not like anyone to think that the Opposition were arguing for a minimum term of 10 years.

Mr. Alison: I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman for that important correction. I apologise for attributing that particular time scale to the Opposition.

Mr. Lord: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition's attitude is crucial for the Bill? Although they may never be returned to office, who knows—

Mr. Enright: Want to bet?

Mr. Lord: As there remains a possibility that the Opposition might be returned to office, the fact that they oppose the Bill introduces a degree of nervousness which will seriously damage the whole purpose of the legislation. The Opposition can make their points and argue their case. It will be enormously beneficial if they then say that they will go along with, and respect, the legislation.

Mr. Alison: I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and his colleagues have heard what my hon. Friend has said. When the time comes for tabling amendments in Committee, the Opposition may table amendments aimed at circumscribing the flexible arrangements in the Bill. Those amendments may prove to be exploratory, a good debate may ensue and the Opposition may not push their amendments to a conclusion. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear in mind the anxieties of the Church Commissioners.

When we come to the end of the necessary phase of selling on vacant possession, we shall look sympathetically at new tenancies under those flexible provisions as long as they are not too circumscribed. I hope that there will be no attempt to introduce special provisions affecting farmhouses on let agricultural land, such as residential shortholds specifically applying to farmhouses within a separate agricultural tenancy.

The Bill is a good example of deregulation. Many of the points at present covered by statute will become matters of contract. That must surely be an important step forward in a free and liberal—in the best sense of the word—democratic society which believes in the ownership of property. I warmly support the Bill.

4.52 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I confess that the constituency of Hemsworth does not spring to everyone's mind when we are talking about matters agricultural. In fact, that is a basic error. Pit villages—the Hemsworth constituency is a series of pit villages—are surrounded by farms. Some of the farms were let out under British Coal and others were farmed by the tenants of large landlords in the area. One instantly springs to mind.

Mr. Garnier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Enright: Of course I give way to the hon. Gentleman who at least knows something about Hemsworth.

Mr. Garnier: I confirm what the hon. Gentleman has said. There are a number of farms in his constituency,

which I had the honour to contest in 1987. Of the 7,000-odd votes I managed to scrape up in Hemsworth, many came from the farmers whom he represents.

Mr. Enright: The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to know that the fields that used to proclaim their loyalty to the Conservatives have moved to the Liberal Democrats and are fast on their way to the Labour party. I can put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest. Logic lives and thrives in Hemsworth.

As my father worked on the railway and we had to go round the London and North Eastern Railway region, I was brought up in a place called Gaisgill near Tebay. All the farms there were small farms with decent folk—families who had been there for generations and who were tenants. They did not own their property in any way. The richest person was the lady who owned the village shop. Hers was the sole shop and all the small farmers had to buy from her because, unfortunately, public transport even then did not run people rapidly to Penrith.

In thinking of those people, I am much reminded of ancient history, which I know that the Minister will appreciate. One recalls in particular the early Greek reforms—ges and anadasmos—and the whole problem of the threat to the stability of society caused by people who were landless and who were not part of society. It was well recognised that if there was to be stability in society, people had to have a stake in society. Even the most right-wing reformers were prepared to give certain guarantees to small people who could work on their land.

The Minister will recall, in early Roman history, Cincinnatus the great consul. He was tired of state affairs—perhaps some of the Minister's colleagues might take a lesson from this—so he went back to the land and tilled the soil until, once more, the ungrateful Romans called him back. He had learnt his lesson behind the plough; that was the essence of it. The Minister will also recall that Cato the censor, who was by no means a radical left-winger, extolled the virtue of medium-sized farms. He extolled not the great farms—the latifundia—but the medium-sized farms. The idea is expressed most beautifully, perhaps, in Virgil's "Georgics". Virgil says that happy are the farmers who have their small estates. He speaks not of large estates or too-small estates, but of medium estates. Indeed, this country has grown in democracy as a result of the people who have served as yeomen. I think especially of the people who served under Cromwell.

Mr. Waldegrave: I cannot resist a brief addition. The hon. Gentleman will remember the landless farmer in the "Eclogues" who left his farm, probably because it had been confiscated by the central Government so that it could be given to a soldier. If the protection, in terms of notice and so on, in the Bill had been available to that farmer, the situation would never have arisen.

Mr. Enright: I note that the Minister refers to the "Eclogues" and to what resulted from civil war. I knew that we had social turmoil in this country, but I did not know that we were on the brink of civil war or that the Bill would prevent little farmers from having their land taken away during it. The Minister's point does not really wear; it is a bit thin. It is a very poor "Eclogue" anyway, as I think that he will agree.

I now come to the point about British Coal, which is relevant to what the Minister has just talked about—the dispossessed farmer. After the privatisation of British Coal, property that had been let to farmers and, perhaps even more importantly, to allotment holders—there are many allotment holders in my constituency—was no longer to be owned by British Coal. What will the property board do? Will it say, "The Bill says nothing about allotments"? It jolly well should say something about them. Will the property board offer first choice to the allotment holders? Not on your life. Will it offer first choice to the farmers? The only advantage that the Minister gained from the President of the Board of Trade was that farmers who had previously put in a firm bid to buy their farms would be taken into account. That did not apply to anybody else.

How will that land be sold? I defy any hon. Member to defend the means, as it is to be sold in huge lots, in London, to people who have the ready cash. In other words, Hemsworth smallholders could become the property of Kuwaitis in next to no time, which is a living, breathing scandal. The Bill does not deal with that problem.

The Country Landowners Association has an interest in this type of Bill, but that does not mean that it cannot speak intelligently on the subject. The association spoke intelligently on inheritance and how inheritance tax discourages people from letting their land, which is a valid argument. Tidying up that part of the law makes sense.

Having said that, the Bill does not assist newcomers to the land, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said, or the county councils, which are in such a desperate financial position that they are having to sell some of their smallholdings and farms to raise capital. County council land was a prime source for people who wanted to set up afresh in farming with remarkably little capital.

Some of those people go to our excellent agricultural institutes, which are as good at training people in agricultural ways as any other section of our further and higher education. They do a magnificent job and I have yet to visit one in which standards are slack or there is no control over what is happening. They are able to make young people think about the future of agriculture and what they should be doing, not only in a United Kingdom context, but in that of Europe and the general agreement on tariffs and trade. Many newcomers do not have any capital and their interest originated in schools, which provide imaginative courses. How are such people to get into farming? It is extraordinarily difficult and the Bill does nothing to help.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East said, reform of the common agricultural policy does not depend on the pious utterances of the Government, or of the Opposition, but on making farmers willing to go along with root and branch reform. Those with large farms have been unwilling to do so, especially when the reforms have been allied to environmental considerations. Those with family farms consider the environment and can see what is happening in the wider world. They are sufficiently flexible to respond, and to feed into the Government machine the sort of policies that can best be put across.

Short-termism is another worrying aspect of the Bill. The right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) expressed it when he said that tenancies must not be too long. Short-termism has crept into our economy and I am not thinking merely of those people who have made great profits from electricity, water or whatever, although they must certainly take their share of the blame for creating a

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certain atmosphere. I am thinking of the many short-term work contracts of three or six months, which lead to all sorts of insecurities. The Bill will introduce those same insecurities into the farmer's world and the family farmer's world.

I have no worries for those with large farms, who can look after themselves. They can always get out and go into something else—if they cannot, they do not deserve to succeed. Family farmers need our support, however, and they need to be able to plan over a long period. They must plan from "generation unto generation", to quote the Bible again. It is important for people to be familiar with the land that they farm and to have sympathy with it. People have feelings about the land—that is a difficult concept, but it is true.

I have also been extremely worried about the number of tax farmers and I am sure that that concerns the Minister too. It is appalling that rich people, such as pop idols or footballers, can save huge sums of money in tax by investing in farms to which they bring no productivity. The family farm is part of the core and the foundation of this country. The Bill does nothing to strengthen such farms and much to destabilise them.

5.5 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I speak as a former tenant farmer who has consistently opposed security of tenure, which has done so much damage to the system. It is extraordinary for the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), who propounds the merits of the system, to talk about improving entry to the industry. No man alive has done more harm to the system than the hon. Gentleman did in the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. It is clear from the tone of his speech that nothing much has changed in his mind.

I sat through the Standing Committee that considered the 1976 Act with him and I acknowledge that he probably knows as much about the subject as any hon Gentleman, but somewhere in his soul he hates landlords and believes that tenants should be preserved. The inevitable result of such a policy is that the supply dries up, as it did with housing, and the system stagnates.

It is universally accepted that the system will not continue without some sustenance. I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point—his only point—that the Conservative party has failed to grasp that nettle despite the fact that it has been in power for so many years. Minister after Minister felt that to act without the agreement of all sides of the industry would simply be stirring up a hornets' nest, which is not something that Ministers like to do.

Not long after I succeeded the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1979, the Northfield report came to the Government for an answer. The then Minister—the noble Lord Walker—was very nervous of the whole subject. He felt that the problems of the agricultural world were similar to those of the housing world. I tried to persuade him that that was not so and that tenants did not feel the same about their landlords as housing tenants felt for the Rachmans of the day.

In a debate in another place, the noble Marquess of Hertford described the status of landlord as having an "aroma of sulphur"—an apt description. Those of us who have been tenant farmers recognise that, to a large extent, one's prosperity depends on the amount of rent that one has to pay. I observed that no sooner had my farm begun to prosper than the landlord would collect an extra slice of rent every three years, which put one back to where one started. Matters such as capital investment, plant and drainage were constantly negotiated and those negotiations were crucial to the business.

If one recognises that the return from owning agricultural land is tiny, even at today's much increased rents, and that the opportunities to find capital to buy land are extremely limited, one can well see the merits of a system that divides the owning of land from farming it. That is why we had such a strong and prosperous landlord-tenant relationship for so many years, with landlords minding their landowning business and tenants getting on with farming. I accept that the cost of equipment in a modern milking parlour, probably installed by the tenant, runs into tens if not hundreds of thousands of pounds and does not compare with the elementary equipment that farming required only 50 years ago. Substantial changes have been made, but there is no reason why there should not be a free market.

The Agriculture Act 1947 spelt the beginning of the end and the 1948 and 1976 Acts made matters worse. Landlords have lost their land for three generations. If a landlord signed a lease under the 1976 Act, he could say goodbye to his land for his lifetime and probably that of his sons. There is no need for such contracts, which should be an agreement between a willing landlord and a willing tenant. Historically, that was so, but the Acts of 1947, 1948 and 1976 were all retrospective and imposed new conditions on contracts that had been freely entered into.

If I were on the Standing Committee of this Bill—I sincerely hope that I shall not be—I would table amendments proposing that those who signed leases under those Acts should no longer be subject to retrospection. For example, if a tenancy was held before 1947 between a willing landlord and a willing tenant, the tenant knew that he would have short-term notice, different rent reviews and other conditions, but the Government of the day altered such contracts and then altered them again in 1976. If a landlord and tenant have signed a contract under the 1976 Act, that is between a willing landlord and a willing tenant. The Bill is an opportunity to remove retrospection from the agricultural landlord and tenant relationship.

If someone owns an office block as an investment, it is worth much more when it is let than when it is empty, but precisely the opposite is true of a farm, which is worth twice as much with vacant possession as it is with a tenant. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be in his position for many years to come and will swiftly give further thought to how he might progress the improvement of the landlord and tenant system. He will not succeed until a let farm is worth more than a vacant farm; that position prevailed until 1947 and we should seek to return to it. We have succeeded in doing so in housing and we must work towards that in farming.

Many benefits derive from freedom of movement. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East admits that the only benefit in his proposal is that he has "locked in"—those were his words—a number of tenants. I see no benefit whatever in that.

The Bill is a small acknowledgement of the fact that the various interested parties have managed to agree. I referred to the Leasehold Reform Act 1967, which I voted against, as the Building Societies (Robin Hood) Act. If ever the Robin Hood principle applied, it applied to the landlord and tenant system in the agricultural world: rob the rich and give the proceeds to the poor. It is no longer entirely that way round, because many tenants have had a good deal. For a small percentage of the capital cost of the land, they have been able to rent that land, sometimes for many years, but now they are unwilling to give up their position and they scream their heads off at the thought of some justice being returned to the system. They argue that they have invested a lot in their farms. That is fair enough, but provisions for tenants' and landlords' rights are well established. I shall discuss landlords' rights in a moment.

I am delighted to see that, in the short term, leases that will be available under the Bill will include a definition of "tenant right". The important point is that the improvements concerned will be made only with the landlord's approval. Tenants have sometimes been able to improve their farms without permission but, on termination of the tenancy, landlords have had to find a substantial sum to pay to the tenant. That did not encourage movement.

Mr. Knapman *indicated assent.*

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I see my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) nodding. He is an expert in those matters.

I strongly welcome the inclusion in the Bill of written agreements, which are essential. In my long experience of misunderstandings between landlord and tenants and affairs of the countryside, agents or landlords often cannot remember having said that a tenant could make certain changes. When it is the other way round, nor does the tenant. I welcome the definition in the Bill that those agreements must be in writing. I foresee a majority of those agreements being fairly short term to start with. Landlords will tread warily, and I do not blame them for doing so. They will gradually gain confidence in their new tenants. I take the point that they may be old tenants with expanded farms. The law can do nothing to prevent that. It is surely the landlord's right to let his farm to whom he wishes.

A great deal of nonsense is spoken about new entrants into agriculture. Few businesses of substance today allow new entrants to start with little money or experience and become their own masters overnight, yet for some reason people say that newcomers have the right to enter agriculture. It is a lovely theory but in practice it should be examined in today's scene, where high capital, high technology and education are more important than ever before.

I entirely endorse the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). County council smallholdings—I call them that because that is what the relevant legislation is entitled—are an anachronism of the past.

Mr. Enright *indicated dissent.*

Sir Jerry Wiggin: If the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), who shakes his head, were to go to the Library and examine the annual report, he would discover that hundreds of millions of pounds of public money are tied up in county council smallholdings, all of which could be sold tomorrow to their tenants or at an equivalent tenanted price. County councils such as Somerset, where I live although my constituency is elsewhere, have thousands of acres of county council smallholdings yet bleat that they must make cuts in education. They had an opportunity to sell those, and they should be sold to their tenants. When the hon. Gentleman reads the bottom line, as he no doubt will, he will be astonished to discover how few new tenancies are being created. The capital and running costs of county council smallholdings are a scandal that should be exposed.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, passed when the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) was on the Front Bench, specifically excluded county council smallholdings because they needed mobility of tenants, and the right to tenancy succession was not given?

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I would hate to be reminded of all the aspects of that long—I was going to say "friendly"—tussle. It was not friendly at all. It was hard-fought legislation, imposed, if I recall, in the absence of the Minister. The Parliamentary Secretary picked up the torch and ran with it, to the eternal pleasure of his socialist friends and to disastrous effect throughout the system.

We have new complexities and new complications. Quotas have rightly been mentioned. They are a highly important and emotional subject, but I would say to the farming community that they came out of the blue, that they have acquired a value and that they may go back into the blue. It is the Government's avowed policy, in many cases, to get rid of quotas. Nevertheless, one or two of my friends retired upon selling their quota, and if I had 1 million litres of milk quota and someone offered me 60p a litre for it, I too would retire. It is extraordinary how those things have come from nowhere.

The premium paid for sheep on the higher land now runs into substantial sums of money, and quite small flocks can fetch tens of thousands of pounds because they are eligible for the sheep premium.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): My hon. Friend mentions quotas. Given the debate about farmers retiring on the basis of their quota, does he agree that what Governments give, Governments can take away, and that, although quotas may be worth something today, if the quota system ended tomorrow those quotas would be worth nothing?

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I was trying to say that, and my hon. Friend put it in much more succinct language.

That presents a problem for the landlord and tenant system. Let us take as an example the less-favoured areas ewe premium. A farm—probably an extensive farm—at a high level that did not attract that premium would find it hard to make a profit, but, if the previous tenant has sold that quota, either the landlord or the new tenant will have to buy it back, and we are getting into extraordinarily

[Sir Jerry Wiggin]

large sums of capital. I do not know the simple solution to that, because in Europe and in Brussels the excellent way in which our system operates is not recognised, which is a great pity. I know that it causes my right hon. Friend the Minister problems. Perhaps when he replies he will say a word or two about the way in which that is to be tackled.

I strongly welcome the recognition, at long last, that there is merit in tax relief on let land. I wish only that we had been sensible enough to have introduced that many years ago, but I understand that it will apply only to land let after 1 September under the terms of the Bill—which by then I hope will be an Act—and to land that continues to be tenanted as a result of the succession provisions. I would go further, and say that, if there is merit in a family farm, which indeed there is, there is certainly merit in a family landlord letting his land, provided that the land is let. I think that that is perfectly reasonable.

As long as hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench do not give an absolute statement of their intentions, there will be no confidence in the agricultural industry to employ the terms of the Bill, and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East knows that, because he well knows what happened under the Agriculture (Amendment) Act 1984, which I voted against.

I was the only Conservative to vote against that Bill because it did not go far enough. I said that the Bill would not work, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), who has just left the Chamber, the then Minister, said, "Ah, but there will be new tenancies because the Country Landowners Association has promised me that there will be." I wonder how many there have been; perhaps a handful. I will bet that there have been fewer than 100.

Unless there is confidence—unless the landlord can return to the free and open possession of his own land at some definable period in the not too distant future, under the terms of a contract freely and willingly entered into with a tenant—the landlord will opt to keep his own land, use some other legal device or in some way seek to avoid the penal provisions of security of tenure.

I know that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East has some responsibility for that matter, and at some time he will have to make that statement if he wishes the Bill to work. Given the agreement in the industry, I plead with him not to delay making that statement too long. We should not waste our time in the House with legislation that will take some time in Committee and on Report and so on, only to find that, in practice, it is destroyed as a result of a lack of confidence.

If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East believes in the system, I hope that he will say so, and that he will at least give an assurance that contracts made under the Act-to-be will not be dishonoured by a future Labour Administration.

5.24 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am not a farmer. I do not declare an interest, but I have lived all my life surrounded by the working countryside. My present home is surrounded by tenanted farms—both by Cornwall county council's smallholdings and by Duchy of Cornwall farms.

In the past few weeks, I have been to Scotland, to Wales, to all parts of England and of course in the Celtic country of Cornwall, and I have met tenants in all parts of the kingdom.

Although the Bill is extremely important, it is only part of a three-pronged approach that must be adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and by the Government generally, if opportunities for new entrants are to increase and if a healthy tenanted sector is to be maintained and expanded to everyone's benefit.

The approach that must be adopted is, if you like, Madam Deputy Speaker, a three-legged stool. First, we need the end of tax discrimination. I shall discuss that in a moment.

Secondly, we obviously need the maintenance of a flourishing county farm estate. In the light of what the hon. Members for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) and for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said, it is a key part of the tenanted sector. I believe that it could play a much better part in future, if it returns to its original function of being a first rung on the tenanted ladder—the first rung of the farming ladder—instead of being the only rung that some tenants have found themselves able to get on to.

Thirdly—the subject of the Bill before the House—we need a legal framework that both potential landlords and potential tenants accept is reasonable, acceptable and likely to remain permanent. I shall return to the argument made by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare in a moment.

Those are the three elements that the sector requires to retain confidence.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman describes the county council holdings system as the first rung on the ladder. Can he give some evidence, from his own county or the Duchy of Cornwall, of the number of farmers who have left county council smallholdings to move on to other, larger, tenancies? We do not appear to be hearing much about that.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making my argument for me. The Bill is important precisely because smallholding tenants on county farms do not have an opportunity to move on to other tenancies. I think that he and I would recognise that the Bill will make it possible for tenancies to be loosened up in future. However, if we simply sell all the smallholdings to their tenants, or if the pressure on the county councils' budgets forces them to dispose of their holdings outright in the open market, the first rung of the ladder is removed. It is not an argument for strengthening the second rung of the ladder if one removes the first one.

It is obvious throughout southern Britain, where I have some experience, that it would be a disaster for the tenanted sector if county councils were forced by Whitehall to sell their prize possessions, especially when they may not be able to obtain the best of prices for them, as a result of local government reorganisation or budgetary restraint. The pressure on the other tenancies would put the system in an impossible position.

Mr. Colvin: On county council smallholdings, will the hon. Gentleman give us some evidence that county council tenants on smallholdings have moved to larger tenancies?

In the county of Hampshire, there have been plenty of new lets of agricultural holdings. We also used to have a county council land settlement. The county council, in its wisdom, eventually sold that settlement—most of it to the sitting tenants, because there was no evidence that any of the tenants of those land settlement holdings were moving anywhere. They were very happy and cosy doing what they were good at, but they had no intention of moving elsewhere. It was not the first rung on a ladder, but a first rung to nowhere. They were content to stay where they were.

Mr. Tyler: I cannot speak with authority about Hampshire. In any event, it would be wrong for me to spend too much time on the issue that the hon. Gentleman raised. I have, however, met the county land agents for seven of the south-west counties. It is because they recognise that it is difficult to move from the first rung on to the second that they support the Bill. If Conservative Members think that the work that the agents are doing is wrong and that the agents' values and judgments are wrong, they should reflect that those professional advisers support the Bill, as I do.

The second leg of my three-legged stool is the tax treatment of tenanted land. As a member of the Committee that considered the Finance Bill in 1992, I moved an amendment which seems now to be remarkably close to the change that the Government seek to introduce by means of the current Finance Bill. The Minister, in urging his hon. Friends to reject my amendment, said:

"If agricultural landlords were to benefit from 100 per cent. relief there would be ensuing pressure from other landlords for similar treatment and if 100 per cent. relief from inheritance tax were extended to other landlords, it would increase pressure for their businesses to be treated as qualifying for trading reliefs from other taxes. To extend trading reliefs to all landlords throughout the tax system would cost hundreds of millions of pounds."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 30 June 1992; c. 422.]

Of course, but we were not asking for that. When my hon. Friends and I pressed the amendment to a Division, all the Conservative members of the Committee voted it down.

Tonight, Conservative Members come before us as converted sinners. I welcome them aboard. I wish only that we could be sure that the tax distortion that has been built into the system for so long can be completely removed. It would be good to find in future that land, whether owner occupied or in tenancy, was treated in a non-discriminatory manner in terms of inheritance tax.

The third leg of my milking stool is that the Bill produces a new legal framework. It is pleasant, for once, to be able to welcome a Bill that is both sensible and progressive. Given the Government's record of unwanted and unnecessary legislation, it is encouraging to welcome a Bill that has widespread support in the industry. Indeed, it derives its parentage far more from the working group of all the interested parties—the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union, the young farmers' groups and, most important of all, the Tenant Farmers Association—than from the Ministry. Perhaps it would be fair to say that the Ministry had washed its hands of trying to find an acceptable formula. It should be said that the persistent work of the organisations to which I referred achieved an important consensus.

It is worth noting that the TFA says firmly that it believes that the Bill is a major step towards the revival of tenanted farms. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, in undertaking a survey last year, considered the possible effect of the Bill. It projected that about 1 million acres would be let for five years or more soon after the Bill came into force, if it were enacted. It foresaw that over half of that land would be let for periods of 10 years or more and that more than 1,000 fully equipped farms and over 3,000 blocks of bare land would provide opportunities for new entrants, for farmers and for businesses to engage in restructuring, with better security and lower capital overheads, because it would not be necessary to buy expensive land to enable them to expand. That does not square with the nightmare scenario that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) was describing a short while ago.

The TFA endorses that view. In giving a warm welcome to the Bill, it states:

"The tenanted sector is the traditional way into the industry for those with skill and energy but who cannot afford to buy land. Yet it has been in steady decline for reasons which include owners' fears that any letting could create life tenancies under present legislation and tax discrimination against letting land. Almost no land is now freshly let on full tenancies under the present law. Agriculture, facing economic and political pressures, needs the business flexibility that a free tenancy market can give for it to remain competitive; paying a rent rather than having to buy high priced land."

It is clear that there will be continuing difficulties if we make no changes to the law. It is equally clear that in Committee we must be careful about the way in which the detailed provisions of the Bill operate, especially as regards compensation—I have noted the arguments advanced about compensation for quota, which will be extremely difficult to calculate in the current speculative environment that is being suffered by the milk industry—and to ensure that we have the best possible arrangements for arbitration. I am confident that we have a good legal framework, which is a good basis on which to make progress. I am equally sure that it will be extremely important to deal with some of the concerns that tenants are already expressing about some detailed provisions.

I think that it was the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare who referred to tenant right. There are still some problems about that, which have not been resolved. They were explored in another place, but they still require some definition. It is extremely important that the approach that is taken to the issue should follow the amendment to clause 17 that was put before the other place. I hope that it will be possible to identify specific exceptions to the general rule where consent is required for compensation.

For example, it is difficult to obtain specific consent from a landlord at each stage of the growing of annual crops, but that may be extremely important when it comes to compensation. The same can be said of pasture and beneficial acts of husbandry, which can add to the value of a farm but may not be appropriate for specific consent from the landlord. Similarly, there is the liming of land and the application to land of purchased manures and fertilisers.

In the normal yearly management and husbandry of a farm, there are elements that can add greatly to the value of the holding, and they must be taken into account when it comes to compensation. Tenant right will require some attention in Committee.

The fly in the ointment must be the attitude of Her Majesty's Opposition. I understand from the Opposition's press release that their spokesman in this place takes a different view from their spokesman in another place. It

[Mr. Tyler]

was evident from the way in which Lord Carter approached the Bill's provisions that he regarded the measure as a sensible framework for reform. He made a positive contribution to the debates upon the Bill, as one would expect. He has great practical experience of agriculture. He did not divide the other place on any of the principles underlying the Bill.

That being so, the issues to which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East referred this afternoon and in his press release require some attention. I do not propose to analyse them myself. Instead, I shall take advantage of the work of the TFA. After all, it is members of that association who will be affected by the Bill. The TFA has, point by point, rebutted the objections of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East to the Bill.

Labour suggests that the Bill will end security of tenure for tenant farmers. That is not true. It is absurd to frighten people by suggesting that that is the position.

Dr. Strang: I have already responded to that issue. I explained in answer to an intervention that I was talking about new tenancies under the proposed legislation, not existing tenancies. There will be a voluntary contract and no statutory right, as the hon. Gentleman will understand.

Mr. Tyler: I heard the hon. Gentleman's explanation. However, I have had the benefit of re-reading his press release. Having done so, it is far from clear that what he says is the position. It is important that we take the TFA's views into account. There is a good case for saying that without this legislation, the position of tenants would be increasingly difficult.

In his press statement, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said that the Bill would mean the end of tenanted family farms, but the TFA rebuts that too, saying firmly that that is not expected to be the case. Through the freeing up of tenancies, many farmers will be provided with the flexibility that they need to cope with the radical changes that lie ahead for British farming.

The Labour press statement says that the Bill will cause a free-for-all and the fragmentation of many farms. But there is no empirical evidence to suggest that that would be the case. The TFA points out that economic pressures have caused that to happen. Those pressures include tax regimes, and local authority holdings and other big estates have been pressured to the point that they find it impossible to maintain their tenancies, and they have—when the opportunity has arisen—sold.

Labour's amendment in the other place, which insisted on long-term protection for farms with a dwelling, was not pressed because it became perfectly apparent to anyone with practical and realistic common sense that, if such a measure were introduced, landowners would simply avoid the burden by hiving off farmhouses, treating them separately and finding tenants who did not need the farmhouse. The so-called residential farm business tenancy was originally proposed by the noble Lord Carter, but he sensibly backed off because he had experience of the practical realities.

I did not understand what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said about the breaking up of holdings, or that holdings would just become larger rather than there being more of them. There is no suggestion that that would be the case, unless his own amendment on residential farm business tenancies was pursued. In that case, there would undoubtedly be a tendency to break up holdings.

Dr. Strang: I am not quite sure what the hon. Gentleman is talking about when he refers to "my amendment". He may be referring to a probing amendment that was tabled in the other place.

I said earlier that there may have been a case for addressing the point to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but clearly if one does—this is a fair point, which the Country Landowners Association made in its briefing for the debate—one must do it in a way that will not achieve the outcome that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting; that is, encouraging the splitting of the farmhouse away from the holding. I thought that there was a consensus in the House that we should seek to discourage the breaking up of farms, which the hon. Gentleman will be aware is happening throughout the country, including in Cornwall.

Mr. Tyler: I am again grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that point. If he does not press the probing amendment in this House, as his colleagues did in the other place, I shall be only too pleased. The amendment would have precisely the effect that I identified. It would tend to encourage the break-up of holdings, rather than their consolidation.

I hope that at end of the debate—not necessarily this evening's debate, but the debate during the whole process of the Bill—there will be consensus. The part of the agriculture industry with which we are dealing needs some long-term confidence and some real appreciation that the political system has reached a consensus about the way in which it is tackling what is undoubtedly a difficult problem. I hope that the Opposition spokesman who winds up will come clean and say whether they would seek to repeal the legislation should they ever come to government. For our part, I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues would wish to reach a point with this legislation at which it is not required to be torn up and thrown out of the window again, and we would wish to build on it, to make progress in the future.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Before the hon. Gentleman comes to his peroration, may I say that I have been able to obtain figures on county council smallholdings, which may be of interest to him? In the county of Cornwall, there are no less than 4,600 hectares of land, where there are 167 tenants. In the year before last, nine new tenancies were granted. In the country as a whole, out of 5,000 tenants, only 125 new tenancies were granted. There is public investment, however, in over 133,000 hectares of land. Surely that is not showing a first step on the ladder. It is simply showing that the concept is completely out of date. I hope that the Liberal Democrats will join us in seeking to destroy such a system.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman has proved my point. He obviously did not listen to what I said—perhaps he was studying the figures. It is because there has not been a second or third rung of the ladder that the tenanted sector has seized up in recent years. That is why I support the Bill. I thought that the hon. Gentleman would be pleased that I am supporting it.

It is not the fault of a bottom rung of a ladder that there is no way up after it. The hon. Gentleman and I may agree that, for a number of reasons which we have been discussing, we have not been able to free up other rungs

of the ladder. That is why the land agents responsible for the county estates right through southern Britain are convinced that the legislation is important. They are convinced that we must get it right, and that it is extremely important that we have a political consensus. We can then give everybody confidence that they can get off the bottom rung and move up. The last thing that we want to do is to remove the bottom rung, as that would not help one little bit.

That is the first leg of my three-legged stool. The second leg is tax discrimination. I hope that the Minister will be able to explain why that is limited in its present format, as the logic of the situation is that it should be extended throughout, as the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare said earlier.

The third leg is that it is very important not only that the legislation reaches the statute book in its best possible form, but that we all make sure that there is no future threat by any potential Government to undo the work that we do with the Bill this Session. Retrospection is a very unhappy way to deal with such problems. It almost always results in injustice and diseconomy.

Naturally, members of the Committee will want to scrutinise all parts of the Bill and I am sure that hon. Members on both sides will wish to make sure that the legislation meets all the requirements, not just for 1995 but, I hope, for many years to come. I hope and trust that Labour Members, both here and in Committee, will adopt a positive attitude to the legislation, listen to those with practical experience of the industry—including the noble Lord Carter—and come round to accepting that, at a later stage, the Bill should be given fair wind on to the statute book.

5.46 pm

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): It worries me greatly that the Government have the support of the Liberal Democrats on the Bill. However, I find the news release from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) far more predictable. It says that it is not for use before Monday 6 February 1996; when one has read it, one wants to change the year to 9996.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East sees this as an issue of social justice. It would be interesting to know just which subject the hon. Gentleman does not see as an issue of social justice. We did hear this afternoon that he was basing his argument on the highland land clearances. He also complained that the Bill would result in the fragmentation of farms, but that is exactly what has been going on. It is precisely because the Agricultural Holdings Act 1948 and the Agriculture Act 1947 bear no relevance to the needs of today that we need the Ministry's five-year terms and other partnerships to get around the existing legislation. That is why we have the fragmentation of farms, and why so few tenancies are available for those who wish to enter the industry.

I turn from the press release of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East to the real world, where the Bill has been welcomed by almost every body associated with the industry, including the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the Country Landowners Association and the Tenant Farmers Association. To get those groups to agree was not just good; it strikes me as a minor miracle. That was acknowledged very much in the other place, where there was acknowledged to be a wealth of expertise, and a number of valuable amendments were accepted.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has not said whether there is a wealth of expertise here, although I must claim to be one of the few Members who can understand the residual manurial values of farmyard manure. I do not know whether that constitutes expertise, but I am tempted to take a few minutes on the subject.

As someone who was obliged to study agricultural law at Cirencester agricultural college—which, 30 years ago, some people thought was an alternative to education—I am pleased to see lengthy and complicated legislation reduced to a Bill of just 31 pages. It is a change also to consider legislation that deals with people who live and work in the countryside—bearing in mind the fact that so many think that the countryside is the green bit that separates the towns and that it is there primarily for access by, and for the recreation of, townspeople.

The number of people who live and work in the country is declining. The Labour party should consider the fact that the Bill is responsible for that decline to some extent. We must restore and increase the number of available tenancies.

We all agree that the Agricultural Holdings Act 1948—I note what my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) said—is well out of date. It was probably appropriate for its time, although my hon. Friend would have trouble accepting that. It is interesting to look at the report of the Second Reading debate on the Agricultural Holdings Bill in 1948, which lasted for two minutes. The Solicitor-General begged to move the Second Reading motion and Major Legge-Bourke of the Isle of Ely said:

> "I think that hon. Members on this side of the House would like to say that we are grateful to the Government for this Bill".—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1948; Vol. 453, c. 1659.]

Hon. Members were commendably brief on that occasion and I shall try not to trespass too much on the time of the House on this.

What was right in 1948 is certainly not appropriate now. Some Opposition Members cannot come to terms with revising clause IV, let alone revising the 1947 and 1948 legislation. At that time, circumstances were very different and the policy behind the Act was that Britain should not be caught out again and that we should not be short of food after the war. Convoys had saved us from defeat in the war and there was no post-war food surplus. Every effort was made to increase production.

In those circumstances, tenants were encouraged to rent smallholdings and to have county council smallholdings. The county council smallholdings—I think that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said this—were supposed to be the first rung on the ladder. However, once people got to the first rung of the ladder, they found it very comfortable and stayed there for ever. In any case, as a result of the prescriptive Agricultural Holdings Act 1948, when people reached the first rung of the ladder they looked up, to see that the other rungs had been sawn away because no one was letting larger areas of land.

That was the view in 1948. I think it was probably Charles Dickens—I may be misquoting him—who observed that any man who could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass grow where only one grew before deserves more from mankind than the whole race of

[Mr. Roger Knapman]

politicians put together; but then Dickens did not live in the enlightened age of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Colvin: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and for pinching the quotation that I intended to make in my speech. However, I must correct him: the quotation is by Jonathan Swift from "Gulliver's Travels". My hon. Friend has saved me a couple of minutes in my speech.

Mr. Knapman: Bearing in mind the fact that, first, I have credited the quotation to the wrong person and, secondly, I am not certain that I have the quotation correct, I think it is incumbent on my hon. Friend to set it right at an appropriate time.

The recent announcement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor about inheritance tax on let land will ensure that the Bill is more effective. I could quote at some length from an unusually supportive leader in last week's *Farmers' Weekly*, which said that the massive boost to the tenanted farm sector

"has been heralded as the beginning of a new era by the Country Landowners Association and as a powerful boost to the tenanted sector by the Tenant Farmers Association".

I agree that that will not convince the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, who is more concerned about highland land clearances. The article says:

"They speak for the whole industry in predicting that this important new tax break will encourage more owners to offer land for letting. In doing so they will ensure the success of the new farm business tenancy agreements which take effect this September.

It should also encourage landlords to increase the length of new tenures because the tax implications of sudden death are less severe".

I hope that that is correct, but it will depend to some extent on whether the Inland Revenue can be prevailed upon not to offer too narrow an interpretation of what constitutes agricultural let land.

The 1948 Act was extremely complex and it led to a lawyers' beanfeast in later years—but I suppose that most legislation does. That was especially so of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare referred—it seems to be engraved on his memory—and the three generations of succession provision. After a number of years, it was obvious that landlords were becoming increasingly reluctant to rent land. One needs a certain amount of confidence to rent out land; one must be prepared to accept that land may be let for up to three generations and that, during that time, its asset value will be half that under vacant possession.

As a result, there were virtually no traditional lettings of agricultural land, which benefited no one. I had the privilege of visiting the Smithfield show the December before last and I spoke to a leading agent who managed hundreds of thousands of acres of land. I asked him how much traditional tenancy land remained and he looked at me as though I were joking. No one does that sort of thing any more.

I must declare, rather late in the day, an interest in the debate. I am a partner in a small firm of land agents which is unsuccessful, first, because my partner is of advanced age; secondly, because he is over-fond of salmon fishing; thirdly, because he is fond of his own woodlands; and, fourthly, possibly because I spend so much time in this place. It was the only firm of chartered surveyors and land agents that was not the subject of a takeover bid during the boom years of the 1980s.

We managed to survive despite the fact there were few traditional tenancies on offer—I think that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State suggested that the figure was 10 per cent., but I thought that the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors had said the figure was only 6 per cent. Whatever the figure is, it is very small. Of the total, 3 per cent. is let to existing tenants or their relations and only 3 per cent. is let to what might be termed "outsiders".

I must tell those hon. Members who would vote against the Bill that that amounts to stagnation of the industry. The average farmer is now older than 50—although I have reached the stage of life where I do not consider that to be particularly old. All hon. Members should accept that the original purpose of the 1948 Act—to provide security of tenure—may have been sound, but, sadly, it has had precisely the opposite effect. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East was speaking, it occurred to me that there is no security if there is no tenancy available. That is the point to which the present legislation has brought us.

All those involved in the industry have known for many years that something is wrong. The National Farmers Union of England and Wales, the Country Landowners Association and the Tenant Farmers Association know that there is not a healthy balance between letting and owner-occupation. Even the National Union of Agricultural Workers, which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East mentioned, must have suspected that something was wrong when it suddenly had so few members that it was obliged to merge with a larger union. I hope that, even at this late stage, the hon. Gentleman will try to appreciate the industry's problems.

Mr. Colvin: Will my hon. Friend give way again?

Mr. Knapman: I have not given another quotation in recent minutes, but I am happy to give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Colvin: I shall not mention the authorship of any quotation on this occasion. Surely one reason why the tenanted sector has dried up is the enormous extent of distortion because the industry is heavily subsidised and enjoys all manner of Government support. One reason why landlords were not prepared to let farms was that they could make much more money farming land in hand than they could letting to tenants. That is why landlords tended to take farms in hand whenever the opportunity arose.

Mr. Knapman: I agree with my hon. Friend that most landlords go through that stage of thinking. It is only when they have the privilege of meeting several different managers—some better than others—that they go off the idea. Theoretically, land in hand should show a better return than tenanted land. I believe that landowners—and the Church Commissioners—want to continue with the traditional letting of land, provided they are satisfied that they can, at a reasonable stage, have vacant possession. That seems to be the guiding principle of most professional land agents and surveyors.

I have mentioned on numerous occasions the complexity of the 1948 Act, and I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Minister of State has thought about ensuring that we do not enter another minefield. There

have been many cases of "horseyculture"—the letting of agricultural land for use by horses. If we mean to encourage extensification and diversification, we must be sure that any farm business tenancy can include letting to horses without the protracted rigmarole that occurred in the courts some years ago.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): Perhaps I may make a point of detail: the horse cannot sign.

Mr. Knapman: The horse can do many things, but I agree that it cannot sign anything. However, perhaps my hon. Friend will satisfy even me on that point in due course.

The popularity of litigation linked to the 1948 Act was second only to divorce at the time. Most cases revolved around what was a short let and an agricultural tenancy. There was a great deal at stake, which is why we were relieved when Gladstone *v.* Bower seemed to settle matters once and for all, albeit in the short term—which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East should not like. Many cases were based on the various notices that had to be served one or two months before the end of a tenancy.

There is no end to it. One must constantly check one's professional indemnity insurance to ensure that such notices have been served in time. Even then, there have been court cases disputing the validity of such notices. *Estates Gazette* has been clogged with reports of such cases for nearly half a century. I hope that will end under the new legislation.

I must enter a caveat. Although I greatly welcome the Bill's brevity of 31 pages, compared with the 1947 and 1948 Acts, we must ensure that the brevity of contracts is not balanced by the complexity of valuation clauses and custom, where appropriate. The shorter the tenancy, the more likely it is that the contract will be silent—and where agreements are silent, we need a clear indication of the code of practice, which I understand is being prepared by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. In short, we must not generate more legal action based on the new legislation.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East took the House on a little history tour, and I agree with some of his points. If a farmer died in July or August in the 19th century, it was unfortunate, not just because he was severely short of breath but because one was not in a position to harvest his crops—and had no right to harvest them. Whatever was planted or attached to the soil remained with the soil. In Latin, as my hon. Friend the Minister will know, that is

"quic quid plantatur solo, solo cedit."

If someone had the misfortune to die in July, having gone to all the bother of planting the corn, no claim could be made once the crop was ready for harvesting. It was obviously necessary to introduce legislation, and that dated mainly—although not exclusively, despite our briefing—from 1875.

The initial legislation was based primarily not so much on security of tenure, which so concerns the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, as on equity between landlord and tenant in terms of the value of crops—particularly at the end of a tenancy. That is where the hon. Gentleman goes wrong. If he said that he was looking for equity between the two parties but would leave them to decide the contracts themselves, we would all be together. I am sorry that we are not.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: My hon. Friend wants to see a contract freely entered into by the landlord and tenant. Is not the problem that, because we have not repealed the 1947 and 1948 Acts and others, the contract must be specified or one will appear as a result of the 1948 Act, for land let for more than two years? Something must be written into the Bill, unless we are prepared to repeal all the other legislation.

Mr. Knapman: My hon. Friend is entirely right, which is why I mentioned the number of court cases to determine whether there was a grazing let or a full-blown tenancy. The financial rewards of winning a case that decided an agricultural tenancy were huge. One understands why so many people were tempted to suggest that they had a tenancy. It was an artificial form of legislation in the first place, and I hope that we can leave all that behind.

I thoroughly support the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Minister and his Front-Bench team, largely because my right hon. Friend made the point that the Bill will provide greater market flexibility and, I hope, opportunities for more tenancies. One recalls Disraeli's dictum of

"lies, damned lies and statistics."

I like to think that 1 million extra acres will come on to the market, but I suspect that one could as easily make a case for 100,000 or 100 million acres. It is not that vast amounts of land will come on to the market as a result of the Bill, but it will release some extra land.

A broad-brush approach to compensation seems to be favoured. What is the status of the RICS guidance notes? Will they be ready and agreed when the Bill becomes law? It is rather important that they should be.

What part, if any, of the customs of the country will apply? If the Minister cannot tell me now, perhaps he will do so in Committee. Those customs are still important. Cornwall has a fairly clement climate—I am sorry to alliterate in such a way—and the Pennines have a rather harsher climate, especially currently. Their customs need to be retained wherever possible.

I am not clear in my own mind about the compensation provisions for relatively short-term lets. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take an interest—I am sure that he will—in the RICS's recommendations. For instance, it was traditional, under a 1947-48 tenancy, with, perhaps, a 200 acre heavy clay soil farm, to conclude that a proportion of the drains and ditches should be cleaned or cleared every year. There was more or less a seven-year term then, and it was thought reasonable that a tenant farmer should go around the farm. I am not sure that it is entirely equitable that a tenant with, perhaps, merely three years—in the Bill, it amounts to four—of farming should have the whole of that liability placed on him or her during that short tenancy. I am not sure that I have thought that matter through entirely—perhaps that is all too evident—but it should be borne in mind. We cannot place wholly on short-term tenancies—three to four-year terms—all the obligations laid on those tenants under the 1948 Act.

It was a pleasure recently to read an article in *Estates Gazette*, entitled "Implications of the Agricultural Tenancies Bill", written by Mr. Christopher Jessel of the

[Mr. Knapman]

London firm of Farrer and Co. I am happy to give it publicity, bearing in mind the fact that it acts for a certain noble Lord in the west country who leases me my salmon fishing, which keeps me sane—although I appreciate that that might be a contentious observation. Mr. Jessel said:

"There is, though, no provision in the Bill that would stop the landlord from restricting the use to pure agriculture if he wishes, although that will be reflected in the rent. If notices are not served (for example, where the tenant goes in on the basis of a handshake) and the character of the occupation changes, then it may become protected by the Landlord and Tenant Act.

In the past it has not usually mattered which protection has applied, so long as the tenant could claim some security, but this could become important in the future, for example, where someone is allowed to keep horses in a field in return for payment."

My hon. Friend the Minister of State mentioned some of the difficulties of horses, but I hope that he will take that point on board.

It is all very well for a parliamentary draftsman to say that all the improvements will be determined by the increase in the value of a holding. I have tried to imagine the increased value of a holding a good many times over the past 30 years or so and find that a somewhat theoretical guidance for any valuer.

Many of the extra bits of land that we all hope will come on to the market as a result of the proposed legislation will be 50, 100 or 200 acres of bare land. That is where the so-called "intangible improvements" envisaged by the Bill become most tempting to tenants; they may suddenly—particularly if there are enough acres—put in an application for an agricultural dwelling.

I can quite understand that whatever a tenant is going to spend should be returned on the appropriate basis at the end of the tenancy, but merely to obtain planning permission, and perhaps against the landlord's wishes? Is that the way in which we should proceed? If that is not my hon. Friend's intention, I should be pleased to hear him say no.

Mr. Jack: It is not.

Mr. Knapman: That is all well and good. One of the replies to a survey by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors read:

"We consider that if the present proposals for new farm business tenancies go through unaltered, then no landlord could be advised to let a farm to a tenant under any circumstances".

It continues:

"The reason is quite simple. It is proposed that a farm business tenant may carry out improvements without the landlord's consent, for which the landlord will be liable to pay at the end of the tenancy. This amounts to writing a blank cheque to the tenant when he moves, and no landlord could possibly be advised to take the risk. I am not alone in that opinion, and I think that the Government is so anxious to put through a consensus agreement that the point has not been addressed."

I am sure that that point has been addressed, but that is the fear of some people. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will see that such concerns are resolved.

Despite all that, I am perfectly satisfied that this is an excellent Bill. It is long overdue, as my colleagues have pointed out. We need greater flexibility and a fresh supply of tenancies to come on to the market. It has been traditional in agriculture to rely on entry either through patrimony, matrimony or parsimony. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) was not going to say this: patrimony and matrimony are still in fashion, but parsimony, sadly, is no longer enough. So huge are the amounts involved that it is just not possible, however parsimonious a person is, to save up enough money to get into farming on a vacant possession basis. The only way in which we can allow young farmers with limited capital behind them to get into farming is to increase the number of tenancies coming on to the market. That is what the Bill does. That is why I enthusiastically support all that my right hon. Friend the Minister proposes.

6.16 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to the debate. A generation ago, my family were farmers. Indeed, if it were not for the fact that the farm occupied by my paternal grandfather was too small, I might today be a farmer myself.

In the 1930s, in Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, my father, like many others, faced the prospect of leaving the land because there was no room for him to farm. Not enough land was available for new tenancies. We heard today—and we are aware of it—that the percentage of let land has been in decline consistently since the beginning of the century. Indeed, in the 1900s, the figure was about 90 per cent., but, as we heard today, a recent survey showed that it is now 30 per cent. or less. The Minister mentioned that in his opening remarks.

Undoubtedly, legislation is necessary for several reasons. The present law on agriculture and agricultural holdings is complex and is contained in a plethora of statutes. I speak as a country solicitor who had substantial dealings with agriculture law. "Scammel on Agriculture" was actually read by lawyers in Meirionnydd, not simply used for pressing flowers. I also speak as one who has the honour to represent a constituency in which at least one in five families has some financial connection with the industry. Of course, farming is what gels the community together. Daily life in Ambridge is very much what it is in parts of my constituency, although the language used may be different. The farming community is the backbone of the rural economy. I realise that this is a Second Reading debate, and I cannot hope to cover all—or even most—of what I believe should be examined in Committee. I think, however, that hon. Members on both sides of the House will readily acknowledge the need to deal with the dramatic decline in the availability of land to new entrants.

I have argued for some time for the inheritance tax relief concession that has just been granted. It will make a substantial contribution, and I am pleased that the Treasury is to amend the Finance Bill to that effect. It will release many hundreds, if not thousands, of acres for letting at a stroke. The much-maligned Farmers Union of Wales, which was treated less than respectfully in another place, had campaigned for the move for some time; apparently it was entirely right in that regard, but wrong in others.

I attended the Royal Smithfield show with the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman). He has already been corrected once or twice this evening, and I hope that we shall not fall out if I correct him again. I was with him, and the rest of the group, when we spoke to a partner in a large west country firm with, I believe, 25 or 30

branches. To the best of my recollection, he said that two or three full tenancies had been created out of several hundred, rather than none. That may be nitpicking, but—

Mr. Knapman: The hospitality at the Smithfield show was generous, and I am prepared to accept that the figure may have been two or three rather than nil. I concede that I may have lost some of the argument.

Mr. Llwyd: I may not have lunched as well as the hon. Gentleman, but we will not go into that now. I meant no disrespect; suffice it to say that very few full tenancies were coming on line. No doubt the bulk of the tenancies that were created—I call them tenancies, although in strict legal parlance they are not—resulted from the Gladstone *v.* Bower agreements, which have already been mentioned. They have done nothing for agriculture, and I do not think that they have done anything for rural stability. They fell through because of an unfortunate judgment. I do not decry the judge concerned, but I think that they will become outmoded if the Bill is passed. That, in general, will be a welcome development.

Although it is beyond doubt that change is needed, if we want to give new entrants more opportunities we should consider a retirement scheme for farmers. For all its faults, the European Union has produced a mechanism for partial funding of such a scheme. Many farmers in my constituency, throughout Wales and beyond are in their mid-50s but cannot afford to think about retiring: the return on their investment has not been good, farming has had its ups and downs over the years and they have been able to put nothing aside. They will have no houses to live in once they leave their holdings, so they are in a difficult position.

The European Union perceived that difficulty, and sought to deal with it. The Government must reconsider; such a scheme would undoubtedly provide more opportunities for new entrants, and I feel that that is one of the main concerns of the Bill. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) suggested a three-pronged milking-stool approach; this is one leg of that stool, which should be added to the inheritance tax exemption and the basic provisions of the Bill—some of which, at least, meet my approval. If we seriously wish to bring more people into the industry and to release more units of land, we should adopt the arrangements already adopted by the European Union.

The Bill is designed to deregulate the law governing agricultural holdings. The agreement to let land is essentially a contract between a willing landlord and a willing tenant, in which I consider equality of bargaining to be a key factor. I hope that, in freeing the legislation as they are, the Government are not thinking along the same lines as they were when they abolished some of the wages councils recently. The aim then was to allow employee and employer greater flexibility in the setting and agreeing of terms, but the only flexibility that I could see was the lowering of wages, as employers always had the right to pay more than the statutory minimum.

I fear that, similarly, agricultural landlords who are less than scrupulous will impose onerous terms on tenants who will be so desperate for land that they will accept those terms. I do not wish to create anxiety—I am trying to express an honest opinion on the basis of a little experience—but it is clear to me that there will be no equality of bargaining if that happens.

If a commodity is in short supply, a premium attaches to it. In this instance, the premium could manifest itself in unfair terms that would do nothing for individual tenants and even less for the industry as a whole. Let us not pretend that there will be true equality of bargaining. It follows logically, therefore, that we must build in safeguards for the weaker party in the negotiation—the tenant.

Rural stability and the future of our communities rely on a healthy and buoyant agriculture industry. I do not deny the need for incentives for landowners to let farms, but tenants must have enough security to enable them and their families to earn a decent living. Farming is at best an onerous and difficult task, and a balance must be struck between both parties; I believe that the Bill is the right vehicle for that balance.

The Farmers Union of Wales has mooted the idea of a working life tenancy lasting until the tenant reaches the age of 65. That is a halfway house between the 1986 system of successions and the complete so-called freedom of contract in the Bill; for reasons that I have already given, I challenge the phrase "freedom of contract". The idea of a working life tenancy is worth investigating, and deserves better than to be put down as it was in the other place. I hope that time will allow a full discussion of it in Committee.

If the Government do not accept the idea, as they may not, I think that there should be a minimum term. That will not drive a coach and horses through the purpose of the Bill. I respectfully suggest that a minimum term of 15 years with a right of renewal for, say, five years would deal with the problem of one-sided bargaining.

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Gentleman said that he would comment on the views of the Farmers Union of Wales. Much has been made of the unanimity of support among landowners, tenants and other organisations. According to current reports, the union is alone in resisting the Bill. Is the hon. Gentleman speaking on behalf of the union or are his views his own? It would be useful for us to know which aspects the union does not like, so that we can deal with them in Committee.

Mr. Llwyd: With respect, I thought that I had made the position clear, but I shall do so again if it assists. The Farmers Union of Wales wants a lifetime tenancy until the tenant reaches the age of 65. That is an excellent idea, but I do not think for a moment that it will be realised. If I am on the Committee, I shall advocate a minimum term of, say, 15 years plus a renewal for five years. That would bring an element of stability and equalisation to the bargaining process. I do not know whether that assists the hon. Gentleman, but I thank him for raising the issue.

The second reason for some form of minimum term is that farming in general and animal husbandry in particular are long-term occupations. Years of careful development are needed to produce a good dairy herd or even a flock of upland sheep or cattle. No one can move in with a two-year agreement and expect to get anywhere. Further, it obviously takes time for a tenant to achieve a return on his investment. Many new entrants will have to borrow substantial sums from banks or lending institutions before they can purchase an item of equipment or stock.

Will banks queue up to lend a large capital sum to a new entrant whose only asset is perhaps a three-year or a five-year agreement? I do not think so. That matter was brought into clear focus by Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos in

[Mr. Llwyd]

the other place. That may mean that the Bill will not assist the vast majority of family farmers, especially in Wales, or young entrants who are anxious to enter the industry and who see that opportunities are becoming fewer and farming is becoming totally impractical for them.

Alas, many youngsters have already voted with their feet. It is sad to note that the intake to agricultural colleges, particularly in north Wales, has been in sharp decline for the past five or six years. I suppose that that shows a lack of confidence in the industry.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Llwyd: The hon. Gentleman sports a black eye so in sympathy I shall give way.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I assure the House that the hon. Gentleman did not give me the black eye. He rightly spoke about the willingness or otherwise of banks to lend money to short-term tenants. Does he agree that a better criterion for bank lending would be the ability to repay the debt rather than the security offered? Does he further agree that banks are increasingly moving to that point of view?

Mr. Llwyd: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but, traditionally, banks look at all sides. One matter to be looked at is the available equity, capital or collateral. Someone with a three-year agreement will not be entertained on that score. Perhaps he or she is exceptionally able. The applicant may have graduated with honours in agriculture or may come from Seale Hayne or some other college. However, we must remember that he has not been put to the test in that he has not been working as a farmer.

I should like to speak more positively but I am not making this up. I am reflecting what I hear and read every day in my constituency. No doubt there is some validity to what the hon. Gentleman says, but the length of the agreement is a telling feature.

Another important point is that in the Bill as it stands there will be no real security for farmers and their families. At the end of the term people will risk losing not only their businesses, however well they may have farmed, but their homes. That cannot be just or equitable on the verge of the 21st century. It is a backward step that is more in keeping with Victorian times.

There may be even fewer new entrants because the detail of the Bill may be tailor-made for expansion by established farmers. It will assist owner-occupiers with large farms who are looking for additional land so as to maximise profits. What will that do for the industry and for our communities? It is potentially damaging. I agree that the Bill contains important principles that are broadly acceptable to hon. Members in all parts of the House. But another recent measure which was heralded for its principles was the Child Support Act 1991. I do not think that I need to say any more. The Act has not worked out and has gone through a process of metamorphosis. It is still not right and many thousands of people in England and Wales are suffering because of it.

I hope that I am not putting forward too black a view, but I read with considerable interest the debates in the other place and note that there is a potentially serious environmental problem in the Bill. Short-term lets may lead to exploitation for short-term gain which would result in long-term detriment to the environment. Furthermore, in Wales there are three pilot areas for a scheme called Tir Cymen, which is similar to the farm stewardship scheme in England. Several schemes operate in my constituency and have been a great success. For example, there is heavy over-subscription for entry to the schemes. That typifies the environmental awareness of farmers who have been excellent and sympathetic custodians of the land for centuries.

Secondly, the modest sums that are available under these schemes are welcome in the current economic climate. The core point is that, typically, the schemes involve a 10-year cycle of works to be carried out. Many tenants in my constituency have signed up to them, but what is to become of such schemes in future if those tenants—I use the term loosely—have agreements that are for five years or less? I put that question to the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on two occasions—once on the Floor of the House and once during a private discussion. I regret to say that I am still awaiting a reply.

The matter is important not simply for the tenants but more broadly for the environment. The mere fact that the Tir Cymen scheme and the stewardship schemes are so popular means that the point should be urgently addressed. If there is a prevalence of agreements with terms of five years or less many thousands of people will not be able to enter these environmentally sustainable and friendly schemes.

On Second Reading in the other place Lord Elis-Thomas said:

"agricultural production and food production is an essential part of countryside management as is environmental and land management and the ensuring of countryside sustainability in environmental and landscape terms for future generations."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 28 November 1994; Vol. 559, c. 507-8.]

To that I say, "Hear, hear". No doubt in debates on the Bill the Government will be able to assure us that that point will be cleared up and that diversification in farming will not be hampered. That is also an important aspect, although it may not matter as much in my constituency because people who live on a mountain cannot start to grow coconuts. However, in many areas of England and Wales it is important. I hope that nothing in the Bill will stand in the way of further diversification because that is necessary. Something to that effect would be better in the Bill.

At a later stage I hope to develop the need for a written tenancy agreement in each case. Banks and lending institutions will be even less impressed if nothing is reduced to writing.

I remind the House of the provisions of the Solicitors Act 1974. I note that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is gazing in my direction. It is obviously to remind me to declare an interest as a country solicitor. The Act clearly states that agreements disposing of or dealing with an interest in land of more than three years' duration must be evidenced in writing and must be drawn up by solicitors. The Bill changes that responsibility, which will now be shared with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. I have read the debates in the other place, when the RICS was quoted almost as though there was no tomorrow. It is obviously in great favour with the

Government. I am not sure why, but it is one of the flavours of the month. I want a uniform notice period of 12 months. That is a simple but sensible suggestion.

Hon. Members have mentioned council-owned smallholdings. There is a ridiculous anomaly in that set-up—it is that people aged 40 and over are automatically disbarred for applying for such a tenancy. I know of an experienced farmer who has moved into my constituency and applied for a tenancy. His wife works locally and his children go to the local school. He has been on the short list three times, but he is not being considered because he is 43. Being that age myself, I feel a little uneasy about such a provision. I sincerely believe that it should be reconsidered.

Quite astonishingly, the Bill does not contain a definition of the word "land". It is highly desirable to have such a definition in an agriculture Bill. The compensation provisions need further explanation and elucidation, especially regarding planning permission and the refusal of a landlord to grant that. In fairness, the Minister has said that there will be room for further discussion on that point and I am grateful for that.

Many other points arise and, no doubt, will be argued in due course. The authors of the Library research document say on the cover that farm tenancies will now be

"in a similar position to business tenancies."

The Library is usually very good and I rely on it, but I regret to say that that is a complete misstatement. Nothing could be further from the truth. Farm tenancies are not in the same position as business tenancies.

As Lord Prys-Davies said on Second Reading in the other place, part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954, which relates to general business tenancies, allows for an almost automatic renewal. This Bill does the opposite. He asked why a right of renewal would be available under the 1954 Act for a tenancy of a shop or an office, but will not be available to a tenant of a farm. I hope to raise that question in more detail in due course.

If the Bill is to be the panacea that it has been heralded to be, a great deal of detailed thinking and discussion will have to take place at a later stage.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I apologise for missing the earlier part of the hon. Gentleman's speech. As he has instructed me as counsel on numerous occasions over the years, I can testify to his expertise as a solicitor in drafting the sort of tenancies that we are discussing. Does he agree that the fiscal treatment of agricultural tenancies that the Government have announced needs careful examination? Welcome and necessary though it is to encourage tenancies by fiscal means, does he agree, from his experience as a solicitor, that if there is a danger that very short agricultural tenancies could be used as a way of evading inheritance tax that will dramatically push up the price of land and may make it more difficult for young entrants to come into the profession? Does he further agree that we need to consider a sophisticated means of ensuring that the fiscal provisions can work effectively?

Mr. Llwyd: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for that view. I am sure that he is right. Indeed, I said earlier that I welcomed the fiscal amendment. I believe that there should be a minimum term. If there were, that would deal with the problem highlighted by the hon. and learned Gentleman. There could even be a sliding scale, which is not uncommon with fiscal arrangements. I have no doubt that we shall return to that matter in Committee.

The Government are deriving a great deal of misplaced comfort from the so-called industry agreement. The president of the National Farmers Union said recently:

"As part of the deal the NFU will accept that there should be no provision for a minimum term."

The word "deal" is interesting. What is the deal? Will the NFU have two knighthoods a year instead of one? Time does not permit idle speculation, so we will have to speculate further about that outside the Chamber. However, I wonder whether it is a big deal. I do not know.

The Farmers Union of Wales is implacably opposed to the proposals and it wants a minimum term for the reasons that I have given. Many members of the NFU in Wales, Lancashire and Cumbria oppose the Bill on the simple ground that there needs to be a minimum period of tenure. The leadership of the NFU, having gone through the painful process of arguing with the membership, has reached some sort of consensus. However, when the Government say time and again that there is consensus in the industry, they are not really correct because a large percentage of NFU members have yet to agree. The whole of the FUW strongly disagrees with the Bill. Therefore, the argument continues.

If a reasonable minimum term were to be included in the Bill, that would not destroy its purpose of freeing up units. Common sense dictates that there is a great difference between tying up land for three generations and tying it up for 15 years. I am sure that such a provision would not drive a coach and horses through the raison d'être of the Bill.

Much of the Bill needs to be amended and strengthened, for the reasons that I have given. As it stands, the Bill is similar to the curate's egg—good in parts.

6.47 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I join hon. Members on both sides of the House in welcoming the Bill. I note that two of my more experienced colleagues, the hon. Members for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) and for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), who spoke very effectively, made the point that the one thing they did not want to do was serve on the Committee. They made one or two telling and difficult points that rendered them ineligible to sit on the Committee. I note that the Government Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) is shaking his head. Could I get away with saying that there is nothing that I would like more than to serve on the Committee? The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) said that he, too, would like to serve on the Committee. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East will have made a careful note of that and, no doubt, room will be found for the hon. Gentleman.

I welcome the Bill not only as someone who takes a personal interest in farming and agricultural matters, not only as a member of the Leicestershire and Rutland committee of the Country Landowners Association and not only as Member of Parliament for a rural constituency but as the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Harborough, where agriculture is practised by farmers who work both their own land and the land of others.

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

As occupants of the Chair will have heard earlier this evening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill has, I am happy to say, received the support of practically every organisation that has anything to do with agriculture. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) has apparently said that the Bill no longer has the support of the official Opposition Front-Bench team. It is out of step with all the people who have given the matter any thought.

I am also sorry that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy has confirmed what I had heard before: that many Welsh tenant farmers are not as keen on the Bill as other farming practitioners in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is a pity. I hope that, if he is fortunate enough to be selected for the Committee, and I know that he has pressed hard to be selected, he will have an opportunity to listen to the arguments advanced by Conservative Members and, indeed, by Opposition Members who did not listen, or who listened to, but ignored, the arguments of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. I hope that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy will support Committee members who support the Bill.

I support the Bill primarily because its general purpose is to encourage the letting of more farmland. That purpose is good and much to be welcomed, but I echo the words of warning that were uttered by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud, and by people outside the House. We should not think that, if the Bill goes into law, acres and acres and acres of new let land will come on to the market—it will not. Some land will come on to the market. A lot more land than is now available to be let will be let, but a flood of new land, if I can mix my metaphors, will not become available.

A flood of new entrants will not come into the farming world as a result of the Bill. Of course, several new entrants will enter it—I hope that many of them will do so—but there will not be a great rush of landlords willing to open up their land to new young farmers in the way that we would all like to see. We are, however, making progress.

It is almost unnecessary to say this but I shall say it—the present law of agricultural tenancies is far too complicated; it has inhibited landowners from letting land; and it does not encourage them to do so. It serves neither landowners nor prospective tenants. If one considers the many Acts of Parliament which, in the past 150 years, have dealt with agricultural tenancies, one realises why that is so—they are all complicated. It took the half-hour speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud to point out some of the more complicated aspects of landlord and tenant law in relation to farming tenancies. With the expertise that he has, he sought to explain the intricacies of the Agriculture Act 1947 and of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1948. Since 1948, numerous miscellaneous agricultural tenancy provisions, statutory instruments and Bills have been introduced and they have further complicated the whole question.

I should like to compare the present situation with that which pertained in the previous century. In doing so, I shall refer to some of the remarks that were made in another place by my noble Friend the Earl of Yarborough on 28 November 1994, in the Second Reading debate. During the course of his maiden speech to that House, he referred—I shall be referring rather than quoting, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to what life was like on the Yarborough estate in Lincolnshire not so many years ago. He said that things had changed considerably, even in the past 50 years. When his great-grandfather owned the estate, the written contracts of all employees stated that they were to attend church. Even up to more recent times, the lease required all farming employees to walk a hound puppy. That is an admirable clause to add to all farming tenancies. Coming from Harborough, where I am the happy Member of Parliament for three packs of fox hounds, I wish that that were still considered to be a perfectly normal thing to do.

The noble Earl went on to say that even his grandfather, the late Lord Yarborough, who did not die all that many years ago, had especially firm views on estate management. While reading the lesson in church one day, he quoted from St. Luke, chapter 2. When he got to the bit where the shepherds left their flocks to go in search of baby Jesus, he looked up at the congregation and exclaimed, "If they had been my shepherds, I would have sacked the lot of them." I think that things have changed a little. We have much to learn from the debates that took place in the other place just before Christmas.

One of the things that we can learn from the other place—here I criticise myself—is shown in the following example. On the evening of the Second Reading debate, the noble Viscount Hampden noted that 16 speeches had already been made in under two and a half hours—it was still only 5.45 pm. Even better, by 6.33 pm, the House had adjourned, having finished the Second Reading debate. Would that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) were still in the Chamber to hear that the Jopling Committee's admonitions were taken more seriously in the other place than they are here.

Let me remind the House of one odd quirk that arose during the speech of my noble Friend Viscount Hampden. He told those listening to him and, indeed, it could be claimed that he told those who were not listening to him, that his grandfather was the only Member of Parliament to have been able to vote twice on the same Bill in a different House. He had voted against the Parliament Act 1911 as the Unionist Member for Brighton in the House of Commons. Then, on the death of his father, and as the successor to his title, he had whipped Upstairs or along the Corridor to vote against it again. We do things a little differently here, except in the case of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who we know succeeded his father, and in the case of my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), who succeeded his father in that seat. Things in the other place are a little different from here.

Much is to be learnt about the Bill and its good sense from the debates that took place in the other place. As I said when I opened my few remarks, a great sense exists that this sector of agriculture is in decline. I am advised by the Tenant Farmers Association:

> "The tenanted sector is the traditional way into the industry for those with skill and energy but who cannot afford to buy land. Yet it has been in steady decline for reasons which include owners' fears that any letting could create life tenancies under present legislation and tax discrimination against letting land. Almost no land is now freshly let on full tenancies under the present law. Agriculture, facing major economic and political pressures, needs the business flexibility that a free tenancy market can give for it to remain competitive; paying a rent rather than having to buy high priced land."

It is regrettable that that is not the view of the Farmers Union of Wales. As I said earlier, I trust that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy will be persuaded that he will have heard enough in the debate and in Committee to change his mind and to allow him to return to his constituency and to change the minds of the members of the Farmers Union of Wales.

The Tenant Farmers Association accepts the need for reform. Country landowners also accept it. As the hon. Member who opted on to the committee and who represents Leicestershire and Rutland, I should inform the House of the view of the Country Landowners Association on the Bill. It states:

"Current agricultural holdings legislation serves neither landowners nor prospective tenants. It does not attract sufficient lettings, and the rented sector is in decline. In 1900, 90 per cent. of land was let. By the end of the 1980s, that figure had fallen below 35 per cent., and it continues to fall. Radical changes in the law are necessary to reverse this trend."

Mr. Enright: I yield to none in my admiration for the Country Landowners Association which is a magnificent body that represents its members' interests very well. However, does the hon. Gentleman really believe that it takes an impartial view and that it agonised before reaching a conclusion?

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman's advocacy of rhubarb, which I greatly admire, is second to none. I am only sorry that he did not have time in his speech to commend Yorkshire rhubarb, something that he usually does when questioning any Minister on any subject. Of course the Country Landowners Association is self-evidently an association of those who own land—that is not a matter of controversy—but that does not mean that it is unsympathetic to, or careless of, the interests of all those who play a part in agriculture.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the intervention by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) was unworthy? It took considerable time and considerable courage on the part of all parties involved in the farming industry to come up with the industry agreement and carry the bulk of their members with them. At many stages, all those organisations had to concede much more than their individual members would have wished.

Mr. Garnier: I hear what my hon. Friend says but advise him not to take the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) too seriously as he is a man with a very refined sense of humour. However, I am happy to place on record the hard work done by the leadership of the CLA, the NFU and the TFA and the many others who played a constructive part in producing the agreement. It goes without saying that the civil servants and Ministers at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are also to be congratulated. However, I am being diverted. I was placing on record the view of the CLA and explaining why that organisation believes that there is need for reform.

In addition to citing the decline of the amount of land available to be let, the CLA said that it was essential for the industry to have a

"dynamic . . . rented sector, attracting capital, expertise and new entrants . . . as it faces increased competition. Reform will lead to an increased supply of land to let."

I said at the outset that the Bill would increase the amount of land to let but not to the extent that many of us had hoped. The CLA also states:

"The RICS"—

the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors—

"estimated that up to one million acres might come forward."

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud referred to the figure of 1 million. It is difficult to see how that figure was arrived at but it is clear that that will exists to bring a great deal more land on to the market.

The present state of agricultural tenancy law was described by the Parliamentary Secretary in another place as a "tangle". In introducing the Bill last November, he said:

"The present tangle of agricultural holdings legislation has grown up largely over the last 120 years or so. Before then the relationship between the landlord and tenant of agricultural land was a much simpler one, governed principally by the terms of the tenancy agreement itself. In the middle of the last century, freedom of contract was held in high esteem, both in society and in legal circles. For example, in a case before the Court of Appeal in 1875 the then Master of the Rolls made the following pronouncement:

'If there is one thing which more than any other public policy requires, it is that men of full age and competent understanding shall have the utmost liberty of contracting and that their contracts when entered into freely and voluntarily shall be held sacred and shall be enforced by courts of justice'."

The value of that dictum is timeless. I am only sorry that it did not receive the attention that it deserved during the passage of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993.

The Parliamentary Secretary claimed:

"Although one-third of agricultural land is still rented, much of this is now rented on short-term agreements such as *Gladstone* v. *Bower* tenancies which do not have security of tenure."

Many hon. Members have spoken with feeling about that. The Parliamentary Secretary continued:

"Thus, the proportion of land that is let on protected tenancies is small and diminishing, and where such tenancies terminate it is known that only about 10 per cent. of landlords choose to re-let on a similar basis."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 28 November 1994; Vol. 559, c. 485-86.]

Any measure that can halt the decline, make more land available to let and encourage landowners to let land to existing tenant farmers or new entrants is to be encouraged. However, the Bill cannot do that alone. I am therefore happy to join my hon. Friends in welcoming the alteration to the capital tax provisions affecting rented land. I suspect that the relevant amendment to the Finance Bill will make more progress than this Bill alone but together the two will have an advantageous effect on the agricultural sector and the let division of it.

As the hon. Member for Hemsworth intervened on me, it would be discourteous of me not to remind the House that he made an entertaining and learned speech, although it was dotted with unparliamentary Latin. However, his private little debate with my right hon. Friend the Minister was instructive for those of us who are not so familiar with the "Eclogues". No doubt as soon as the debate is over, many hon. Members will rush to the Library to check the hon. Gentleman's references and citations.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth mentioned the farming community in his constituency. He may know that I had the honour of attempting to take that constituency from the Labour party in 1987. I was not successful but I did manage to meet people who farm in that traditionally coal mining constituency. We are

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mistaken if we think that Labour Members represent only urban and industrial constituencies. It is certainly the case that many of them do but many—too many, sadly—represent constituencies in which there are farmers. I suspect that if the hon. Member for Hemsworth and his colleagues who represent similar areas were to conduct a detailed poll of farmers, landlords and tenants in their constituencies, they would find that many would be prepared to welcome the Bill.

Mr. Colvin: Does my hon. Friend accept that the health of the agricultural sector goes far beyond farming per se? I previously represented the urban constituency of Bristol, North-West which contained, among other things, docks and aircraft factories. The health of the agricultural sector was important to my constituency because grain, feedstuffs and fertiliser were exported through the docks there. In other words, agriculture has to be healthy in order to support the service industries that feed on it.

Mr. Garnier: I could not agree more. One of the sad effects of the industrial revolution was that, for obvious reasons, many people moved from the country to the cities and the affinity between them and the areas from which they came has been lost. The increase in incomprehension about what goes on in the countryside and the widening gap between the understanding of the urban population and the understanding of the rural population about what farming entails and about what country life is all about are much to be regretted.

Mr. Enright: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that farmers in my constituency, who farm what is now British Coal property, but which will be sold off over their heads in the City, are happy with the Bill? It does nothing to protect them.

Mr. Garnier: Far be it from me to lecture the hon. Gentleman on the individual opinions of his farmers—

Mr. Enright: You did.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman has corrected me. The farmers who have been contacted by the agricultural associations, including the unions, have overwhelmingly come out in support of the Bill. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has been unable to persuade his constituents of the good sense of the House passing the Bill. Next weekend, he can have another try; he may try a little harder this time. I do not want to part from the hon. Gentleman on a churlish note because his constituency is the birthplace of Geoffrey Boycott. It also has within it the greatest collection of Chippendale furniture to be found in one place in this kingdom, at Nostell priory—

Mr. Enright: And Featherstone Rovers.

Mr. Garnier: Featherstone Rovers, too. I trust that when the hon. Gentleman takes time off from talking to his farmers about the good sense of passing the Bill, he will take the chance to look at the furniture at the priory.

I expressed disappointment at the speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. It was in line with the current attitude of the Labour party—the so-called new Labour party—in being unhelpful to those who live outside traditional Labour areas. It was also in line with the speech we heard from the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), the so-called shadow Minister for Inner Cities. Last week, he spent 26 minutes lecturing the House on rural England, a subject about which, as his speech made clear, he had no knowledge. It was interesting that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was able in her winding-up speech, which lasted about eight minutes, to dismiss the ridiculous remarks of the hon. Member for Leicester, East as the remarks of someone whose knowledge of farming and the countryside had been gained from the windows of InterCity trains at night. A truer word was never spoken in this House.

This debate gives me the opportunity to place on record my support, and that of the Conservative party and the Government, for landlord farmers, whether they are human or corporate, for tenant farmers and for all those who live and work in the countryside and who have concern for its wildlife. In my part of Leicestershire, over the centuries, they have made the countryside the green and pleasant land that it is today. Their daily lives and work are less and less understood by the majority of the urban population.

I have not spoken tonight about the A427 and for that you will be grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What I have done is to express my whole-hearted support for the Bill. I have expressed one or two reservations about the enthusiasm felt by many inside and outside the House about the numbers of new tenants, and the amount of new tenanted land, that will come on stream. None the less, this is a good Bill. It deserves a fair wind and I am sorry that the Labour party appears to have taken such a churlish attitude towards it.

7.13 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): I noted with pleasure the speech of the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin). He always addresses arguments in the manner of a snow plough, brushing everything aside and ploughing straight down the middle. Some weeks ago, as a member of the Select Committee on Agriculture, of which he is the distinguished Chair, I asked him whether it would be a good idea for the Committee to investigate the issue before us this evening. His reply—I am sure that he will not mind my referring to this—was, "There is absolutely no point in discussing the subject because you lot will support the tenants and us lot will support the landowners. We will end up producing two reports and then we will be exactly where we were at the start." There was some sense in that and the conversation ceased at that point.

There is, however, an area between complete deregulation, which is what the Government are about, and the status quo, which the Government want to get rid of. There is still a great deal of scope for reasonable discussion and there may be solutions less disturbing than those that currently worry many tenants and many Labour Members. That area was well covered by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) who made an intelligent and weighty speech full of interesting points that the Committee will want to consider.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare also mentioned, as have several other Conservative Members, that the Bill is supported across the industry. That is not quite so. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) mentioned his extensive visits around the country.

He cannot have made it to Wales, or at least he cannot have listened there very much, and he cannot have made it to the north-west or to Cumbria.

Mr. Tyler: As I said during my speech—as the hon. Gentleman would know if he had listened—I have paid three visits to Wales in recent months. I have also been to the north-west and the north-east. There is far from unanimity, even in the depths of rural Wales, for the view taken by the Farmers Union of Wales.

Mr. Pickthall: I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman say that because that is my experience too. It makes his robust defence of the Bill even more surprising. The Bill is presented as if it had monolithic support from all organisations; it does not. Many of us have had meetings. A few months ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) and I met the Farmers Union of Wales, many members of the National Farmers Union from the north-west and the Farm Tenants Action Group. That group included one Conservative county councillor from the constituency of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) who was a virulent opponent of the Bill. Until his recent sad death, Lord Derby was also an opponent of the total deregulation envisaged under the Bill. I did not hear that straight from his mouth; I did not move in those circles, but I heard it from many of his tenants.

At the end of 1993, the NFU dropped its support for a 15-year minimum tenancy. As the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy said, it would be interesting to know what deal brought that change about. At that point, the NFU tenants committee split in a way that made opposition very clear in the north-west, in Wales and in Cumberland. Perhaps the country does split along those lines; I do not know about that in detail. Farmers told us that they were angry because the provisions were not retrospective. They do not object to the lack of retrospection in itself; they would be crazy if they did. They saw this lack of representation, however, as taking the heat out of the debate.

As the provisions of the Bill are not retrospective, the tenant farmers to whom we spoke were personally secure and were thus talking out of a sense of altruism. They were worried about the future of farming and the fact that new tenants would find it more difficult to make a start in farming. They were worried about the threat to family farms and the fragmentation of farms.

Mr. Jim Heyes—a member of the National Farmers Union tenants committee until the split—farms close to my constituency. He described the Bill as a "time bomb", which would have little immediate effect, but would mean that, as tenancies ended, farms would be rented out in a new and insecure way. He said:

"The position of farmers in the community will be undermined because they will always be moving on. Currently farmers tend to be in once place for at least 25 years, bringing stability to the community."

That is the other side of the stagnation argument voiced by Conservative Members. Mr. Heyes continued:

"the law will cater for less sensible landlords and those who want to work the system".

It seems odd for me, as an Opposition Member, to be speaking on behalf of maintaining a system that has kept Jim and his family farming at Mossborough hall since the 16th century, but I am at home with that argument. He also said that the Bill would mean the

"destruction of any career structure for farm workers"

because of the short-term nature of their employers' business. Farm workers have not been mentioned in that context.

The Government have sought change for three main reasons: the unfavourable fiscal treatment of let land; the problems of the remaining rights of succession and lifetime tenancies; and the fact that the amount of let land is declining as a percentage of farmland, as many hon. Members have said, thus restricting new entry. In the other place, the noble Lord Carter estimated that it is now as low as between 20 and 25 per cent. Nevertheless, that is a quarter of farmland and it is not an inconsiderable amount.

The Government's announced equalisation of fiscal treatment for inheritance tax has sorted out some of the problems, but hon. Members have drawn to Ministers' attention where the tax regime is not yet satisfactory.

The original NFU policy of a 15-year minimum tenancy had some force. It answered the arguments about lifetime tenancy rights but retained an element of security that, while not going all the way to answering tenant farmers' concerns—certainly not those of the Farmers Union of Wales—at least acknowledged the need to protect continuity in law, with all that that means for career structure, the health of the land and the environmental investment of tenants.

My concern is whether the free-for-all that the Government and the CLA insisted on will create better conditions for new entry, or whether it is simply a means of increasing the value of land to the landowner—a process that will automatically follow from short tenancies. The shorter the tenancy, the greater the increase in value. Of course, that never occurred to the Church Commissioners. As we were assured, they are merely worried about flexibility and it never crossed their minds that their land holdings might rocket in value.

The Bill would create two classes of tenant—those who enjoy the present rights of security and those who do not. The former have the sort of security that can attract backing from banks to enable them to secure further rented land on a short or a longer-term lease, which might keep out new entrants, who will find that the short-term nature of their leases is not conducive to getting the financial backing or investment required. The same problem arises with larger owner-occupiers and their ability to take on extra parcels of land, and contract farming companies, which are able to offer higher rents.

It is more than possible—I put it no higher than that—that the number of tenant farmers will continue to decline and that new entrants will not get the toe-hold that the propaganda surrounding the Bill promises. We must take considerable care to deal with that problem.

The sons and daughters of farmers, who are the largest pool of future farmers, may well be discouraged from staying in the family business, or even in farming, by the short-term nature of their parents' leases. The possibility of short-term leases might encourage the fragmentation of farms. Older owner-occupiers might be encouraged by the new system to retire, retain the farmhouse and lease off

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parcels of land to provide an income, which could divide more houses and farms and accelerate the demand for more building. I am concerned about that, as it might affect the green belt, and I know that the Minister of State will also be concerned.

During the debate a couple of weeks ago, I asked questions about the effects of planning policy guidance 7. The Minister did not have time to answer any questions because she spent so much time abusing my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), but she said that she would get in touch with me with some answers. That has not yet happened. As the Minister knows, PPG 7 loosens the controls on the alternative use of agricultural buildings, allowing landowners to secure planning agreements to change the use of such buildings, even if they are not redundant.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is PPG 2.

Mr. Pickthall: I am sorry. I stand corrected.

That change could be a significant means of elbowing out the tenant, by removing certain important buildings and I want the Minister to deal with that in his reply.

Tenants who want to move to bigger or better holdings will be able to do so only by giving up the security that they enjoy. They will be reluctant to do so—indeed, they would be mad to do so—which will further choke off the possibility of movement within the tenanted sector.

Several hon. Members have referred to the lack of stepping stones—I think that the ladder has been the metaphor. One of the significant rungs in such a ladder must be when a tenant moves from a small farm, or perhaps a difficult farm having made a good job of it, to a better farm and, he hopes, to an even better farm after that. He used to be able to do so with security. He is not going to move to a slightly better farm if he then suddenly finds himself without lifetime security. The total removal of the minimum term, therefore, might not achieve what the Bill's central purpose is purported to be—the increased flexibility to attract new tenants—and it could well do the opposite.

The probability of adverse effects on the environmental work that farmers undertake is just as serious. Because many farms are of a piece and are lived on for a long time, tenant farmers have traditionally improved the quality of the land, the buildings and often the marginal environment. Their role in improving ditches, sluices and drainage is especially important in a flat, low-lying, peat area such as mine. Under a 10-year lease, which is reasonably optimistic, will there be the same natural, cumulative process of positive work on the quality of the land and the environment in tenanted areas? I very much doubt it.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, which seems to have written a bible in connection with this debate, suggests that some 50 per cent. of new land let will be bare land. That connects with a question asked by Viscount Hampden on Second Reading in another place. He asked, dramatically, what one should do about houses for farmers. Lord Stockton went on to another subject and left it as a rhetorical question. I do not blame him, for it is a difficult question. The demand by new entrants farming bare land to live close to or on their holdings will increase. That is only natural, especially when they must keep an eye on livestock, which cannot be done easily from five miles away in a neighbouring town with perhaps one or two remaining council houses, or when they have glasshouses. Pressure on the planning system to build on green belt or other sensitive areas will increase.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy asked who will house tenants evicted after five or 10 years. Where will they go? My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East discussed the Labour party's policy for freeing up entry into farming. I shall refer to just one element of that, which has been mentioned by several hon. Members this evening: county council smallholdings. Until last year, Lancashire county council, for instance, had 4,700 hectares of county council smallholdings. Once the current negotiations have been finalised, it will have only 1,750 hectares, comprising just 65 smallholdings in total. That has been brought about partly by the Government's decision in 1992 to allow councils to spend the proceeds obtained from such sales, so long as they got rid of them before December 1993, and now by the assumption in resettlement grants of ludicrous levels of capital receipts. County councils are being steadily and progressively removed from the tenancy sector and I imagine that most of them will be completely removed from it by the end of the year.

I accept that movement through the county council smallholding system has been relatively small. The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare gave figures on that. None the less, in one area tenancies reached 65, so there was some possibility of movement in the system. If the Government wanted to do something about that, would not it have been more logical to give shorter tenancies for county council smallholdings?

A colleague told me to look at the case of Johnson *v.* Moreton, which was heard by the Law Lords in 1987. I recognise that events have moved on since then. The dispute was over an attempt to evict a tenant in Warwickshire. I refer not to the details of that case, but to some of the Law Lords' judgments, which still apply. In the first sentence of their finding—they found in favour of the tenant—they discussed the 1948 Act on which their judgment was based. They said that

"it was in the national or public interest to encourage efficient farming and good husbandry by conferring security of tenure on tenant farmers, and that such farmers, because of their inequality of bargaining power, required statutory protection in the making of contracts for the leasing of land."

Mr. Jack: I have listened with interest to the hon. Gentleman's comments on security of tenure. Does he agree that clauses 1, 5, 6 and 7 of the Bill give the protection that he seeks?

Mr. Pickthall: I agree that, for the Government, many parts of the Bill, such as those on compensation agreements, are immensely compromising. However, I am dealing with the overall effects of the Bill, which, the Minister will agree, is primarily aimed at freeing up tenancies to bring new people into farm tenancies. I assume that the aim of Bill is not entirely to fill landowners' pockets with money. I have been trying to explain why, in reality, the Bill could have the reverse effect. In that respect, I share the opinions expressed by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy.

Lord Salmon went on to say that, if there was no such thing as security of tenure,

"there was no great inducement for those farmers to work as hard as they could, still less to plough money back into land which they knew they might well lose sooner or later.

The security of tenure which tenant farmers were accorded by the 1947 Act was not only for their own protection as an important section of the public, nor only for the protection of the weak against the strong; it was for the protection of the nation itself."

I shall not bore the House by quoting extensively from that judgment, but all the Law Lords agreed and I quote only the general principles on which they made their judgment, not the details of the law.

Some of the most striking phrases came from Lord Hailsham's judgment. He said that

"since the 1880s successive Parliaments have considered the fertility of the land and soil of England and the proper farming of it as something more than a private interest . . . It takes years (sometimes generations) of patient and self-abnegating toil and investment to put heart into soil, to develop and gain the advantage of suitable rotations of crops, and to provide proper drains, hedges and ditches. Even to build up a herd of dairy cattle . . . These are not simply matters of private contracts from which the landlord can stipulate that the tenant can deprive himself . . . It is a public interest introduced for the sake of the soil and husbandry of England of which both landlord and tenant are in a moral, though not of course a legal, sense the trustees for posterity."

Obviously, the same applies to Wales.

I return to the point that I made at the beginning of my speech about the clear polarities between the parties, mentioned by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare. There are large areas for compromise, which I hope can get rid of many of the fears of Opposition Members and the tenant farmers with whom we have spoken in recent months. Most of the areas of compromise appear to be swept away in the Government's urge to deregulate. Ultimately, that will be detrimental to the future of farming in the north-west and the rest of the country, and to country life itself.

7.38 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) seems to have discovered various cells of the National Farmers Union in Westmorland and Wales that are against the Bill. He must accept that, nationally, the Country Landowners Association, the Tenant Farmers Association and the National Farmers Union, after enormous discussions among themselves, reached a mutual agreement on both sides of the industry. That is a fact of life, which he cannot avoid. Of course, one can find dissidents in those organisations, as one does in all organisations, but the national situation is clear.

Mr. Pickthall: I believe that, in a sizeable slice of the country, comprising Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire and Wales, the majority of tenant farmers oppose the measure.

Mr. Spicer: I do not know about that part of the country, but the national position is clear. It is so clear that all those organisations have agreed; indeed, everyone is pretty well agreed except for, it would appear, the Labour party.

One can understand why the Labour party might oppose the Bill, because the Bill—to my mind, admirably—strengthens proper market principles with respect to the agriculture industry, and especially bases those principles on the supremacy of the contract within lettings. That has been done in the circumstances of a very sharp decline in the lettings industry due, as has been said, to factors on both sides of the industry—the lack of security of tenants or the feeling of lack of security, and the fact that, for years, landlords have not been able to get their properties back in the way that they would want to.

That dying letting industry is in a worse condition than most of the statistics that have been pushed back and forth across the House suggest. Arm's-length tenancies as a proportion of holdings had decreased to 19 per cent., according to figures published by the Royal Agricultural Society three or four years ago, and were declining. That is a very serious matter.

The Bill, as has been said, encourages new entrants; it encourages a flexibility of approach that must encourage new lettings, although this may be difficult to quantify precisely, as several hon. Members have said.

Would that the principles of the Bill—especially the liberalisation of taxation that goes alongside the legislation—were applied to that extent in, for instance, the residential lettings market. When I stopped being Minister for Housing and Planning, the residential lettings market accounted for the smallest proportion of the housing market of that in any country in the western world, and there were very large numbers of unlet houses: 600,000 in my time. I doubt that the figure has improved much. I certainly approve of the liberalisation measure in the agricultural tenancy sector.

I have one reservation, which relates to the famous "Evesham custom". I use the word, "famous", but I suspect that only you and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have heard of the Evesham custom before tonight. It will effectively be abolished if the Bill goes unamended. As I have the honour of representing Evesham and the vale, and have done so for 21 years, I am likely to be the only hon. Member to bring that matter, which is very serious in my opinion and that of my constituents, before the House tonight.

The Evesham custom became law exactly 100 years ago, when it was introduced by means of the Market Gardeners Compensation Act 1895 by two of my predecessors. In those days, two Members represented the Vale of Evesham; now we have two for the price of one. The grandson of one of those hon. Members, Sir Berwick Letchmere, continues to live prominently in the constituency.

The Evesham custom was maintained in the Agricultural Holdings Acts of 1908, 1923, 1948 and, most importantly in view of the argument that I shall make, in the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986. It applies exclusively to land tenanted for the purposes of market gardening. It relates, therefore, to small parcels of land—often of no more than two or three acres—on which the monitoring of improvements, and indeed valuation when there is a transaction, was regarded, and continues to be regarded, as so costly and time consuming for the large landlords that dominate our district—such as the Glebe and the Christ Church, Oxford—which tend to be ecclesiastical landlords as it happens, as to make it not worth their while to become too involved in matters that are important to the tenants.

A method was therefore devised by which tenants became responsible for their own purchases and sale of their tenancies, which carried with them a lifetime tenure. Tenancies were bought and sold, with the protection of statute, at prices that could and did include the value of improvements, the value of crops and, critically, a premium associated with lifetime security. I am told that

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typically, nowadays, that premium is worth between about £200 and £300 an acre, or about 50 per cent. of the market price of agricultural land.

In the Vale of Evesham, about 420 tenants are affected, many of whom have paid the premium or have included it in their balance sheets, to the extent that they bought it or it was bought many years previously. I am told that 420 tenants in my constituency are affected in that way by the Bill, but there may well be an equal number throughout the country who will suffer a similar deprivation if the Bill is passed. If the Bill was passed unamended, they would suffer a loss of anything up to thousands of pounds in terms of loss of premium valuations and, being small businesses, they would be very badly affected.

Should the premium that those tenants have paid for, or have found in their balance sheets over the years, be stripped from them retrospectively? I hope that the Government will reconsider the issue, because there has been considerable confusion about the matter, certainly in departmental circles. Not many people have thought the matter through. It affects only 420 tenants in the Vale of Evesham, but, crucially, it affects the premium that has been added to the other valuations, and I emphasise that it would be retrospective. The Government have made a big play of the fact that the legislation is not to be retrospective, so I hope that they will consider the retrospective element of that matter very carefully.

An amendment could easily be added to the list of exemptions in clause 4 of the Bill. Those would disallow new tenancies using the Evesham custom, but would allow present tenancies to be saved from retrospective abolition. In practice, the custom would die out, partly as a result of the trend towards ownership of larger parcels of land, and partly because the custom already dies on the death of the incumbent unless it is passed on.

This is a wrinkle in an otherwise very welcome Bill, but it is an important one, at least for the 420 tenants who are, rather worryingly, affected, or potentially affected, by the Bill—to the extent that several of them could well go out of business through no fault of their own, as a result of the effect that the change in the premium valuation would have on their balance sheets.

I said at the start of my speech that the Bill would help the process by which new entrants come into agriculture. Sadly, the effects of the Bill must be seen in the context of the general working of the common agricultural policy, one part of which is the distortion deterring new entrants to agriculture. The artificial suppressions of supply and price, and above all the inflated values of certain holdings to which quotas apply, are real deterrents. The Labour party claims to have a magical way of dealing with the distortions of milk quotas, for example, but it seems that we would still be left with basically the same system.

If we are to encourage new entrants, we must radically reform the CAP. The United Kingdom will have to have control over the way in which its agriculture is supported, which should be only where that support is directly required. We should not be in the business of distorting our agriculture for the purpose of helping other countries' agriculture.

I welcome the Bill, but it is a small drop in a large bucket if the purpose is to release agriculture from its present constraints and to make it more flexible, and to make it more worth while to rent and own agricultural property and to work in the interests of British farming and horticulture.

7.51 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): First, I declare my interests. I am connected with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union and the Charities Property Association.

Perhaps the interests of our 250,000 farmers and 48,000 agricultural workers have been forgotten during the debate. In the 1900s, 90 per cent. of farming land was let while only 30 per cent. is now let. How will the Bill attempt to remedy that? Words such as "stewardship" and "benefit" to agriculture must be uppermost in our minds. That is why the four major parts of the industry came together, following some tortuous negotiations, to produce an industry-wide agreement.

The parties to the agreement were the CLA, the NFU, the Tenant Farmers Association Ltd., and above all—the organisation has not, to my knowledge, been mentioned before this evening—the young farmers. The young farmers are especially important because they are the people who are trying to get into agriculture. It is regrettable that the present system locks them out of it. Young farmers cannot afford the entrance fee that the current system demands. If the health of the industry is uppermost in our minds, we should be encouraging younger people to enter it. It has been said that the average age of a tenant farmer is 55 years. If that is the fact, we should be seriously concerned. We should be considering ways of reducing that average age.

Apart from youngsters, there are those who have had a first career in a profession or industry, who have made a bit of money and who want to have a second career in farming. They, too, should be able to enter the industry.

The Royal Agricultural college is in my constituency. We know that there are other such excellent centres of education. We have a great tradition of training new entrants into agriculture and we have done that extremely well. It is a tradition that we export throughout the world. I was a student at the RAC, and when I travel the world I meet other ex-students who are advising foreign Governments. We have excellent training and it would greatly enhance the health of agriculture if we encouraged new entrants.

The Bill has been produced after tortuous negotiations. As is apparent, it is largely a deregulatory measure. It will allow much greater freedom for agreement between landlord and tenant, and between lessor and lessee. At the same time, there are dangers and pitfalls for both sides of an agreement. It is for both parties carefully to negotiate a tenancy agreement. I recommend that anyone entering into such an agreement should ensure that it is set out in writing. It would be foolish for either a tenant or a landlord to enter into a verbal agreement unless it were for two years or less. Contrary to what was said earlier, it is possible under the Bill to have a verbal agreement.

The RICS has been criticised for estimating that more than 1 million acres of farming land would potentially be created by the enactment of the Bill. The estimate was arrived at because 10,000 agreements in the private sector are now negotiated outside the provisions of agricultural holdings legislation. I shall deal later with the options.

Having arrived at an industry-wide agreement and the Government having produced an extremely good Bill, the industry is poised to let much more land go forward for tenancies. Agricultural husbandry is set to improve by encouraging new entrants into agriculture. What has happened? We find at the last minute that the Labour party has decided to oppose the Bill.

It is incredible that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), who is about to walk out of the Chamber, was a Labour Minister when what was the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill passed through the House, to be enacted in 1976. The hon. Gentleman has recognised the folly of that Act as it applied to the tenanted sector of agriculture. He knows that almost overnight the lettings of farms dried up. Why was that? The answer was that the current tenant had security of tenure, as did the two succeeding tenants. The hon. Gentleman came to recognise that. He has made various statements since I have been a Member of this place, and I have not been here for very long. He has recognised the damage that was done to the tenanted sector by the 1976 legislation. I hope that, although time has passed, this Bill will go a long way to remedy the disastrous effects of the Labour Government's legislation.

Why does the Labour party oppose the Bill? The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East has made some extraordinary statements. For example, he said that he wanted the pattern of farm sizes to adjust to market forces. He said in his next sentence that he was worried about social justice and the relationship between landlord and tenant not being equal. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Either he believes in market forces or he does not. It should be understood that no one is forcing a landlord to let or a tenant to take land. There must be a free market agreement. That is the best approach if both parties are subsequently to be happy about what they have done.

If I were one of our 45,000 agricultural workers, I would be quaking at the Labour party's attitude to the Bill. If the Labour party opposes the Bill, there will be no farms to let and the number of farms and farmers will decline. Above all, the number of farm workers will decline because the industry will not be sufficiently profitable to continue to employ them all. The trend that we have seen since the war will continue.

It is foolish of the Labour party to oppose the Bill. I hope that the Opposition will not divide the House, but if they insist on doing so—I suspect that they are so shortsighted that they will—they will give a signal to the industry that they intend subsequently to change the proposed legislation. If they intend to do that, let them give an undertaking that any such change will not be retrospective. At least we would not then have to wait 20 or 30 years until Labour came to power with the industry being apprehensive and not letting. I should be grateful if the Labour party would give the industry that assurance, as landlords and tenants would then be given the confidence to go forward from the enactment of the Bill—one hopes well before the end of the year—and use its provisions to the benefit of the industry.

When I wrote my speech, it just so happened that I wanted to comment on clause 4, although not the type of clause 4 which Labour is talking about.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I know that the hon. Gentleman will be very pleased to talk about clause 4.

Mr. Williams: I shall intervene before the hon. Gentleman moves on to clause 4. The hon. Gentleman made a ringing declaration about free market forces, and how the Bill allows the free market to work within tenancies. Does he feel comfortable in his own mind that he is talking about agriculture, when the common agricultural policy is the most interventionist policy one could imagine? Is not it contradictory to be strongly advocating the free market in what is an incredibly rigged market?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman and with my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) on this. We must press for the European Community to expand to the east, and it will be difficult under GATT and the CAP to continue the present regime. I expect the present regime to continue until the reforms which are due to take place in 1999. Thereafter, there may be some phasing out and reduction of the CAP, not least when the second stage of GATT starts to bite.

I return to clause 4 and, before I am ruled out of order, I must add that I am not referring to the Labour party's clause IV. Clause 4 is important, because it puts an absolute seal on anybody being able to make the legislation retrospective. The clause rules out those tenants who already come under the terms of the Agriculture Holdings Act 1986. Even artificial devices with the agreement of both the landlord and the tenant will not be affected by the Bill.

Having said that, clause 4(1)(d) was amended in another place, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look at it. I have read it several times and—although I shall take advice from my legal friends—it is a tortuous clause. Perhaps it can be simplified a little.

Clause 37, which is the most fundamental clause in the Bill and which has not been mentioned tonight, relates to the definition of agriculture, which has been lifted from the definition in the Agricultural Holdings Act 1948 and which I believe to be somewhat out of date. For example, the clause talks about osier land, but I doubt whether there are many commercial osier beds left. The definition needs to be updated.

The definition—which is the basis of the Act—must suggest where the industry will go in the future. For example, we need to think about including in the definition crops for industrial and fuel uses. We must think about those tenants who will have land in various Government schemes, such as set-aside, environmentally sensitive areas and nitrate sensitive areas. Will they be included in the definition? The basis of the Bill could be undermined unless we consider updating that clause.

Clause 10 relates to rent reviews. There was great discussion in the other place about this, and the clause was subject to an amendment which enshrined the Government's intention that the Bill could be used to review rents upwards as well as downwards. My hon.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

Friend knows that it is possible to have a rent review by agreement which includes the usual clauses referring to the default of an agreement in which an arbitrator can be appointed. It is also permissible to draw up a tenancy agreement in which the rent is to be reviewed by a formula. I have talked to several professionals in the industry, and it would be helpful if my hon. Friend at some stage—perhaps not this evening, but in Committee—could clarify what sort of formulae would be accepted which would give rise to the possibility of a downwards, as well as an upwards review.

Would a formula on a retail prices index basis be acceptable? Would it be acceptable to have a formula based on some form of profitability of the tenant's farming? The industry is interested to know about those things, and it would be helpful if my hon. Friend could clarify them.

Rent reviews have been mentioned widely by professionals in the industry, and one aspect of those discussions has been the resumption of part of the holding, for which the Bill rightly makes no provision and for which prudent landlords and tenants will wish to make provision. If a tenant wished to surrender part of the holding and the landlord wished to resume part of it—the rent being altered thereby—would that trigger a fixed-term review date? We need to be clear about that.

I have said that the Bill is largely a deregulatory measure which allows greater freedom of agreement between landlord and tenant. Therefore, I believe that it will start to incorporate some of the facets which are well known in commercial property law, including the concept of forfeiture. Under the old agriculture holdings arrangements, where a tenant had an irredeemable breach of covenant, there was an incontestable notice to quit. This Bill contains nothing like the seven deadly sins that were covered by the Agricultural Holdings Act 1948. Those matters have—quite rightly—been left to the landlord and the tenant to agree. But, as in the case of commercial property, I believe that the law of forfeiture will apply in those cases.

One other piece of commercial practice which I believe may apply to the legislation—I raised the matter with my hon. Friend the Minister earlier this week—is the concept of privity of estate and privity of contract, which was the subject of an amendment by Lord Gallacher in another place. It is a highly technical matter, and I shall try to explain the concept simply to the House.

Where the parties to a lease agree to certain matters which affect the property, they are bound by that agreement. That is called privity of estate. One can, of course, enforce those covenants in a court of law, and that becomes what is known as privity of contract. Under commercial agreements in England and Wales—not Scotland, as the law there is the opposite to that in England and Wales—where an assignment takes place and the assignee defaults on the lease, the enforcement of the original covenants can go back to the original assignee. In commercial property, the original assignee can be several stages and many years down the line.

I have had one very bad case in my constituency, where a couple had been retired for many years in a very nice town. They had totally forgotten about the commercial lease of their small premises, and the landlord had gone back through all the lessees, all of whom had—for one reason or another—been unable to meet their obligations under the covenants. Suddenly the couple found themselves with a huge bill for a lease which they had long since forgotten. I would be very interested to hear what my hon. Friend has to say about that.

Although some professionals disagree with me, I think that if we had a comparatively long lease for farm business tenancies—for example, 25 years—and there was more than one assignment during that term, those assignees could be held to account by the landlord. That is a very undesirable and insidious practice, and I am talking to the Lord Chancellor's office to try to abolish it in the commercial sector. As the farm business tenancy scheme is an entirely new concept, I urge my hon. Friend—if he and his experts agree with me—to see whether it will apply to the Bill. My hon. Friend should consider seriously amendments to make sure that that does not apply under the new concept. It is an entirely new concept; it is not retrospective and it will not affect existing tenants. I think that it would be a thoroughly worthwhile exercise.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I support the points that he has made and I add my concern that the Bill might perpetuate the existing law in some way. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor said in another place that there is a case for reforming the law and if the Bill allows the iniquitous practice of privity of contract to continue it is most important that we amend it in the House.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. As hon. Members know, he has tried to introduce a private Member's Bill to remedy the situation. He and I are working hard with various parties in the commercial sector in an effort to avoid the pitfalls that should not befall the agricultural sector.

On the more technical aspects of the Bill, clauses 15 to 19 deal with improvements. There has been much discussion about what the words "physical" and "intangible" mean in the context of clause 15. I think that the word "physical" encompasses growing crops, tenant right, severed crops and so on, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) has mentioned. The "intangible" element of the clause is much more difficult to define and I think that it will give rise to many court cases in the future.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to give some examples now or in Committee of how the intangible aspects of the clause will be dealt with. Those which arise during the currency of the lease will be affected, as well as those intangible aspects that may not have been noticed when the lease was taken out. Intangible aspects encompass simple things such as planning permission and abstraction licences, but we must also deal with the difficult intangibles such as good will.

How does one compensate either the landlord or the tenant for good will at the end of a tenancy? How does one with deal with contaminated land, for example, which may be attributed to an act of the tenant but which may not be noticed for many years? Those matters must be considered very carefully.

Hon. Members have mentioned the problems of quotas and the compensation clauses. Under the previous legislation, the landlord was entitled to a share of the milk quota as of right, but this legislation does not prescribe

how quotas should be dealt with. One cannot foresee what will happen if we introduced a wheat quota, for example, which would decrease the land value considerably from the landlord's point of view. The tenant could then sell off that free quota for a substantial amount of money at the end of his tenancy and the landlord would suffer as a consequence. We must examine those aspects of the Bill.

A number of professionals have referred recently to a problem with serving notice under the legislation. I believe that it could be remedied fairly easily and there must be plenty of legal precedent as to how the notices should be served. The legislation does not outline how a landlord should deal with a tenant who consistently refuses to allow any form of notice to be served upon him. Those sorts of problems have been overcome in similar legal situations.

The Central Association of Agricultural Valuers has raised several other problems with me. Under the Act as it was drawn originally, clause 34 allowed only solicitors to draw up leases of three years or more. I believe that there will be an amendment in Committee to allow chartered surveyors—of which I am one—to draw up such leases.

Although I have a vested interest in not allowing anyone else to draw up the leases, I must point out that the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers is the most widely respected body in the area of agricultural valuations. Its yearly valuation tables form the basis of the work of all professionals in the field—whether they are surveyors, accountants or solicitors. Therefore, it would be iniquitous for the Bill to exclude that organisation from drawing up leases.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned a problem with granting planning permission. What will happen if a tenant applies for planning permission for a housing estate, for example? It could involve the payment of substantial compensation to the tenant at the end of his term of tenancy and the sum involved may be well beyond the landlord's resources.

Under the present Act, the tenant must ask the landlord to allow him to apply for planning permission and the landlord may refuse to give that permission. The matter can then be referred to arbitration and the arbitrator may allow the tenant to apply for planning permission for a housing estate, which is duly granted. However, if the housing estate is not built, when the tenancy comes to an end the landlord may have to compensate the tenant for many hundreds of thousands of pounds. The Bill should contain a mechanism to allow the landlord to block tenants applying for planning permission. We must examine that area closely.

Many of the Bill's clauses allow for matters to be taken to arbitration under the Arbitration Act 1950, which will give arbitrators far greater freedom than they have at present. The Bill also gives the landlord and the tenant the right to appoint an independent expert and there may be a temptation to appoint such as expert as it will be a much cheaper process than arbitration. What will happen if an independent expert makes a decision in favour of one side and the parties disagree? Will they be able to appoint an arbitrator subsequently?

Mr. Jack: If a person who is independent of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors is appointed, the two parties must agree beforehand to abide by the arbitrator's decision.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's clarification. Perhaps he will clarify what will happen if one party wishes to appoint an independent expert but the other party does not. The matter will then almost certainly have to go to arbitration because the Bill provides that the matter should be referred to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, which will appoint an arbitrator. I hope that that assertion is correct. If my hon. Friend does not wish to clarify that point now perhaps he will do so later.

We have had a long canter around the course this evening. I welcome the Bill as one of the most important milestones in the post-war history of agriculture. It is a long-overdue reform from which landowners, tenants, agricultural workers and new entrants to the industry will benefit. Yet the Labour party consistently opposes it. It is typical of the Opposition to think that their only role is to oppose. They cannot see that, when it is in the interests of the entire industry, for once they should support the legislation. I welcome the Bill and I wish it a speedy passage on to the statute book.

8.18 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I have listened intently to the speech of the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown). I followed the first half quite well, but I found it more difficult when he began to discuss privity of contract. The hon. Gentleman has certainly done his homework in that area and if he is as voluble in Committee as he has been this evening the Committee process will be a long one. I agreed with his early comments about the common agricultural policy, although I beg to differ about how the free market will assist agricultural tenancies.

I also listened intently to the opening speeches by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang). My hon. Friend concentrated on the insecurity that the Bill will create among tenant farmers. Farming is a long-term enterprise and requires considerable commitment and investment—particularly in the case of livestock. The present legal framework offers lifetime tenancies and succession rights, but if there is a move to the free market and no minimum tenancy, there will be enormous insecurity.

The right hon. Gentleman said that most new land on the market is the subject of short-term lets. In Wales in 1993, only 11 per cent. of all relet private land was the subject of long-term agreements, whereas a massive 72 per cent. was accounted for by short-term agreements. The Bill will tend to encourage the latter. The right hon. Gentleman said that when the market settles, it will be in the interests of landlords and tenants to enter into long-term agreements, typically of 10 to 15 years. That is more an article of faith than a belief based on experience. There is a risk of a multiplicity of short-term contracts of three, five, seven or 10 years in place of existing lifetime

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tenancies. That could inflict on British agriculture the short-termism that cripples British industry, with its failure to plan and invest for the long term.

Short tenancies would make it difficult for new entrants. Banks will be reluctant to lend money for farm improvements and investment unless there is security of tenure for 20 years or more.

Mr. Jack: Can the hon. Gentleman substantiate that claim with the views of any particular clearing bank, particularly bearing in mind the fact that banks already transact substantial business in providing finance to tenants who are only on Gladstone *v.* Bower agreements?

Mr. Williams: At a presentation given last year by the Welsh NFU, one of its officers stated that Barclays was reluctant to lend to new entrants unless there was long-term security of tenure. I cannot quote chapter and verse, but I know that the statement was made.

The NFU's chairman in Wales, John Lloyd Jones, stated in a press release dated 16 February 1994 that

"virtually all lettings in the last few years have been on the minuscule 20 month Gladstone Bower arrangement, which gives neither tenant nor landlord adequate returns or opportunities . . . You have to remember that the present situation is not encouraging young farmers into the tenant sector, but simply enabling existing farmers to be larger because they are the only people who can take the risks implied in a tenancy as short term as 12 to 20 months."

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman heard my remark that 10,000 current private landlord agreements are skirting existing legislation. That represents a large amount of agricultural land. The RICS calculates that a high proportion will come within the Bill's scope, which would provide much greater stability. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Williams: There may be stability in some cases, but in Wales generally there is strong opposition to the Bill.

The proposed legislation could mean short-term exploitation of the environment to its long-term detriment. In upland areas, what value will the upkeep of hedges, dry stone walls and wildlife features command if all contracts and agreements are short term? I am aware of the NFU's qualified support for the Bill, but the Welsh NFU wants tenancies of a minimum of 15 years. Ninety per cent. of farms in parts of Wales such as Betws and Coed in Snowdonia are tenanted. If they become short term, there will be severe repercussions.

The average age of farmers in Wales is 58 and the industry desperately needs a new early retirement scheme. There is a case for helping older farmers to retire, provided that they make way for their sons or daughters or for another person.

I am concerned about the Bill's effect on rents for existing tenants. The December 1994 parliamentary brief that hon. Members received included an article by Roger Gibbard, lecturer in land management at Reading university. He stated:

"Throughout the debate, perhaps the fiercest opposition has come from existing tenant-farmers, despite repeated assurances that existing tenancies will not be affected. One of the greatest fears is that the rents on new lettings, which will inevitably be higher due to competitive tendering in an under-supplied marketplace, will be used as comparables in traditional rent reviews, much in the same way as residential rents are often quoted as comparables for farmhouses. The consequence of this will be pressure on existing tenants to pay higher rents."

Other hon. Members mentioned the importance of local authority smallholdings in offering a way in to young people. Dyfed county council has 167 such farms, ranging from 40 to 180 acres. They are retirement tenancies with an age limit of 65. Ten to 12 farms become available every year to let. There is an appalling danger that local government reorganisation and the financial pressures on councils will put them under pressure to sell. Councils must resist if their farms are to remain as breeding grounds for new farmers.

The Bill suits existing owner-occupier farmers who want more land, agribusiness or contract agriculture. However, short-term agreements will make life much more difficult for new entrants. It will drive up rents for existing tenant farmers and can only be destructive for the environment. I am happier with the present system, which offers greater security to tenant farmers, and allows them to plan long term and to farm in harmony with the environment.

8.28 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I declare my interests in agriculture as a landlord, owner-occupier, tenant, member of the Country Landowners Association and National Farmers Union, a past president of the Hampshire Association of Young Farmers Clubs and one of its current vice-presidents. I believe that I have the credentials to speak in this debate.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). He reflected the Farmers Union of Wales brief in demanding longer tenancies, but that is entirely in his hands and those of Labour's Front Bench. If they removed the uncertainty that persists over the future of tenancy legislation, landlords would be greatly encouraged to grant longer-term lets.

The contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) was probably one of the most powerful that we have heard this evening, and one would expect that from a former student of the Royal Agricultural college, Cirencester. I, too, am a former student—only I did the short course. From the great knowledge that he obviously has of both landlord and tenant legislation and the proposals before the House today, it is clear that he did the long course and came out very fully qualified.

I was interested in some of the other contributions. My hon. Friend has obviously talked himself on to the Standing Committee that will consider the Bill, but so, too, has my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), who referred to the 420 tenants in his constituency and the way in which the Bill will affect premium valuations. I sense that there was confusion on the Government Front Bench when he put his questions. It will be interesting to see whether he gets an answer this evening.

The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) made an interesting contribution. I was surprised that, as a member of the Select Committee on Agriculture, he did not have a greater knowledge of landlord and tenant legislation. It is perhaps a pity that the Select Committee did not look at the present law and decide how it might be reformed. He referred to the Bill as total deregulation, which it manifestly is not. One cannot just repeal all

landlord and tenant legislation and hope that case law will take its place. The Bill replaces what is in existence with something that we think will be very much better.

The hon. Member for Lancashire, West referred to the speech by Viscount Hampden. I seem to recall, from reading through *Hansard* of the debates in the other place—I am thinking in terms of the much earlier intervention by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) about the rather dubious ways in which some landowners came to possess such large acres of our country—that the noble Lord has, in fact, owned his estate for more than 600 years. I also recall that he discovered from one of the early tenancy agreements which he looked up in preparing for the debate that the rent in 1314 was payable in barbed arrows. I suspect that they were used to ill-effect, because that is the date of the battle of Bannockburn, which, I am glad to say as a Scot, the English lost. No doubt some of my ancestors and those of the hon. Gentleman were there on that day and took part in that decisive battle and victory against the invading English.

The contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) was interesting. I am pleased that he did not stray on to the subject of the A427, but I made a mental note that if in future there is any need to prolong debates in the House, an intervention on that question may provoke a lengthy reply from him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) made a contribution based on his experience as a land agent. He called for a free market in farm tenancies, and, of course, it is freedom of contract within the market that the Bill will introduce. That is precisely what it is all about.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd)—I am pleased to see him back in the Chamber—made an interesting speech as a solicitor with much experience of farming matters. He left us in no doubt of the line taken by the Farmers Union of Wales in its call for a minimum term. I have already said that I believe that the proposed legislation will lead to greater security and more tenancies.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy also referred to the black eye of my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury. I must confess that I, too, had a black eye. That was 25 years ago—the last occasion on which I had a black eye. The hon. Gentleman said that at least it was not a Welshman who gave my hon. Friend his black eye. It was, however, a Welshman who gave me my black eye. I was a tenant farmer in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I was visiting my farm and was being driven around it by the Welsh manager. He tipped me over a precipice in a Land Rover and we fell 300 ft. I had two black eyes, and 15 other breaks. It was a Welsh doctor who put me together again. I sat in Aberystwyth hospital contemplating the future and read the biography of Iain Macleod, and it was at that moment that I decided that politics was for me; so, had it not been for the black eye that the hon. Gentleman's constituent gave me—I hope that he is still alive, because he, too, was in a mess afterwards—I might not be here today.

I am pleased to say that my hon. Friend got his black eye in the hunting field. I very much hope that the circumstances under which he got his black eye will persist for many years to come and that the House will resist any attempt that might be made at any time in future to abolish hunting.

The opening speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), the Opposition spokesman, was revealing. There was one lovely moment in his speech when he said that a Labour Government would not be returning. Then there was a very long, rather Freudian pause. I think that it was a great pity that he continued. He should have stopped his speech right there.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) took big farmers to task, because they were environmentally unfriendly. He painted a picture of small farmers being extremely careful with the environment. I must point out to him that every farmer and landowner is very conscious of the need to protect our environment. It is a costly matter. I would argue that the bigger the farmer, the more able he is to bear the cost of protecting the environment. I should like to see less cross-compliance than there has been, whereby grants available for other aspects of agriculture depend on environmental measures being undertaken. I would far rather have a policy of direct grants for environmental purposes.

Mr. Llwyd: Is it not a fact that, because of the recent changes in the law regarding the farm conservation grants available to farmers to comply with environmental sanctions, and so on, more of an onus is placed on potential tenants and the short-term tenancy without guarantee is even less likely to be practical?

Mr. Colvin: That may be the hon. Gentleman's view. It is not mine. There is obviously an obligation on both landlord and tenant.

On the point made earlier about the stewardship scheme in Wales, I believe—I stand open to correction—that the provisions of such grant aid under any stewardship scheme would continue even if the tenancy were to change. There is an obligation, which becomes a liability jointly on the landlord and the tenant of a farm.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is not the precise issue raised by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) the sort that could well be coped with under the proposed legislation? Referring to the slurry disposal system, an incoming tenant could say to his landlord, "This farm is defective and I shall not take it on unless you allow me to make this improvement and compensate me for it at the end of the tenancy."

Mr. Colvin: That is the answer that I should have given. My hon. Friend is obviously far more learned in the matter than I am, and it is a very good reply.

Her Majesty's Government have been wise to introduce this measure in the other place rather than here. Reading through the contributions made in the other place, I was struck by the number of peers who referred to their wealth of expertise both as landlords and as tenants. There are, of course, very few farmers in the House. Times have changed. There used to be many, but I recall that, at the end of the Maastricht debate in July 1993, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, having concluded the debate, slammed shut his notes, turned around and said, "Well, that is the end of that very important business, now let us all go off and gather in a really good harvest." Looking around the Chamber, I did not see many hon. Members on either side of the House who had anything to do with gathering in the harvest, and I thought how much times had changed.

[Mr. Colvin]

It is not surprising that the Bill has arrived with very few amendments from the other place. It is the product of many months of work by the Tenants Reform Industry Group, which comprises the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union, the Tenant Farmers Association and the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs, supported by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers. I agree with what hon. Members have said about the importance of bringing the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers within the scope of clause 34 so that agricultural valuers, as well as solicitors, can prepare leases.

The Bill is well thought out, and has been on the launch pad since December 1993 following a lengthy period of consultation set up by Ministers back in 1991. Of course there have been differences of opinion, but ultimately sensible compromises have been made. The Bill also follows a 1992 Conservative manifesto commitment to liberalise radically the agricultural tenancy laws

"in order to make more land available to rent, especially for new entrants."

The involvement and agreement of the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs has not been mentioned enough, given the extent to which the Bill will improve the younger generation's prospects. At present, having left college or university with good qualifications and, often, with practical experience, members of the younger generation are doomed to a life on the road as travelling salesmen trying to sell agricultural products to, for instance, my right hon. Friend the Minister and to me—or, at best, to being agricultural contractors working for other farmers. I believe that the Bill will enable youngsters to get into farming more easily, although I acknowledge that there will always be the problem of trying to raise capital. Hitherto, they have been the victims of outdated legislation dating from 1947 and 1948, and of the 1976 legislation that extended security of tenure from one generation to three.

Many hon. Members have referred to the regrettable shrinkage of the tenancy sector. In 1900, total acreage was 90 per cent. let; the percentage is now down to 35. I acknowledge what the RICS has said about the real percentage of land that is let: it puts the amount at 27 per cent., and ascribes only 20 per cent. to tenant farmers. I think, however, that the number of genuine arm's-length tenancies is even smaller. Many tenancies nowadays are merely arrangements dictated by tax considerations. I refer, of course, to tax avoidance rather than tax evasion. There is nothing wrong with that. The value of land for probate purposes, with vacant possession, is probably £1,400 an acre; the value of land that is let is between £800 and £900 an acre. Landlords can hardly be blamed for taking farms in hand and then reletting them to family farm partnerships to reduce valuations for probate purposes.

Labour Members have said that the Bill heralds the end of security of tenure for tenant farmers. I say that, if it is not enacted, it will herald the end of tenant farmers: there will be none for whom to provide security of tenure. The Bill's principal objectives have been adequately set out, and, as I have said, it has come from the other place with very few amendments; those that have been made are mainly minor and technical.

Opposition Members may not remember very well our recent debate on the rural economy, as few were present, but the Bill is relevant to it. The Bill will benefit the countryside, because agriculture will remain the foundation of our rural economy and farmers will continue to be the principal stewards of rural areas. I hope that the White Paper that the Government intend to publish soon will encourage farmers to be more environmentally aware, following the progress that has already been made, and that such awareness will be based on the voluntary principle rather than compulsion.

I also hope that planning policies will be more proactive and will support diversification. I hope that our tax policy will recognise farming, forestry, the letting of land and buildings and alternative farm enterprises on agricultural holdings as farm businesses—what the Country Landowners Association has described as rural business units.

Clause 1 is important, because it defines a farm business tenancy and goes on to describe tenancies that cannot be farm business tenancies. According to a brief from Conservative central office, the proposals relate solely to the agricultural sector and are not concerned with tenancy provisions relating to business premises; but the Bill says that they can cover commercial activities when the character of the tenancy is primarily agricultural. Confusion will arise as farms diversify and alternative enterprises spring up. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will explain precisely where the division will come.

These are times of rapid change in farming, and of great opportunities which the Bill will extend to the younger generation of farmers. In 1800, George Crabbe said:

"Our Farmers round, well pleased with constant pain,
Like other farmers flourish—and complain."

I have not heard a single farmer complain about the Bill, but one thing that farmers do complain about is lack of capital.

Farmers tend to be capital rich, although the capital is usually locked up in land and fixed assets; but they are often revenue poor, unless they are overwhelmed by the concrete jungle of development—in which case, they cease to be farmers altogether. The 1970s saw an influx of new institutional capital into farming, and of remote landlords with little interest in farming other than its relation to the balance sheet and its provision of a hedge against the galloping inflation produced by Labour Governments' economic policies. I hope that we never see such inflation again. Many of those investors burnt their fingers. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said how wrong it was for farming decisions not to be made locally, and I agree. I felt very sorry for tenants whose landlords were on the other side of the world, and saw landowning only as a temporary investment.

I believe that the Bill can provide the basis for a far closer partnership between landlord and tenant. It should be welcomed by all political parties. It is certainly in accord with what was called for in the Labour party's consultation paper "Encouraging new entrants into farming", which was published last September. The Opposition should avoid sewing any seeds of doubt about the durability of the proposals: farming is a long-term business, and a stable legal framework is vital.

For the record, let me correct the quotation from Jonathan Swift that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud wrongly attributed to Charles Dickens. It was Swift who wrote:

"that whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together."

My farm, like most others in the United Kingdom, and certainly the farm of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has done just that. As a farmer cum politician, I am in two minds about the quotation. However, I am not in two minds about the Bill which I commend to the House. It is long overdue and it is a sensible package of reforms for landowners who do not wish to farm or cannot farm, and for farmers who do not wish to own or cannot own. I trust that it will get its Second Reading.

8.49 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): In view of the cautious words at the beginning of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), perhaps I should remind the House of my interest in farming. More significantly, and as a matter of caution, I remind the House that, sadly and reluctantly, I am still a name at Lloyd's. I apologise for missing the Minister's speech at the beginning of the debate and that by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr Strang). My reason for missing them was that I was at the sitting of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee which was interviewing the chairman of Lloyd's about Lloyd's self-regulation. You may be interested to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I have never in my life heard such a puny justification of self-regulation.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Interested as I might be in a private capacity, in my public guise I must tell the hon. Gentleman that he is out of order and must return to the debate on Second Reading.

Mr. Marland: I thought that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the Minister might be interested to know why I arrived late in the Chamber. I thought that it was important to state the exact reason.

I welcome the Bill, as do most hon. Members who have spoken. I pay tribute to the National Farmers Union and the Tenant Farmers Association for negotiating on this matter between themselves for, I think, more than five years. I am glad that the NFU is giving the Bill the nod of approval, certainly in my constituency, and that is added justification for taking matters forward.

It is sad that Labour appears to have changed its view. It cannot understand that, to make a market, one needs a willing buyer and a willing seller. It appears that that is what the Bill will provide. Labour's attitude should come as no surprise to Conservative Members because for ages it has claimed that it is the friend of the farmer and the farm worker. It is a friend to as many people as it can possibly convince that Labour believes in their best interests. Sadly, that does not always turn out to be the case. A recent example is to be found in the export of live animals, because, in 1975, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East voted for the restoration of such exports. We have been discussing the issue in the House for the past fortnight. The matter has been brought up two or three times and, twist and turn as he may, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East cannot get away from the fact, because it is on record, that he voted for the restoration of the export of live animals.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman for a second time, but he is still not in order.

Mr. Marland: I was speaking about farming and about the interests of tenant farmers.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman was a little closer, but he was not close enough.

Mr. Marland: Many tenant farmers have a vested interest in the export of live animals to the European Community and I wanted the House and anyone listening outside to appreciate that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East is in favour of such exports and has voted for them in the past.

The Bill will bring new entrants to agriculture and give the industry new vigour. All industries need vigour, and let me make no bones about the fact that farming is a business. I am sure that you will let me get away with saying that, Madam Deputy Speaker. Vigour and new blood need to be brought in all the time, and farming is becoming more and more specialised. Hon. Members have said that the capital requirements of those involved in farming are becoming greater. Technology is developing and the knowledge of farmers is becoming greater.

Sadly, I was not able to go to Cirencester on the three-year management course which my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) attended. It obviously did him a lot of good. Farming is a specialist business, and out are going the small farmers and those people who for reasons of their own want to quit the business. Dynamic young men and women are coming in. It is probably significant that I have a parcel of land which I intend to let to a young farmer who lives near my farm. He is much more dynamic than I am and I shall welcome him to my farm because he will bring to it vigour, dynamism and excitement.

People want to own land for all sorts of reasons, but they do not necessarily want to farm it. They want to own it for fishing, conservation, tree planting, shooting, pride of ownership or the privacy that it gives them. There is nothing wrong with any of those aims. Term agreements will be helpful because they will ensure that a farmer does not lose control of his land. That is surely at the heart of the measure. No long-term contracts are coming on the market, because landowners do not want to lose control of their land for many years.

It is right not to fix term tenancies: there should be no minimum or maximum. The market will shake itself out and at the end of the day will reach the right conclusions. Rents will accurately reflect the opportunities in agriculture. It is right for a farmer to take the opportunity to generate wealth from a tenanted farm outside a town or urban area by adding value to his product, whatever it might be, through selling it directly to the consumer. However, he should pay a higher rent than a hill farmer.

Recently, many of us had an opportunity to meet some hill farmers who came to the House and gave us an extremely nice dinner of Welsh hill lamb. They told us that some of the difficulties that they were facing might

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force some of them off the land. They said that it was right and proper that, when their rents were being decided or reviewed, the difficulties they were facing should be taken into account. So be it: if there has to be a rent reduction to keep them on the land, we should welcome it and pave the way for it.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) made great play of the fact that there was too much short-termism in farming and in the tenancies that are currently available. He is right: there is much short-termism in letting, for the reasons that I gave earlier—landowners do not want to part with their land for long periods. That is why there is such a growth in grazing tenancies, in the number of Gladstone *v.* Bower arrangements and in the number getting permission from the Ministry to have tenancies.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Is it not extraordinary to note that, although the Opposition may intend to vote against Second Reading, the Labour Benches are quite empty?

Mr. Marland: Nothing surprises us about the Opposition or about what goes on on the Opposition Benches. Earlier in my speech, I mentioned that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, Labour's Front-Bench spokesman, had voted for the export of live animals.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not expect to have to warn the hon. Gentleman again.

Mr. Marland: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Enright: I have just done a quick calculation and, in fact, there is a larger percentage of Opposition Members present than Conservative Members.

Mr. Marland: I do not want to risk deviating, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I can count nine Conservative Members and only five Opposition Members.

The Bill will bring an end—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) to do his maths incorrectly?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. As I have told the House previously, the Chair is not responsible for the accuracy of hon. Members' observations.

Mr. Marland: It is accurate to say that many businesses use rented property. Why should agriculture be any different from engineering? If an engineering business wants to occupy a factory from which to run its business, there is no problem—it can take the premises for whatever length of time it wants. It should be precisely the same with agricultural businesses.

Mr. Llwyd: The hon. Gentleman must know that an engineering business comes under part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954, which allows it an almost automatic renewal of its tenancy. There is no such provision for agricultural tenancies in this Bill.

Mr. Marland: Perhaps that point should be studied further. A good landlord and a good tenant would want their arrangement to continue. Whether it is an engineering business or a tenanted farm, it does not appear to me that, in the long term, it makes any difference. As we all know, my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury has volunteered to serve on the Standing Committee and he may wish to raise that point during its proceedings. It is right that we should provide the opportunity for people to occupy land on a term agreement, to be worked out between the landlord and tenant. They can go forward together on that basis.

I am glad that the new arrangements for tenant compensation at the end of a tenancy will reflect the value that a tenant has added to the holding, whether it is quota, a building improvement or the establishment of new enterprises on the land. The landlord and tenant can come to an arrangement either before the start of a project or, if the tenancy comes to an inexplicably early end, reach a proper agreement to compensate the outgoing tenant and/or his family or those whom he leaves behind in the event of his untoward death.

The question of tenant right should also be discussed in Committee. If a tenant dies when crops are growing—for example, when the wheat crop is just ready for harvesting—under current provisions that crop would belong to the landlord. I hope that that problem can be sorted out in Committee because it is an important aspect, especially for short-term tenancies.

The change in inheritance tax is something that all with an interest in the Bill will welcome, as will all those with an interest in the health of the countryside. The 100 per cent. relief from inheritance tax will ensure that newly available land for letting will come on to the market. I am absolutely certain that that is a major feature of the Bill, because many would-be landlords have been waiting to see the precise financial arrangements. I compliment the Treasury, which has agreed to this provision, because it will bring many new jobs and opportunities to the countryside.

The Bill will create not privilege but an opportunity for new entrants into agriculture. It will create opportunities for wealth creation in the countryside. It will create opportunities and jobs for the 48,000 agricultural workers who have already been mentioned. What will they say when they hear about the antics of Labour Members tonight? What will they say when they hear how their jobs and their future are jeopardised by Labour Members, who appear to be advocating a massive running down of opportunities in the countryside? Labour Members should seriously reconsider their position between now and 10 o'clock, because there is no doubt that what they have said will have a serious effect on the countryside.

Mr. Booth: Does my hon. Friend deprecate the fact that the number of agricultural tenancies has fallen to about 10 per cent. of all landholdings? Does he agree that the Bill will help to redress that imbalance to its previous position of almost 80 per cent. of landholdings?

Mr. Marland: I do not know whether the traditional figure is 80 per cent., but I am certain that there will be a tremendous increase in the amount of land that is available for letting, for all the reasons that other hon. Members and I have given.

As I said earlier, I am sorry that I missed the bulk of the debate. I wanted to explain in greater detail to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, why that happened, but you would not let me. I am really sorry that I have not heard the entire debate.

You may think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I am again deviating from the subject, but I promise you that I am not. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury will back me in my assertion that there is a major problem with Gloucestershire county council. It is controlled by Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who have run it into a massive debt of £129 million, and it has a large agricultural estate. For some time, my hon. Friend and I have urged the council to reduce its debt. More than once, we suggested that it should liquidate a large part of its agricultural estate, for which it could obtain many millions of pounds.

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Mr. Marland: Here we go.

Mr. Tyler: Had the hon. Member been present during an earlier part of the debate, he would have heard hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise that county farms are the essential first rung on the tenancy ladder. That does not mean that it is the only rung, or that, if one takes away all the rungs above, one will be left with something that is worth preserving on its own. As a Conservative Member said, to cut the ladder at the point where people would be prevented from getting on that first rung is of no assistance to the tenanted sector. Hon. Members on both sides of the House acknowledged that before the hon. Gentleman returned from dealing with the matter of Lloyd's upstairs.

Mr. Marland: I wondered what defence the Liberals on Gloucestershire county council would come up with, and the hon. Gentleman has just given me a foretaste of that. Labour and Liberal members of that council have been saying precisely what the hon. Gentleman has just said, but the object of the Bill is to create more opportunities for new entrants—whether they be young, middle-aged or old men—to come into the industry. Justification no longer exists, therefore, for the hon. Gentleman's friends on the council to hang on to the agricultural estate. They should consider seriously the opportunity of selling it off.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend in the middle of his excellent peroration. Is not the real point about smallholdings that they could be perfectly well managed by a private or institutional landlord? Tenants would have security of tenure—they would still be there—but the tremendous capital value would be released. I agree with my hon. Friend about Gloucestershire county council. I put it in touch with someone who would do what he suggested, but it refused to listen to that person's advice. The council should reduce its landholding.

Mr. Marland: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. I am sure that we shall hear more about the matter because there will be some twisting and turning from the Liberals, as has been shown by the comments of Liberal Members.

Mr. Enright *rose—*

Mr. Marland: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who, no doubt, will tell us about the Labour councillors on Gloucestershire county council.

Mr. Enright: Absolutely not, and I deplore words being put into my mouth. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, earlier in the evening, a National Farmers Union delegation from west Yorkshire was here in the House? I was buttonholed for half an hour by a gentleman who hired his farm from North Yorkshire county council, and who complained about what might happen to him as a result of the Bill. That council, of course, is controlled by the Conservatives.

Mr. Marland: I obviously cannot discuss specific cases with the hon. Gentleman, but I am certain that, if he wanted to buy his farm from North Yorkshire county council, he probably could do. I do not know the debt position in relation to that council, so it is not possible for me to make a constructive comment on that point.

Nevertheless, I welcome the Bill. I wish it well in every way. I hope that it has a speedy passage through Committee and that, between now and 10 o'clock, Opposition Members will change their minds.

9.7 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): The Bill shows an important philosophical difference between the Labour party and the Conservative party. Conservative Members believe that society is best ordered by unbridled exercise of social position and the power of accumulated wealth. Labour Members recognise the strength and contribution of those forces, but we seek a society in which all people can live without fear of exploitation or harassment, and in the knowledge that the law will provide them with economic and social justice.

The notion that an agricultural tenant should have security of tenure for life was introduced by a Labour Government in 1947. It was part of a package of measures that were designed to bring stability to an industry that, before the second world war, had witnessed crushing depression and chronic insecurity.

The Bill is portrayed as part of a liberating process that will release land to be farmed by new tenants, and that will facilitate the expansion of progressive and successful operators in the industry. Labour Members do not believe that the interests of the industry and of the countryside will be best served by denying future agricultural tenants the benefit of a reasonable measure of security of tenure and of statutory protection in the complex relationship that they have with their landlords.

The Government, apparently with the full agreement of the landowning and tenant farmer organisations, are throwing to one side the whole panoply of legal safeguards and protections which have been developed over the years to prevent the tenant from becoming a victim of his landlord and to give him a legal framework in which he can invest with confidence and which will enable him to give of his best to the land. In its place is to be a system that has at its heart a key fallacy: that the parties to an agricultural tenancy are free agents and come as equals to the negotiations. In this respect, the Bill opens the way to a revesting of power in agricultural landowners, which will place them in a position not dissimilar to that held by their forebears in the 18th and 19th centuries.

All this has been done on the pretence that landowners will now be encouraged to award more lettings of their land to new entrants into farming. How shall we know whether this gamble has paid off? It has been estimated by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors that 1 million acres of agricultural land will be released for letting as a

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

consequence of the Bill. The Country Landowners Association estimates the figure to be 1.6 million acres. Wisely, the organisations give no idea of the period of time over which these acreages might be released.

Both estimates were made before the Government announced that let agricultural land is to qualify for 100 per cent. inheritance tax relief. Therefore, it is possible that the figures may be revised upwards. Indeed, that may be the only positive effect on tenancies. It was, as the Minister graciously acknowledged, mentioned in our document on encouraging new entrants into farming.

Apart from the public relations figures issued by interested bodies, what will tell us how many new tenancies will be created over a period of, say, five years from the date of Royal Assent? No doubt landowners will wish to include the reletting, under farm business tenancies, of land at present covered by grazing agreements, Gladstone *v.* Bower arrangements, Ministry-approved short lettings and other ingenious licence tactics which avoid the creation of an agricultural tenancy.

Also included in the total new lettings will be a substantial acreage of bare land. That will enlarge the size of neighbouring farms and provide no opportunity for a newcomer in the industry. In addition, there will be the let farms that become available during the period of assessment and that will now be let on farm business tenancies. We must be careful not to include them in the figures for "new let" land.

Assuming that at least half of the 1.6 million acres is composed of land at present in hand but which would be let to new tenants on farm business tenancies, and assuming that the average size of the holdings let is to be 250 acres, we should expect 3,200 new tenancies for commercial farms over, say, the next five years. We shall see. A tally could also be kept of the acreage of farmland which, over the same period, ceases to be tenanted, such as farms currently owned by British Coal.

Mr. Colvin: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why he thinks that the average new tenancy will cover 250 acres when the average size of farms is 150 acres?

Mr. Jones: I was using a putative figure to minimise the numbers. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, if farms were to be 150 acres, considerably more tenancies could be expected.

What causes a sharp intake of breath is the absolute nature of the Bill's intent. There have been no half measures and no visible compromises. It might have been sufficient to open the door to many new entrants into farming if landlords had been given freedom of manoeuvre for tenancies of less than five years and lettings to tenants of a certain age or for holdings of, say, less than 80 acres, or to introduce period tenancies, the compulsory retirement of tenants at 65 or one of the many other proposals that must be on the table. Instead, the sword has been taken up and the rights of several generations of future tenants have been severed.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman was trying to talk down the acreage that would come on to the market as a result of the Bill but, according to his figures—3,250 farms of 250 acres—I calculate that the total land available would be in the region of 600,000 to 700,000 acres. That is still a substantial figure.

Mr. Jones: I was not talking down the figure; I was saying that it was rather a lot to expect out of the Bill. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has his own views.

The right of the tenant to serve a counter-notice on his landlord when he is told to quit the holding has gone. Also gone is the sensible connection between the rent that the tenant is asked to pay and the productive capacity of the land. The tenant is now left to the vagaries of an imperfect open market in which agricultural rents are set on an upward course. Also gone is his entitlement to compensation for disturbance when he is ejected from the farm. All that is left is compensation for improvements that have received the landlord's approval. That provision has been described by the National Farmers Union as a hard-won concession.

Gone are the model clauses that made clear which repairs were the responsibility of the tenant and which were the responsibility of the landlord. The division is now left for the landlord to determine in the terms of the agreement that he offers to the tenant. Worse, where there is no agreement, confusion and uncertainty will prevail and will lead to endless legal wrangles.

Gone is the statutory right of the tenant to claim compensation for damage caused by wild animals and game birds, which only the landlord has the right to kill. That may be a small point, but it is indicative of a determination in this legislation to wipe the slate completely clean. The list could be extended by going more deeply into the schedules of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986.

One consequence of the Bill is that the tenant of a 1,000-acre farm, with all the capital equipment and employment that is needed to run a farm of that size, could have less security of tenure and fewer rights when dealing with his landlord than the occupier of a small corner shop in Newmarket. How has that come about? The answer is that it is the result of a famine of agricultural tenancies.

We are told that landlords were deterred from creating tenancies because of the introduction of succession of tenancies in 1976; many hon. Members have said that. If that is true, why have landowners not taken the opportunity to let more land since 1984 when the succession provisions became optional for new tenancies? The truth is that the famine began long before 1976. Its cause lay in the level of returns that landlords and their advisers felt they should get from rents. Institutional owners, an important source of let land, felt that they could get a better return on their investment elsewhere and individual owners were advised that they would make more profit from taking their farms in hand.

The House should remember that open market rents were built into agricultural holdings legislation from 1947 to 1984. Under the operation of that formula and before the introduction of succession, the supply of tenanted land seriously diminished. Open market rents failed because the demand for farms outstripped supply and the rent that many new entrants were prepared to pay was in excess of what could be supported by the productive capacity of the farm. Those entering tenancy agreements with high rents lived in the hope that inflation would rise to reduce the cost of their rent in real terms. In many cases, they badly

miscalculated and disaster befell them. It is to be seriously doubted that there can be such a thing as an open market for agricultural tenancies.

If the Country Landowners Association is to be believed, following this legislation, there will be an initial rush of privately owned land offered up for rent. After approximately five years, the flow of new tenancies will have slowed down and the turnover will be mainly in existing tenanted farms. If, as seems likely, we witness at the same time a further restructuring of UK farms, with amalgamations and multiple-ownership arrangements, the demand for tenanted whole farms will, predictably, increase and the supply will either begin to decline again or will remain static. The inevitable result will be to drive up rents.

Furthermore, all the bidders for a single tenancy will not be starting with the same advantages. A neighbouring farmer who estimates that he can run a nearby farm without increasing his labour force by using his own buildings and by making greater use of his existing range of machinery can offer a higher rent than an efficient newcomer who proposes to run the farm as a self-supporting enterprise. Similarly, applicants with sources of income from outside agriculture will tend to distort the market for the normal working farmer.

The difference between conditions 30 years ago and the conditions that will apply after the Bill becomes law is that having forced the rent as high as he can get it, with or without arbitration, the landlord will always be tempted at the end of the term to seek an even higher rent from a new applicant. The way will be clear for him to repossess the farm.

During the debate, we were told with monotonous frequency that the package has been agreed with the whole industry, including organisations representing the interests of tenants. We know, however, that the Farmers Union of Wales has maintained its opposition to the proposals throughout.

Also, in October 1992, the National Farmers Union and the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs were clear as to the points that they were aiming to secure in their discussions, following the publication of the Government's consultation document. They considered it vital that a legal framework be maintained, to ensure that tenancies were let on fair and reasonable terms. They demanded a minimum term for the letting of not less than 15 years, with two years' notice of termination after the term was ended. They asked that an existing tenant who had proved suitable be given the option of continuing his or her tenancy when the fixed period came to an end. They said that wide statutory provisions were needed, relating to the payment of compensation at the end of the tenancy. They expressed total opposition to freely negotiated rents at open market values.

What has changed since those demands were made? Few of them feature in the legislation and the National Farmers Union has slipped quietly into line behind a triumphant Country Landowners Association. Significant numbers of their members have misgivings, however.

One of the strong points persuading the NFU and the Tenant Farmers Association to accept the package was that existing agricultural lettings would not be affected by the introduction of farm business tenancies. In our opinion, however, they should not be too complacent. On the face of it, existing tenants are safe from threat, but as the Bill becomes law, the landowner will have an even greater incentive to engineer the termination of old arrangements, or—in the case of pre-1986 agreements—to persuade the tenant's children to give up their rights of succession. Cash bribes are an obvious approach, but the tenant must also watch for the stealthy move—for example, sending a farm business tenancy agreement for the son or daughter to sign when the father is on his deathbed, in the knowledge that, for succession to operate, the successor must apply to the agricultural land tribunal to have the tenancy assigned to him or her. A tenant might be moved to a larger or more productive farm on the estate, on the condition that he or she entered into a farm business tenancy. The landlord might even accompany the transfer with an unenforceable verbal promise that the tenant's son would succeed him to the tenancy when the time came.

At all times, existing tenants will be well advised to be watchful. They should also not assume that their rents will be unaffected by the operation of the collateral open market for farm business tenancies. Rents on new lettings, which will inevitably be higher, due to competitive tendering in an undersupplied marketplace will, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) said, be used as comparables in traditional rent reviews, in much the same way as residential rents are quoted for farmhouses.

On the supposed principle that the parties to a farm business tenancy agreement are free to come to their own understanding as to the terms that are to apply to the letting, it is true that neither party is forced to enter into an agreement, but beyond that the landlord has the asset and will create the terms under which the property is let. In most cases, the tenant will come to the negotiation as a supplicant.

If tenants are young, they will be keen to farm, eager to prove themselves, full of optimism and prepared to give the enterprise everything that they have got. The terms of the tenancy will be offered to them on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Even if they take legal advice and are told the extent of their obligations and the precariousness of their position under the agreement, they will still sign because there will be only one thought in their minds—they want to farm more than anything else in the world.

That is hardly a negotiation between equals. The landlord, or his agent, will rely on the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors model agreement, appropriately modified by counsel to suit the needs of his estate. From his point of view, the landlord is merely being prudent. He may not know the potential tenant and will want to be able to escape from the agreement and repossess the farm, if the going gets difficult. He will be looking for no more rent than his land agent has told him that he can expect and he does not want the farm to deteriorate, but he also does not want to use his capital to carry out improvements for which he can expect the tenant to pay. If the tenant is young, the landlord will want to keep the farm on as tight a rein as possible, within the terms of the agreement.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I apologise for not being here at the start of the hon. Gentleman's speech. I hate to interrupt, given the exciting nature of what he is saying, but his theme assumes the present situation—no competition and no farms to let elsewhere. He is stating the present situation—the result of a Labour Government's

[Sir Jerry Wiggin]

legislation—in which there is a virtual monopoly. If there were plenty of farms for the hypothetical young man to rent, none of the problems that he describes would exist.

Mr. Jones: I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not at the meeting about Lloyd's, or at least is not affected by it. He misses the point. The supply of land is limited, no new farms are being created, and existing tenants will hang on to their tenancies, so we are talking about a small number of farms. Had the hon. Gentleman been here at the beginning of my speech, he would have heard the number that I expect. Sadly, he was unable to be here.

The inequality between landlord and tenant has been recognised by Parliament in the letting of domestic housing, and tenants have been given protection under the Housing Acts. Until the introduction of this Bill, Parliament recognised the multiple problems that can arise between landlord and tenant and sought to give the tenant adequate safeguards and protective rights in a series of Acts of Parliament from 1887 onwards. All that is now turned aside and the agricultural tenant is told that he must look out for himself.

On a wider point, there are other problems with the Bill. I refer to the duties of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as set out in section 17 of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986. It seems strange that a Minister with such a wide-ranging duty to balance countryside interests has drafted a Bill to cater almost exclusively for the interests of agriculture. That is a dangerously myopic approach to a set of long-standing problems. It is in the best interests of both landlords and tenants to be able to enter into new tenancies and leases that permit the widest possible use of rural land, bodies of water and other natural and man-made resources in the countryside. The Minister may contend that a new, wider set of definitions will confuse rather than clarify, but such an assertion only ossifies definitions that are increasingly outmoded and limiting to rural enterprises and associated employment opportunities.

The Agricultural Tenancies Bill should cover all agricultural, silvicultural, natural, man-made, heritage, conservation and environmental land management uses and other related uses. New definitions should cover all existing and foreseeable enterprises and uses of rural land, buildings and bodies of water, including keeping livestock for the production of medical products; growing crops for industrial purposes; conservation; preservation; and enhancement of the countryside environment.

If the current, narrow definitions are not expanded, all other rural tenancies and leases must come under the terms of the Landlord and Tenant Acts, principally the 1954 Act. That general legislation was not designed to cater for such uses and enterprises. Indeed, the 1954 Act specifically excluded agricultural holdings. The result may be that, where a landlord and tenant agree to a variety of uses for rural land and buildings, they must enter into more than one type of tenancy or lease to comply with the legal requirements of their overall agreement. That duplication of professional charges and paperwork is far from the efficient and economic framework which the Government purport to introduce.

Over the coming years, we shall monitor the position closely. Inevitably, the lack of security of tenure for farm business tenancies will lead to disappointment, disillusionment and hardship. Landlords are being given back the full range of power and privilege that they exercised in former years. We shall expect them not always to seek perfection in their tenants, to be compassionate with tenants who become ill or meet misfortune and be understanding when tenants are no longer young. The function and exercise of the power returned to them is larger than the matter of pure economics.

The Opposition solemnly repeat our commitment to the family farm as the unit that has shown most resilience throughout the devastating economic storms that have swept through the history of agriculture. That unit is most in harmony with the rural environment. We also repeat our commitment to farm tenancies for the working life of the tenant. Such tenancies encourage good husbandry, and give the tenant confidence in dealing with his land and dignity in dealing with his landlord.

As the farming and landowning organisations have reminded us in discussions on the proposals, the economics have changed, as have the needs of agriculture since 1947, or even within the past 20 years. The economics and the science of economics may have changed, but the countryside changes more slowly and human nature changes even more slowly, if at all. The need for social justice was one of the guiding principles behind the now-to-be-disregarded agricultural holdings legislation. We shall not forget that fact when we look at the workings of this legislation when we are in government in years to come. It was enlightening to see many Conservative Members intimate that most people outside the House reckon that we shall be in government after the next election. Why else would they be so concerned about our stance on the Bill?

9.29 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): One could hardly describe the speech of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) as riveting. If that was an example of new Labour, it shows that the Opposition must undertake much more modernising.

I thought that the idea of a wind-up speech was to reply to the telling points of hon. Members on the other side of the Chamber. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West did not reply to any of the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and my hon. Friends the Members for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland). All we heard was a dirge of despair and depression about the future.

Mr. Marland: Luddite.

Mr. Jack: That exactly sums up the Opposition's approach to the matter. The doomster approach was backed up by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), who in his opening dragged along as much of the luggage of agricultural history as he could. The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) dallied in a dilettante way with the classical approach to agriculture, and I think that the best that we can say to him is, "rhubarb".

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) was supportive, for which I thank him.

Mr. Enright: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jack: Not until I have finished my little review. The hon. Gentleman has had his entertainment; it is now my turn.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) made some interesting points, which I shall discuss later, as did the hon. Members for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) and for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams).

I was interested in a press release that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East issued on 18 November 1994, in which he said:

"Security of tenure is essential for the family farm"—

as though that was a newly discovered truth, which had not dawned on the Conservative Benches for many a long year. I was surprised that neither he nor his hon. Friends mentioned the construction of the Bill in clauses 1, 5, 6, 7, 16, 23, 24 and 25, all of which concern various aspects of security that are central to the subject of agricultural tenancy.

Dr. Strang *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. If he wants to challenge me at the Dispatch Box, I shall be delighted to receive a specific challenge on those clauses.

Dr. Strang: I shall not intervene again, but I think that it is a question of terminology. The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) may agree with us. It is one thing to compensate the tenant for his improvements; in so far as the Bill ensures that, we support that. I have no doubt that we shall even try to make that stronger. However, when we talk about security of tenure in relation to agricultural tenancy legislation, we talk about tenure, and a minimum term was quoted.

There was a time when, as several hon. Members said, the National Farmers Union supported a minimum term. I am sure that the Minister understands the Bill, which proposes no minimum term, so when it becomes law someone could have a tenancy of three years or five years. We do not regard that as adequate security of tenure.

Mr. Jack: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman shows an inability to distinguish between the period of an agreement and the security embodied in that agreement. The Bill is drafted in terms of the definition of farm business tenancy: willing partners come together, in mutual interest, to define their rights and responsibilities, and to make very clear one with another the length of time that they agree that the tenancy should run. The Bill gives precise legal protection on the ending of the tenancy. Once agreed and signed, it is cast iron and copper-bottomed and provides excellent security of tenure. That is the whole basis and construction of the Bill.

Dr. Strang *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. If he thinks that, by nominating a number such as 15, he will bring more land on to the market, he and his hon. Friends are in for a rude shock.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare opened with a full-frontal attack on the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. He pointed out that, in his opinion, the hon. Gentleman was anti-landlord, and certainly a flavour of that emerged from what the hon. Gentleman said. My hon. Friend made some telling points about the cost of entry into farming. I received a letter from Barclays bank on the subject, part of which read:

"Having read the Bill through carefully and considered the implications for the bank's future approach to farm financing with my colleagues in Barclays, our opinion is that, should the Bill become law in its present form"—

it would seem that the bank supports the Bill's enactment—

"Barclays will continue to consider each application for farm finance on an individual, case by case basis."

The letter continues:

"We lend currently into situations ranging from lifetime tenancies to annual seasonal lets."

The bank showed an understanding of the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare and rebutted the claims made by the hon. Member for Carmarthen.

Mr. Alan W. Williams *rose—*

Mr. Jack: I shall not give way now.

It is important to understand that banks take into account the costs of going into farming. They understand the various problems that are faced, especially by new entrants.

I am glad that my hon. Friends have welcomed compensation mechanisms by agreement and the proper operation of the written agreement and notices, which are built into the framework of the proposed legislation.

Hon. Members have questioned information about land availability. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury dealt with the point when he referred to the excellent survey of its members by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. It is the institution's members who will determine the amount of additional land that will be available over five years. I have been asked by hon. Members when the extra land will come into the marketplace.

We have never claimed that the floodgates will open. We are merely saying that a more flexible farm business tenancy will reflect farming in the modern world. Opposition Members often talk about strengthening the rural economy. They should realise that without the flexibility of the farm business tenancy to combine agriculture with other forms of economic activity, it will be difficult for the countryside to live. How can enterprise be fostered without that flexibility? The Government understand the need for flexibility; it is regrettable that Opposition Members do not.

Compensation for milk and other forms of quota has been mentioned. As some of my hon. Friends have said, where additional quota has been bought during a tenancy it could be the subject of compensation arrangements with the landlord's permission. The rest of the quota would attach to the land. Sheep quota would move with the tenant. It is possible, as with all these detailed matters, for the landlord and tenant, in reaching an agreement, to define precisely where each party stands. That is an element of responsibility that the Government understand.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby spoke with authority and knowledge on behalf of the Church Commissioners, who are major landowners. Deprecating remarks were made by Opposition Members, who failed

[Mr. Jack]

to place due weight on my right hon. Friend's remarks. He made the telling point on behalf of the Commissioners, in welcoming the Bill, that it was a deregulatory and simplifying measure. My right hon. Friend also said—the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West failed to take up the point when he replied on behalf of the Opposition, as did the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East—that the Opposition had not clarified their intentions for the future of this proposed legislation. Tenant farmers, young farmers, the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union will all have taken note. I shall have more to say about that later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud spoke with knowledge and qualification. He went into important detail on repairs, for which tenants will be able to claim compensation for improvements with the landlord's consent.

On a number of other points I shall reply in detail in writing to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud, as the details are important. He covered the central issue of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors' code of practice, which will be very important in guiding people and in determining the nature of their tenancy agreement. That will be backed up by the professional information to which my hon. Friend adverted in his comments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud asked about compensation. Clauses 15, 16 and 17 adequately define compensation—not only the circumstances in which it can be claimed but the methodology that can be used to determine the amount payable. Arbitration mechanisms are available in statute to resolve disputes between landlord and tenant. I hope that my hon. Friend will find those clauses interesting reading, and I commend them to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough rightly said that the current law is too complex and that it has inhibited the availability of land for rent. Many of my hon. Friends, in excellent analyses of the history of tenanted land, pointed out that there has been a long-term decline in the amount of land available for rent. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West tried to suggest that we are arguing that the availability of land declined only between 1976 and the present. We agree that it had been declining, but I must point out that the amount of land available dropped between 1976 and the present by a further 10 per cent., so the legislation must take some responsibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough pointed out that there was widespread support for the Bill. I am amazed that the Opposition do not feel deeply uncomfortable about that widespread support. Nobody would ever claim that there was not some disagreement in certain parts.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): All of Wales.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman may say that, but I disagree.

We do not disagree that people will have sensible questions to ask about the Bill, which will no doubt be explored properly in Committee, but the Opposition must surely feel uncomfortable about our success in bringing together the powerful players whom I have mentioned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) who, sadly, is unable to be in his place, told us about the Evesham custom, which is no small matter in his constituency. I hope that my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to read the *Official Report*, because I want to reply in detail to the points that he made.

The Bill is not retrospective. I am advised that when a tenant passes on a tenancy, under the Evesham custom a new tenancy arises, although it is not treated as such for the purpose of the rent review provisions of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986. Any new tenancies after 1 September 1995 will be covered by the Bill. Thereafter, the tenant will not be able to claim compensation on improvements that he installs without the landlord's consent. That will not affect the legal position of the tenant's existing tenancy. The Evesham custom applies—as I understand it—only where the tenant has served notice that he is leaving, so the decision to a certain extent is in my hon. Friend's constituents' hands.

My hon. Friend fears that a tenant deciding to leave might have difficulty in finding a new tenant to reimburse him for his capital expenditure, but other options are open to him. One is for the tenant to remove his fixtures and buildings and relocate or sell them. Another is to suggest that the new tenant agrees suitable provisions with the landlord on how the matters are to be dealt with in the new farm business tenancy. These are complex matters, and I shall write in more detail to my hon. Friend. I hope that he understands that his principal concern about retrospection is not an issue about which his 420 constituents need to worry any longer.

The House will agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury was knowledgeable, thought-provoking and probing—all in one speech. I congratulate him on what he had to say. My hon. Friend is a qualified chartered surveyor. He presented the plight of young farmers and he referred to the problem, to which I adverted, of the amount of tenanted land drying up following the passage of the 1976 legislation. He also gave a critique of the Opposition's views about the marketplace.

In one document, the Opposition say that they are worried about the operation of the free market, but then Opposition Members say that they want what they describe as a "fair market rent". They cannot have their cake and eat it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury said in his speech.

My hon. Friend talked about clause 4 of the Bill—not the Labour party's clause IV, but our respectable clause 4—and he highlighted the fact that this key element of law stops retrospection. He knew that the Opposition were not prepared to give a similar commitment.

My hon. Friend specifically picked out clause 4(1)(d) and asked whether it could be simplified. I will examine that clause in Committee. He also referred to clause 37 as defining "agriculture". I disagree with him on that point: we believe that it is an adequate description but, as always, I will consider carefully what he said about industrial crops and biomass. On his point about downward rent review, if he studies the detail in the relevant clauses he will find that, once an arbitrator is involved, the arbitrator can review either up or down and the terms under which that occurs are defined clearly in the Bill.

My hon. Friend raised the difficult and complex question of privity and I am grateful to him for giving me prior notice of his intention to do so. I think that he described accurately the long-term consequences for the tenant of the first party in relation to any liabilities that might ensue vis-à-vis assignment. With foreknowledge of the issue, it may be possible to design the agreement to cater for such circumstances—although that may not become a reality in view of the current limited time scale.

I do not think that I can assuage my hon. Friend's concerns in that area. As he said, the Lord Chancellor's Department is examining the matter in the round. I believe that that very difficult problem should be dealt with in that way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury and other hon. Members discussed the various aspects of planning permission. My hon. Friend outlined a scenario whereby the landlord could be forced to pay a huge amount in compensation for planning permission without having consented to the application for planning permission. That nightmare scenario will not occur under the Bill. The refusal of consent for planning permission cannot be referred to arbitration under clause 18. The Bill deals with planning permission carefully and it ensures that, if gain is made by the tenant, proper compensation is available, subject to the landlord's consent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, in an excellent review of the remarks of hon. Members on both sides of the House, asked about the nature of the farm business tenancy. I think that he was confused about the various briefings that he received on the subject. The Bill provides more scope for the types of non-agricultural business that can be developed during the lifetime of the tenancy.

Initially, the tenancy must predominantly involve agricultural activity, but if the tenant develops a new business within the curtilage of the holding it will not obstruct the tenancy agreement that has been signed. The early clauses of the Bill deal with that subject very clearly. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support for the Bill because he speaks from a practical and a knowledgeable base.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West made a wide-ranging speech, finally homing in on the heart of the matter. He welcomed the Bill's provisions for compensation. I will consider the Bill's approach to tenant right, which was mentioned by a number of my hon. Friends. That is a tricky subject but it can be covered by the terms of the tenancy agreement. There is an element of responsibility on the parties concerned to identify matters important to them and to specify them in the agreement.

It would be churlish to spend all my time commenting on Conservative Members' excellent speeches and not remark on others. The hon. Member for Hemsworth, an expert on rhubarb and classics, entertained the House with an interesting speech.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister give way on the subject of rhubarb?

Mr. Jack: No. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has already given the House her views on that subject.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth mentioned British Coal. My right hon. Friend the Minister had discussions about that matter with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. British Coal has written to the remaining tenants who have expressed interest. That matter is primarily for British Coal and the Department of Trade and Industry. We are closely monitoring the position and understand the sensitivity surrounding that matter. I hope that the hon. Gentleman takes some comfort from that response.

Mr. Enright: And allotments?

Mr. Jack: As someone who also digs on an allotment every weekend, I appreciate the importance of allotments. We will carefully monitor those points.

Mr. Waldegrave: Is there any rhubarb on my hon. Friend's allotment?

Mr. Jack: Yes, a little—and, stewed at home, it is very nice.

Mr. Enright: Is it forced rhubarb?

Mr. Jack: No, it grows naturally in Lancashire. What they do in Yorkshire is their business.

I welcome the support of the hon. Member for North Cornwall. Unlike some Liberals, he has not changed his mind since 7 December 1993, when he put on record his support for the measure. We must be charitable occasionally when we receive support. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman commented on the tax situation, which was a triumph of negotiation by my right hon. Friend, in responding to the genuine concerns expressed by farmers and landowners. It was important to ensure no fiscal barrier to more land becoming available.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who intervened briefly, cannot have his cake and eat it. The Bill is not about forcing county councils to sell smallholdings, although several of my hon. Friends advanced extremely good suggestions for ways in which councils could make use of those assets.

The Bill will cover all forms of farm business tenancy from the beginning of September. I hope that answers the hon. and learned Gentleman's point. He commented also on the RICS survey, which indicated the source of additional land. I welcome his analysis, and we will examine his point about tenant right. He also attacked Labour's attitude to that issue, which shows unanimity across the House. We want to know more of Labour's thoughts about that matter. It is possible that some of the concerns listed by the hon. and learned Gentleman could be dealt with in the tenancy agreement.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy—

Mr. Foulkes: Pardon?

Mr. Jack: At least I made an attempt to pronounce the hon. Gentleman's constituency, which is more than the mutterings from the Labour Front Bench suggested.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy spoke about planning issues. Where consent for improvements has been given by the landlord, it is possible for compensation to be paid to the tenant. If the landlord refuses consent, the tenant can refer the matter to arbitration. Clearly, there may be important issues of planning that reflect the tenant's own thoughts about developing the holding. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Bill, where those matters are dealt with in considerable detail.

[Mr. Jack]

The hon. Member for Lancashire, West and I share at least one thing—we both know Mr. Heyes of Mossborough hall. The hon. Gentleman knows him as a constituent; I know him from my former incarnation in the horticulture business and have done business with him. He is an excellent salad and vegetable grower. I, too, have spoken to Mr. Heyes, whose enthusiasm for criticising the Bill has perhaps matured with time. My noble Friend Earl Howe, the Parliamentary Secretary in another place, and I had a meeting with him, at which we listened carefully to what he had to say.

The hon. Member for Lancashire, West mentioned the security of tenure. I refer him to clauses 1, 5, 6, 7, 16, 23, 24 and 25, all of which lock together a security of tenure once the landlord and the tenant have reached an agreement and which offer very good protection not afforded by many of the existing arrangements.

I think that I have already dealt with the point made by the hon. Member for Carmarthen.

I now deal with some of the substantive comments made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. When I looked at the Opposition's approach to the matter, I could not believe my eyes. I read the document, "Encouraging new entrants into farming". I thought that it would be a voyage of discovery. Would there be some new truth in it that I had missed? I turned to the first page. One of its headings is, "Background". Then, "The Tory Response". It talks about "their"—the Tory—"plan". Clearly, Labour had not heard that the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union, tenant farmers, young farmers and many others had helped to write the Bill.

I continued reading this illuminating document. The next thing that I found was, "Land Tenure Legislation at Present"—a sort of description. I thought that it would be a brief summary, but, no, it runs on for the next two pages—I am still nowhere nearer understanding what the great plan is. I finally got to, "The Labour Party's Tenancy Reform Strategy", followed by "Structural Support for New Farmers". We have heard much this evening about retirement plans. Where will the money come from? As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said, the shadow Chancellor has not given him any right to spend anything, so any claims that the hon. Gentleman makes on that are as nothing.

The first part of the document talks about compensation. Where is the money to come from? It is yet another false agenda from the Labour party. The next part of the great document deals with quotas. The Labour party wishes to take away from those who have and create some pool of new quota. That is not supported within farming. I went through the rest of the document: rent, European aid, county council aid—I am still searching for the great Labour plan, but nowhere can I find it. What it eventually says is:

"the 1986 Act would be reformed and simplified".

I think that I am getting nearer the holy grail, but where is the detail of the reform, the simplification, the improvement, the factors that will attract new, young blood into agriculture? I have waited for hours this evening to hear the answers to those questions and we still have not heard them. All we have heard is a tatty, second-hand critique of the existing situation, which is the Labour party's own legislation.

The present arrangements do not serve farming well, as Marie Skinner said in an article entitled "Talking Point", in the NFU magazine. She said:

"Landowners cannot be forced to rent out land. They can be encouraged to do so".

She also said:

"There is a widely held misconception that security is vital if land is to be farmed well. However, the opposite is probably true. Too much security in an industry creates complacency and mediocrity."

We have heard complacency and mediocrity from Opposition Members; I commend that article to them.

As we reach the end of a thoughtful and well-argued debate, I am struck by the fact that members of the so-called new Labour party—the modernisers—are behaving like Luddites. Young people who want to hang on to the dream of going into farming need the support of Conservative Members: they are not getting it from Labour.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 177, Noes 129.

Division No. 64] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chidgey, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Ellelson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*

Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Maddock, Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sykes, John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Cleland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffd, Hl)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Joe Benton

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

EDUCATION

Ordered,

That Dr Robert Spink be discharged from the Education Committee and Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Ordered,

That Mr. Bruce Grocott be discharged from the National Heritage Committee and Mr. Roland Boyes be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

M1

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I am extremely grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for granting this debate. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads, who is to reply to the debate, and to his various predecessors since 1989 who have had to succumb to the blandishments of myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Sir G. Bright), who wishes to be associated with my remarks tonight. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, since the announcement in the White Paper of November 1989 that consideration would be given to widening the M1 between junctions 10 and 12, a shadow has been placed over the people who live in and around that part of my constituency and, especially, over those who are affected by the motorway. Some, of course, have lost their homes because the intended route will go through them. Some will lose parts of their gardens, with, in some cases, the motorway coming much closer to their homes. The majority will be affected not just by the increased traffic on the motorway, but by construction work in the area.

My hon. Friend will know that, since that time, numerous public meetings have taken place and numerous representations have been made to me, not just by people in the Luton area, but by those outside it as well. I shall confine my remarks to people in the borough of Luton. A responsible action group, under Mr. John Neal, has been set up. Throughout this longish period of more than five years, those people have worked closely with me. I hope that I have worked closely with my hon. Friend and with the Highways Agency, which has been co-operative in its dealings with my constituents and me.

Obviously, I have made numerous personal visits. Only last week, I visited some the homes of about a dozen constituents who are affected. It has been the dominant topic in that area for some time because, as I think even you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might realise, living close to a motorway of this intensity, and as busy as this one, makes life somewhat unpleasant from time to time.

The motorway carries about 120,000 vehicles per day on its three lanes on either side. Some of the residents affected were in their homes before the motorway was built. It opened in 1959 to a mere trickle of traffic. Just one or two cars are seen in some of the early photographs. Even at that time, no one envisaged that it would carry the traffic that it carries today, and that it is envisaged to carry later this season and into the next.

My constituents and their predecessors have been extremely tolerant of the terrible nuisance with which they have been afflicted. The amount of traffic has increased. There have been problems with noise and nuisance, the surrounding traffic going in and out of the motorway, accidents and pollution, and all the other factors that are associated with living near to what was for many years, and what probably still is, the major arterial road in our country. They have been extremely tolerant and, in many cases, badly compensated for what they have suffered.

Throughout all those problems, and throughout the discussions that we have had since the White Paper first envisaged the road, the agency has been extremely co-operative. I would be happy if my hon. Friend would pass on my best wishes and thanks to the agency for what it has done, with the obvious caveat that it will keep up the good work, and be even more tolerant and co-operative in the next few months and years.

I should like to bring three small items to my hon. Friend's attention. I hope that he will answer them this evening or at a later date. The first relates to the timetable of events. Virtually 100 per cent. of the constituents affected accept that the road will go ahead and be built. We know that money has been put on one side for it. It has escaped all the savings that the Government will make on their roads programme expenditure.

After some five years of discussion, those people want things to move on as quickly as possible. As my hon. Friend knows, the public consultation exercise will finish on 17 March, just over a month away. I shall be interested to know what sort of reaction he has had to that exercise.

It is fairly obvious that there will be a public inquiry, but it would not be right for my hon. Friend the Minister to comment on that inquiry or its outcome. I warn those listening outside who represent pressure groups which, understandably, take the view that the road is not necessary, that the money could be better spent elsewhere and that construction is environmentally unfriendly, to be sensible when giving evidence to the inquiry so as not to cause any further delay.

Many of my constituents are elderly and have been in their homes for many years. That is especially true of those whom I visited recently, some of whom are in their late 70s and 80s or even in their 90s. To delay the road for another few years because of arguments about the route or whether it should be built at all would be unfair to them. In all the years that I have been involved in this debate, only a handful have believed that the road could be stopped. I am not saying that they want the road to be built, but the majority may now realise that it could perhaps be of some benefit to them. I should be grateful if the Minister could outline a more precise timetable; my constituents would certainly be happier.

The project is running some six months late and, as we know, such things often tend to slip but it is important that my constituents have as firm an idea as my hon. Friend can give about the timetable so that they can plan their lives. Some, knowing that compensation could be forthcoming—mainly on blight notices—have not yet approached the Highways Agency. However, I have urged them to do so as quickly as possible. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to give some idea of the future programme.

The second and very important issue is the basis on which any compensation will be made. I know that this is going to be a thorny subject among the individuals affected, the local valuation officer and the Highways Agency. It would not be fitting for me, and certainly not for my hon. Friend, to enter into any financial negotiations or to talk about figures with individuals. I would not expect him to do so and, as he knows, I have never asked that he should.

There is an anomaly involving those who have been living beside the motorway since before 1959, who are known as the forgotten people. There are only a few and they are, by definition, elderly and do not want to move. It is extraordinary that because they are in what I call the pre-1959 position, the compensation that they have received—bearing in mind how busy the road is now—

has been minimal. It has been nothing more than a bit of secondary glazing from the local council and possibly an easement of what used to be known as their rates.

My hon. Friend will be familiar with the noise insulation regulations introduced in 1975, but my constituents have been left behind. I confess that I do not have high hopes of his reply, but those people must be taken into account. It is intolerable that people who bought their homes all those years ago will not get the compensation that those who moved in later will get because noise can now be measured and has increased. It sounds complicated, but the Minister knows exactly what I mean and I am sure that he is familiar with those regulations. I ask him with some passion to consider my comments and see whether some assistance can be offered.

Some people might get compensation because of a very recent judgment made, I believe, in the House of Lords on compensation offered for the depreciation of property between junctions 9 and 10, a section of the motorway that is now almost complete. I realise that this is hot off the press, but my constituents are asking, rightly, whether my hon. Friend can say whether the judgment will make any difference to them. Some letters from the Highways Agency appear to hint that it could. If that is the case, I hope that my hon. Friend can clarify whether the judgment made in that case could affect my constituents. If money is available, I am anxious for them to get every bit of compensation possible because, by heaven, they deserve it for living next to that road.

The third point, which is as important as any point that I wish to bring to my hon. Friend's attention, is the problem of noise and nuisance which inevitably goes with motorways. My hon. Friend has done his homework, so he will know that, right at the start, I pleaded that the noise barriers should be the most up to date. I appreciate that modern technology is improving sound barriers all the time, whether earth barriers, fence barriers or natural barriers. I do not want my hon. Friend to tell me tonight exactly what sort of barriers there will be and then to find myself standing here in two years' time, God and the electorate of Luton willing, saying to my hon. Friend, who will probably be in the Cabinet by then, or to his successor, that we asked for the most up-to-date barriers. It is important that work continues on that side so that when the road is built, we can say firmly that the barriers are the best available on an almost no-expense-spared basis. In a project of £400 million, a few extra million pounds spent on barriers for the comfort of my constituents is essential.

If there is any opportunity within the logistics of building the road for some of the barriers to be in place while the construction work is going on, that must be done. I know that my hon. Friend has made promises and I respect them. It is, however, essential that while the work is going on, the noise and nuisance are kept to a minimum. Ironically, the noise from the construction work, some of which will go on into the night—my residents appreciate that because they want the job done quickly—will be worse than the noise generated by the motorway and will be almost incessant. We must have further reassurances that where possible—I admit that with earth barriers it may not be possible—some form of sound insulation will be provided while the work takes place. When it is completed, the noise barriers must be the most up to date.

The surface of the road should, again, be the most up to date and the quietest. I appreciate that this will be a matter of cost to an extent. Having said that, now that we can develop what is called whispering concrete—that sounds almost like a pop group, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I assure you that it is a form of tarmacadam—the noise will be lessened. Some 70 per cent. of the noise from motorways comes from tyres. Everything that we can do, therefore, to ensure that the surface of the road is the quietest possible, with the most up-to-date technology, will help. I hope that my hon. Friend may be able to give me some help on that point. The noise from the tyres is excessive, especially in the summer months when people sit outside in conditions that many of us who are fortunate enough to live away from roads can never really understand—unless we suffer them while visiting people who live bang beside motorways. A quiet surface is essential.

I am glad that the predictions for noise in the majority of the area about which we are talking—we are all hanging on a string on this one—are that the level of noise could go down slightly. We are grateful for that and it will be of some comfort to my constituents. If we can get the noise level down even further by laying the right road surface, I hope that such a surface will be used.

I hope that my hon. Friend will bring some comfort to my beleaguered constituents; I feel strongly about the matter. It is no fun living next to a major road with 120,000 vehicles a day going by virtually 24 hours a day. It is certainly no fun not to be able to sit in the garden in the summer or not to be able to open the windows. It is no fun hardly to be able to have a normal conversation in one's own home, let alone outside one's home, as happens in some cases. That is why I hope that my hon. Friend will bring them some comfort this evening.

Secondly, I hope that the compensation that my hon. Friend offers, and continues to offer, to my constituents, either through his Department or elsewhere, will be more than adequate. It must be some sort of comfort, especially for the older generation who do not want to move from their houses, and it can give them some financial relief for the burden that many of them have suffered for about 40 years.

Thirdly, if it is within his power—it is, to a certain extent—my hon. Friend must speed up the process as much as he can. If he can give me some comfort tonight, he will certainly have the gratitude of my constituents. I make no apology—this subject will not go away until the road is completed. Indeed, once the road has been built, there will undoubtedly be compensation claims for the noise levels. The quicker the process and the greater the compensation, the happier my constituents in that unfortunate area will be.

10.30 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) on securing this debate and on his assiduous advocacy of the concerns of his constituents. There is certainly no need for any apology for continuing to bring those concerns to my attention, and that of the Highways Agency and of the House. I also thank him for his generous comments about the agency and its staff, which will be greatly appreciated.

[Mr. John Watts]

I welcome the opportunity to discuss a number of important issues associated with the proposed widening of the M1 between junctions 10 and 15 and to tell the House of progress made by the Highways Agency, which handles the scheme on our behalf. My hon. Friend raised issues that concern people who live near the motorway and those who feel strongly about transport and its impact upon their environment. He set out his concerns clearly and thoroughly.

As my hon. Friend reminded us, since it was built in the late 1950s, the M1 has become a heavily used strategic motorway route, linking London, the midlands and the north. In recent years, traffic flows have increased considerably and, between junction 10 and junction 15, the M1 carries flows of between 92,000 and 121,000 vehicles per day on different sections. Congestion occurs regularly, especially during peak periods or when there are accidents or incidents.

Traffic is expected to continue growing, increasing congestion and making driving conditions on the motorway intolerable. If that is not dealt with, drivers will be tempted to divert to local roads, bringing more pollution and noise into local communities. That is particularly true of my hon. Friend's constituency, as he and his constituents know only too well.

Long queues develop at peak times, especially near junctions. Widening is needed to relieve existing congestion and, for that reason, is one of the Highways Agency's priority 1 schemes.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 19 December that we are refocusing the roads programme to concentrate more on the improvement of the existing network, rather than on entirely new routes. The scheme for widening the M1 between junctions 10 and 12 is entirely in line with that philosophy.

Proposals to widen the M1 between junctions 10 and 12, and on to 15, will bring substantial economic and safety benefits to road users. The widening will reduce the cost that congestion imposes on industry, reduce accidents, save time for road users and reduce urban congestion. By easing congestion, air quality will also improve, as traffic that is moving freely produces less harmful emissions than stop-start traffic.

The Highways Agency also examines carefully the environmental impact of schemes and the measures needed to mitigate that impact. A considerable advantage in building on the existing network is that it limits intrusion. That is no reason why those living alongside existing routes should suffer from that policy. It is therefore very much our aim to improve the environmental context and level of protection, wherever possible. That is illustrated by this scheme.

The widening solution uses a mixture of parallel widening, asymmetrical widening and symmetrical widening. The parallel and asymmetric techniques enable us to move the motorway further away from existing communities, with the benefits that that brings. The alignment through the southern part of Luton, in my hon. Friend's constituency, is an example and there are others further north within the scheme. The parallel technique also enables widening to take place with minimal interference to traffic during construction. Noise levels will naturally fall where the motorway is moved away from properties, but we shall take other specific measures, including contouring and landscaping, for more general environmental protection.

We are all too aware that existing traffic noise next to the motorway is generally very high. For most properties in Luton, existing noise levels fall in the range of 58 to 78 decibels, although for some properties levels are higher. The area around junction 11, Dunstable road, is very noisy where the motorway is elevated and traffic is heavy.

The proposed widening includes extensive environmental protection: noise barriers are proposed throughout the built-up areas and at other sensitive locations along the route. In Luton, barrier heights will vary between 9.5 ft and 16.5 ft, depending on the local situation. The use of the best acoustically absorbent barriers where appropriate and justified will reduce reflected noise and offer significant benefits in the urban area. As they cost between two or three times the price of standard reflective barriers, we must be satisfied that the benefits are commensurate with the additional cost of using them.

The overall aim is significantly to reduce existing traffic noise for people living near the motorway. Once statutory procedures are complete, and given the availability of funds, noise mitigation provisions that can be put into place before the remainder of the scheme is complete will be installed so that their benefits may be felt as soon as possible. For many properties, noise will be immediately reduced and our calculations show that, 15 years after widening has been completed, noise levels will still be significantly lower or no higher than now for some 2,350 properties in Luton close to the motorway. Over 100 properties in Luton will qualify for noise insulation from either traffic or construction noise, to which my hon. Friend referred in particular. The Highways Agency will approach those concerned in due course to arrange that.

My hon. Friend referred to the proposals' blighting effect on some of his constituents' ability to sell their property. So far, the agency has bought 41 properties in my hon. Friend's constituency under the statutory blight legislation, where land will be needed for the scheme. It has also used the Secretary of State's discretionary powers to acquire a further eight properties and has, unfortunately, had to turn down 17 other requests for purchase. It will look at 11 of those again in the light of the Court of Appeal judgment in the case of Lieutenant Colonel Owen, to which my hon. Friend referred. New guidelines are being prepared urgently to reflect the implications of that judgment, and anyone who believes himself eligible under the new guidelines will be free to reapply and have his case reconsidered.

My hon. Friend made a strong case for the "forgotten few"—those living in the area before the motorway was first built. I am sorry to disappoint him with regard to that small number of residents whose residence predates the opening of the motorway. Unfortunately, legislation does not provide for compensation in respect of existing noise nuisance. It provides only for compensation for noise arising from the widening proposals if it increases noise by at least 1 decibel to more than 68 decibels. Primary legislation would be necessary to provide relief for that group of residents, and I do not hold out the hope that such legislation will be forthcoming.

As with all our schemes, our procedures will provide a wide range of opportunities for those affected to contribute to the debate and raise their concerns. Public consultation exhibitions were held at local venues in November 1992. Individual members of the public and representative bodies took great interest in the proposals and made a number of suggestions and requests. In the light of local people's views and concerns, the proposals published by the agency last November included improved noise mitigation measures and further development of the design of the junctions to ease access for traffic and reduce the environmental impact.

As my hon. Friend said, the opportunity for people to make representations about the environmental statement or to object to the draft orders does not expire until 17 March. The next stage is likely to be a public inquiry held before an independent inspector. The timing of that will depend on the issues that arise from that objection period.

However, I can assure my hon. Friend that there will be no undue delay on our part in taking that important scheme forward to a public inquiry. Following the inquiry, a decision would not be taken on the way forward until my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment had considered the inspector's report and the objections that had been raised.

I am afraid that I cannot give any more definite idea of timing, because so many matters, especially the length of time that the inquiry will take, are not under our control.

That scheme is important, affecting one of our most important motorways. We are taking account of the various events that bear on the road programme, but schemes such as that must continue to be developed. In doing so, we and the Highways Agency will be at pains to ensure that we redress the sufferings of individuals for the general good when we can, either by the design of the scheme or by the various means of compensation. If they are still not satisfied, it will be open to them to express their opinions to us in writing or by seeking to appear at the expected public inquiry.

My hon. Friend referred to road surfaces. Porous asphalt is often advocated to reduce surface noise, but in its current form it would have inadequate wearing characteristics for the volume of traffic that uses the motorway. The increased maintenance costs and the delays and disruption that frequent maintenance would lead to would, in such circumstances, make it economically unviable. However, as my hon. Friend will appreciate, development of materials may have improved the strength of noise-reducing surfaces sufficiently before the decision about the type of surface needs to be taken, and we shall keep the position under review so that if there are stronger, lower-noise materials available to us, we shall certainly give careful consideration to using them.

My hon. Friend referred to whisper concrete. We are testing the use of whisper concrete on the M18 between junctions 5 and 6, and the preliminary results appear promising. I have seen an experiment on a new stretch of bypass in Derbyshire, where whisper concrete is also being applied.

I have listened carefully to all the arguments made so well by my hon. Friend, and those arguments will be considered in greater detail by the Highways Agency. I hope that I have been able to give him some of the assurances that he and his constituents have sought, and I am sorry that I have not been able to offer him all the assurances that they would have wished to hear from me.

However, my hon. Friend can be assured that, in proceeding with that important scheme, we shall take the fullest account of any measures that we can use to mitigate its impact on those who have to live near the M1 through Luton.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 7 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

1. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for reducing the number of unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Portillo): The Government will continue to control inflation and Government spending and borrowing. Those policies have reduced unemployment by 558,000 since December 1992 to a level almost 2 percentage points below the European Community average.

Mr. Mullin: Has the Secretary of State noticed that, despite all the rhetoric, the level of public spending is the same as the level that his Government inherited from the Labour Government in 1979 and that his party is now the party of high taxation? Might not that be because it is extremely expensive to maintain the best part of 3 million people who are permanently out of work? Does he now regret advocating policies which have led to mass unemployment?

Mr. Portillo: I am an advocate of policies that will lead to mass employment. Keeping inflation low and keeping control of public spending and public borrowing are the way to ensure that employment is created in this country. The hon. Gentleman has created a reputation for himself as a seeker after truth and justice, but when he speaks in the House on unemployment he is a propagandist and seeks to distort. His party is in favour of higher taxation and higher spending and, therefore, it is in favour of higher unemployment.

Sir Ralph Howell: While welcoming the fact that unemployment is falling, is that not partly due to the trend for one regular full-time job to be turned into two part-time jobs? Should we not cease to deceive ourselves that unemployment is falling in the long term when in fact it is 65 per cent. higher than it was four years ago?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend should look at the figures that we published last month, which showed an increase over the past year of 221,000 full-time jobs and only 83,000 part-time jobs. My hon. Friend is too careful a student of the figures to fall in with the propaganda put out by the Labour party, which despises part-time employment even though such employment is often the ladder to full-time employment and also the way in which many people wish to structure their working lives. Even if my hon. Friend had fallen in with that propaganda, the most recent figures show that the number of full-time jobs is rising faster and that they are more numerous than part-time jobs.

Mr. Chidgey: Will the Minister confirm that unemployment among ethnic minority groups is running at more than three times the national average? What action is his Department taking to compile evidence of racial discrimination in employment and what measures is the Secretary of State planning to eradicate the imbalance in the unemployment figures?

Mr. Portillo: A series of questions answered recently by, I believe, my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) drew attention to worrying levels of unemployment among ethnic minorities, which is indeed a problem. My Department tries to address its policies and to approach its client group so that opportunities for those facing discrimination of any sort—including, for example, older workers and those who have been long-term unemployed—are maximised. We shall continue to tailor our measures to provide the most effective help for all sorts of people and for those facing any prejudice, to improve the working of the labour market and to help those people to improve their employability.

Mr. Merchant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a proper understanding of the employment situation requires examination of not only the very welcome fall in unemployment, but the increase in the number of people in jobs? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that an increase in that latter figure is correct?

Mr. Portillo: Yes. For some time the Opposition used to take heart—I use that phrase because they like to look for bad news—from the fact that although the number of people employed was clearly rising, according to the labour force survey, which was the internationally agreed standard, at the same time there was a reduction for several quarters according to the other survey, the work force and employment survey. Now both measures have come into line and both surveys say that there has been an increase in the number of people in work, and also a substantial increase in the number of self-employed. Unemployment is falling, and employment and self-employment are rising, so there is no bad news left for the Opposition: the only conclusion to be drawn is that the economy is doing well under the policies pursued by the Government.

Ms Harman: Will the Secretary of State admit that there has indeed been bad news today for the 2,900 Rumbelows staff who have learnt that they are to lose their jobs? What has he to say to them? Will he recognise that there will be no feelgood factor so long as everyone at work in this country feels that his or her job is under threat? Does not the right hon. Gentleman's complacency, which he has demonstrated yet again today, simply remind everyone that the Government are out of touch and do not care?

Mr. Portillo: I have recently read some articles on the national minimum wage written by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) which made me believe that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) had been replaced on the Front Bench. I welcome her back to her place with great relief. However,

in all the time that she and I have had dealings I have not felt that statistics were her strong point. Today she has demonstrated again that she will grasp at any piece of bad news that she possibly can. Why did she not tell us that B and Q has today announced more than 2,300 more jobs? Why does she talk only about jobs that have been lost and not about jobs that have been created? It is because she is interested only in creating gloom and in scoring political points; she is not interested in the British economy or in the plight of the unemployed. Why does she not take the opportunity to correct the false impression that she gives and acknowledge that when jobs are lost in some companies they are created in others, and that 226,000 extra jobs have been created over the past year? That is the fact of the matter, and that is what she should be talking about.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to read this year's *Barclays Business News*, which states that last year a net figure of more than 24,000 new small businesses were started? Does he agree with me that—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) would listen, he might hear something worth listening to. Does my right hon. Friend agree that with more than 2.6 million small businesses in this country we need to encourage those enterprises and that the last thing that we want to do is heap non-wage costs on them, as the Labour party would do? Would that not destroy jobs?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend speaks good sense, but I am afraid that he is wasting his time speaking good sense to the Labour party, which is not interested in small businesses, in enterprise culture or in creating jobs in the real world. The Labour party is interested only in propaganda and point scoring. The proof of that, as my hon. Friend says, is the fact that Labour policies for the future are to sign up to the social chapter and destroy jobs in this country, to impose costs on employers and to disregard the warning given by Mercedes-Benz this week that it would have to move jobs out of Europe because of the social chapter. The Labour party wants to move us into the social chapter so that jobs will be destroyed in Britain, too.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Before we make further progress, I must tell hon. Members that I hope that we shall be able to make more progress. The first question has taken almost 10 minutes.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I ask Back Benchers and Ministers to be brisk in their questions and their responses. Otherwise it is most unfair to Members whose questions are further down the Order Paper. I want to see better progress made in future.

Disability Discrimination Bill

2. Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from (a) the Confederation of British Industry and (b) the Employers Forum on Disability about proposals in the Disability Discrimination Bill to exclude firms with fewer than 20 employees from its anti-discrimination provisions.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): Both organisations were among the 39 employer associations which responded, 36 of which did not oppose the exemption.

Mr. Corbett: Have not both the CBI and the Employers Forum on Disability said that it would be wrong to exempt firms with fewer than 20 employees from the measures proposed in the Disability Discrimination Bill? Those organisations include 96 out of every 100 companies and represent 37 out of every 100 people at work. Why is the Minister so far apart from employers, and even further apart from the 6.5 million people with disabilities and their carers?

Mr. Paice: We always listen to what the CBI says, although not to the exclusion of everybody else. The simple fact is that out of the 39 employer associations and organisations which responded, 36 did not oppose the exemption. That is a massive majority, and we should take note of it. It is interesting that of the employers themselves—as opposed to employer associations or organisations—again, the vast majority did not oppose the exemption, which was clearly spelt out in the consultative document.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that at present employers with 20 or fewer employees are excluded from the legislation and that it is therefore perfectly sensible that that should continue? Does he further agree that we should build the new procedures on a sensible and practical basis rather than trying to sweep everything in together?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is right. The present quota system excludes firms with fewer than 20 employees, which is why we used the same figure in the Bill now being discussed in Standing Committee. My hon. Friend also rightly emphasises that we must be concerned about the overall effects of the proposals on small businesses, which do not necessarily have the resources to be able to study, follow and implement all the minutiae of the legislation. That is why Governments of all persuasions have always given favourable encouragement to small businesses.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister take some comfort from the fact that the CBI and the Employers Forum on Disability have taken a positive attitude to the proposed legislation which may encourage the Government to go further down the road?

Mr. Paice: We are encouraged by the fact that the vast majority of organisations which responded to the consultative document did so positively in regard to the general approach of our proposals. Obviously there was a vast range of different opinions on different aspects of a comprehensive piece of legislation, and those are currently being addressed in the Standing Committee.

Long-term Unemployment

3. Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest available figures for

unemployed men in the Liverpool travel-to-work area who have either (a) been unemployed for more than five years or (b) never been employed at all.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): In October 1994, there were 5,658 men in the Liverpool travel-to-work area who had been claimant unemployed for five years or more. Information is not available on the employment history of unemployed claimants.

Mrs. Kennedy: That is an example of how figures are used in an attempt to disguise the seriousness of the problem facing Liverpool. The 1991 census return showed that 44 per cent. of men in the Liverpool district had either not worked for five years, or had not worked at all, but all we get from the Government are measures designed to disguise the fact that they massage the figures. When will the Minister bring forward measures to bring jobs to Liverpool? That is what the people whom I represent are interested in.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am interested that the hon. Lady says that the Government massage the figures. I have a press release from the TUC which calls the labour force survey on unemployment figures "fully reliable". However, the LFS unemployment total is almost exactly the same as the claimant count, which blows a hole in the Opposition's claim that the claimant count is fiddled.

Mr. John Marshall: Would my hon. Friend expect employment in Liverpool to benefit from the introduction of a national minimum wage or the adoption of a social chapter? Is it not absurd that those who complain about unemployment would introduce measures which would increase the level of unemployment?

Mr. Oppenheim: During the 1970s, unemployment in Liverpool rose faster than it has under this Government, and unemployment in the constituency of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) has fallen by 10 per cent in the past year; long-term unemployment is less than half of its 1986 peak, while overall unemployment is more than 34 per cent. down on the 1986 peak. We now have a better record on jobs than the rest of the EC, in contrast to the situation in the 1970s when we were bottom of the EC league table on unemployment.

Jobseekers

4. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will publish guidelines on the requirements for behaviour and presentation of individuals seeking work as described in clause 6(3)(b) of the Jobseekers Bill.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): We shall in due course bring forward regulations under this clause. Each case will be decided on its own merits by independent adjudication officers. The Chief Adjudication Officer, in accordance with his statutory duty, will give them advice and guidance on applying the law.

Ms Jackson: Will ex-Ministers, who the Government insist must be allowed to take jobs in companies with which they had dealings while in office, be subject to those behavioural and appearance tests? Was the chief executive of PowerGen, Mr. Wallace, subject to a critical appraisal of his appearance before the Government handed him £1.2 million in the form of tax-free share options? Is not that squalid requirement of a mean-spirited and mean-minded little Bill yet a further example of a Government committed to preserving the privileges of the few while destroying the rights of the majority?

Miss Widdecombe: I am sure that the hon. Lady has never sought to be judged on her appearance in any profession that she has undertaken in the past. If people have jobs, at whatever level, they have clearly satisfied their potential employers in terms of appearance, ability and everything else. The hon. Lady's question is therefore wholly inappropriate.

Training

5. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about training provision for young people with special needs.

Mr. Paice: The Government are committed to ensuring that training opportunities are appropriate for all young people, including those with special needs.

Mrs. Roche: Does the Minister agree that that reply is totally inadequate when one considers training schemes for young people with special needs? The Harington scheme in my constituency, for example, which has been widely praised by many, including Ministers at the Department, has to struggle year in and year out because its budget is not ring fenced by the training and enterprise council. Is it not time that its budget was ring fenced so that it did not have to rely on a surplus from the TEC? Is it not time that the fine words of his Department were matched by action?

Mr. Paice: Madam Speaker, I listened to your exhortation for short answers. Had I taken longer on the first one, I could have told the hon. Lady about everything that we are doing for young people with special needs. I could have told her about all the additional financial help available through a number of routes. The training and enterprise council may provide separate enhancement payments for those with special needs. My Department may provide extra funds, and we do so in many cases. Most important, there are special arrangements to pay for low achievement outcomes, in terms of word power and number power, for special needs trainees. I could have told the hon. Lady about the funding pilot scheme now run by the north London TEC showing that the starts and outcomes—based youth training programme includes a commitment to pay premiums for special needs trainees. A range of measures is in place. The hon. Lady is right to identify a group of trainees who need special help, and they are getting it from the Government.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend recognise the considerable contribution of charities in that area of training? Will he look carefully at the arrangements being made between TECs and charities? In the longer term, will he consider splitting the training of those who present particular difficulties from the rest of the responsibilities of TECs, which in many cases would be better employed raising the general prosperity of their area?

Mr. Paice: We recognise the specific and important role that charities play and we have looked recently at how we can assist them in that. We considered the idea

of some sort of standardised contract and we are talking to the TEC national council about how charities can be helped in that respect. However, I am not keen on the idea of separating those with special needs as it is a cross-party belief that overall integration into mainstream training and education is, wherever possible, the best way to help those with special needs.

Mr. Barron: Will not special needs trainees, many of whom need longer periods in training to achieve a successful outcome, be seen as too great a risk—some providers already regard them as such—because the Government's payment by results scheme has forced them to cut corners? When will the Minister take the right action and ensure that those with special needs are treated properly, rather than in the charitable way that he described in answer to an earlier question?

Mr. Paice: We recognise that those with special needs must have particular attention paid to their needs. If the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) had done his homework, he would have discovered that in the training for work programme, which goes national with a payment by results system on 1 April, we have specifically ring fenced the number of starts for those with special needs. We are paying substantial premiums for their achievements so that if they are unable, understandably, to get the higher levels of national vocational qualifications they will receive massive premiums for achieving lower NVQs than would be the case for mainstream trainees. Our action is right and proper. On the youth training programme for special needs trainees in the younger age group, we shall be looking at similar measures as we move that programme towards a starts and outcomes funding system at some stage in the future.

Mr. Barron *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but he does not know what he is talking about. The simple fact is that we do not have starts and outcomes in the YT scheme, other than in pilot programmes. As I said to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), special arrangements operate in those pilot programmes to protect those with special needs and to provide extra premiums.

Mr. Evennett: Will my hon. Friend confirm that training for young people today, irrespective of whether they have special needs, is better than it has ever been in our history? Does he also agree that it is extremely encouraging to note the number of 16 and 17-year-olds who are in full-time education or training?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend properly identifies the tremendous improvement in staying-on rates. That is a tribute to all that the Government have done to improve the range of opportunities for young people. For instance, the development of general national vocational qualifications to provide an alternative vocational route for people to carry on into further education has been a major step forward and a major contributor to the improved staying-on rate. The massive expansion in higher education opportunities is also a great tribute to the Government. We have provided more opportunities for young people than any Government in history, particularly the last Labour Government.

Workers' Representation

6. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he next expects to meet representatives of the Trades Union Congress to discuss representation of workers.

Mr. Oppenheim: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular contact with the TUC to discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Miller: When the Minister met representatives of my union—Manufacturing Science Finance, or MSF—just before Christmas, he gave no comfort to the workers at G.S. Scott who were dismissed following attempts to gain union recognition when the vast majority of workers in that small company wanted that recognition. Is that not yet another example of the Government attempting to protect the interests of the privileged? Does the Minister accept that in this day and age if the majority of workers want union recognition it should be given by the employer?

Mr. Oppenheim: There is a fundamental difference between the right to belong to a trade union and the right not to be discriminated against for belonging to a trade union. There is redress—*[Interruption.]* The union should have advised its members to go to an industrial tribunal, where they would gained some redress legally. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should address his question to the union leader who failed to give that advice, because redress is available.

There is a difference between the right to belong to a trade union and politicians telling employers that they should deal with unions rather than dealing directly with employees, which they prefer to do. That voluntarist approach of allowing employers to make the choice does not seem to be causing any problems with the Opposition spokeswoman, as she has just sent her child to a school which has refused to recognise a trade union. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Sit down. That is a total abuse of Question Time. I have asked not only for questions and answers to be brief, but that they should be to the point and deal with the substantive question on the Order Paper.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: There is no point of order.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The record should be corrected. What the Minister said is not true.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. I have dealt with the matter and reprimanded the Minister, as well as Back Benchers who take a long time to ask their questions. It is absolutely essential that Ministers should answer the questions that are on the Order Paper or are asked as supplementaries and not to try to sidestep those questions by introducing irrelevant material.

Mr. Knapman: When my hon. Friend meets the TUC, will he mention the subject of Mercedes-Benz, which may well wish to move its manufacturing plants to this country

because of the high cost of the social chapter? Given that the TUC seems to believe in the social chapter, is it perhaps left in something of a dilemma?

Mr. Oppenheim *rose—*

Hon. Members: Resign.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Oppenheim: It is not only Mercedes; Sabena also wants to move workers out of Belgium because of the high levels of labour regulation. The sooner that our partners in the European Union realise that the more one adds to employers' costs, the more one will cost employees their jobs, the better the job prospects of people in Europe will be.

European Social Policy

7. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on the European Commission's Green Paper on European social policy options for the Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Council of Ministers discussed the Commission's White Paper on European social policy on 6 December. I argued that the Social Affairs Council should concentrate its efforts in future on a positive agenda designed to help member states in their fight against unemployment, rather than on unnecessary and potentially damaging employment legislation.

Mrs. Ewing: Given that the Government's papers change colour as often as their policy on Europe, does the Minister recognise that the veto that he used at the Council in December has left the UK very isolated in various areas of important legislation? Is it not a fallacy on his part to peddle the myth that the competitiveness of other countries is being damaged because of regulations? The reality is that the competitiveness of those countries is much greater than that of the UK.

Mr. Portillo: I am surprised that the hon. Lady chooses to make that argument in the week when the head of Mercedes-Benz has made the point that he may have to pull out of Germany precisely as a result of the high social costs that are imposed by the social chapter.

The hon. Lady is quite wrong to think that the United Kingdom is isolated. The United Kingdom is following policies that are now recognised as being in the main stream around the world. In Korea, in Japan, in the United States, in South America and in Australia, Governments are following policies directed at making their economies more competitive. Specifically, they are putting the emphasis on keeping the burden of costs on employers light. This is a world-investing, world-trading and world-conscious country, and we shall not be browbeaten into imposing costs on our employers that would make us uncompetitive in that world.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Is not most of European social policy supposed to be built around the protection of people's health and safety at work? Is it not a paradox that we have the best health and safety record in Europe, and one that builds on a tripartite voluntary system which requires no imposition from Brussels?

Mr. Portillo: We have high levels of health and safety protection, and I am proud of them, but I cannot agree with my hon. Friend that the social policies of the European Community are built on health and safety matters. The social chapter is an ambitious attempt to build a social dimension into Europe—that is, to impose very high costs on employers for Governments to develop social policies that they cannot afford and to impose them on employers, and to achieve that by a massive extension of qualified majority voting. Only when they have not been able to achieve that by the social chapter, because of Britain's opt-out, have they resorted to health and safety chapter headings. In at least one case, I thought it to be so wholly inappropriate that I am contesting it in the European Court.

Ms Harman: Given the concern expressed by the President of the Board of Trade about the threat to employment growth caused by the divisions in the Government over the European single currency, will the Employment Secretary tell the House whether he continues to believe what he said on GMTV last year—that he does not want a single currency and that the 1999 timetable is unrealistic? Is that still his opinion, or does he agree with the Chancellor, who said last Thursday that Britain might have a single currency by 1999?

Mr. Portillo: I can tell the hon. Lady that that was not discussed at the meeting of European Ministers which was referred to in Question 7. The Prime Minister has made it perfectly clear that, if a single currency is recommended in 1996 or 1997, the United Kingdom will not be part of it and we will not make a recommendation about it to Parliament. I believe that people around the world are concerned about Britain's membership of a single European market, and that is not in doubt.

Minimum Wage

8. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what occasions discussions have taken place between European Employment Ministers on the effects of a minimum wage (a) on young workers and (b) on the long-term unemployed.

Mr. Oppenheim: There have been no discussions, but the EC White Paper on competitiveness criticises the minimum wage for destroying jobs.

Mr. Riddick: Is my hon. Friend aware of a report, commissioned by the French Government, which found that the minimum wage in France contributed significantly to the much higher levels of unemployment among young people and the long-term unemployed? Does he agree that the social chapter, while equally well meaning, could have the same bad effect on job prospects? Should he not encourage our European partners—all 11 of them—to stage a mass opt-out from the social chapter and thereby create more jobs across Europe?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is interesting that two European countries—France and Spain—which have a minimum wage of the type that Labour proposes for Britain have youth unemployment levels which are two and three times that of the United Kingdom.

I find it amazing that the Opposition are trumpeting the fact that they are launching a campaign on the minimum wage, yet Opposition Members cannot come to the House and tell us at what level they would introduce the

minimum wage and what they would do about differentials. I urge the relevant Opposition spokesman to tell the House exactly what Labour's policy is.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: What is the Minister prepared to do for my constituent: a 50-year-old divorced woman who is trying to find work? She is not able to take up work because the only jobs that she can find are low paid and part time and if she accepts them she is then disqualified from benefit and cannot afford to keep herself. What will the Minister do for people in those circumstances?

Mr. Oppenheim: One of the schemes that we have to help such people is the back-to-work bonus. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may deride that, but it is designed to help such people. Obviously, Opposition Members are not interested in those practical measures.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) also ignores the fact that the number of full-time jobs has increased significantly in the past year, in contrast to what is happening elsewhere in Europe.

Sir Michael Neubert: When considering the interests of young people and others, is it not instructive to draw on our experience of the minimum wage in the United Kingdom? Is it not the case that, in those industries which were formerly covered by wages councils, not only have average earnings been sustained and even improved but the number of people employed has increased?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is a further point: a single man—

Mr. Olner: No, he is not.

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The figures clearly show that employees who were covered by wages councils have seen faster wage rises than has the work force as a whole. They are the facts and if the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) cares to deny them, he will have to produce other facts to counter them.

Mr. McCartney: That was a contemptible and a shabby question from an hon. Gentleman who gets paid £1,000 per minute for a question.

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman has a question to put to the Minister, I will hear it; otherwise I shall call another hon. Member.

Mr. McCartney: Will the Minister accept that we are the only country in Europe which does not guarantee a minimum wage? This is the only Government in Europe who give pay jackpots to the boardroom while there is low pay in the workplace. Is it not the case that, under the jobseeker's agreement, the Government will force people to take employment for £1 per hour or lose their right to benefit?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman should check his facts because only half the European Community countries have statutory national minimum wages. If the jobseeker's allowance is such an evil, why does his party not pledge itself to abolish it when it is in government?

Let us not have any nonsense about the Opposition not wanting to give policy pledges, because they have just given such a pledge for a £75 back-to-work bonus. If the JSA is such an evil, I invite the hon. Gentleman to commit himself here and now to abolish it if his party returns to power after the next election.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the companies which are actually paying below the £4 level per hour are often those with marginal businesses such as rural sub-post offices and corner shops? Does he believe that those businesses are more likely to stay in business with a minimum wage of more than £4 a hour, or go out of business and destroy even more jobs?

Mr. Oppenheim: The figures clearly show that only four in 1,000 adult full-time workers earn less than £2.60 and that 60 per cent. earn more than £5.30 a hour. It is also interesting that a single man in the bottom 10 per cent. of earnings would have seen his take-home pay increase by more than 23 per cent. since 1979, whereas the same person would have experienced a fall of 1 per cent. between 1974 and 1979. The only time Britain was a low-paid, skivvy economy was not under the Conservative Government, but under the Labour Government.

Inward Investment

9. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his assessment of the impact on inward investment of the United Kingdom's recent industrial relations record; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The turnround in industrial relations records since 1979 has contributed to our remarkable record in attracting inward investment, which has made the United Kingdom the number one location in Europe.

Mr. Brandreth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the City of Chester has a remarkable record for attracting inward investment in recent years? Will he confirm that, in the year to last November, some 238,000 days were lost in this country through industrial action, compared with 1979, when 29 million days were lost in that one year? Does he see a direct correlation between those two startling facts?

Mr. Portillo: I congratulate the City of Chester on attracting inward investment and I congratulate my hon. Friend on his part in that. He has always been positive and welcoming and has looked for opportunities for his constituents. I see a direct correlation between that and our performance in industrial relations. To put it graphically, in the first month of 1979, we lost five times as many days through strikes as we lost in the whole of 1993. Those who want the bad old days of industrial relations and disorder restored by returning the Labour party to Government need their heads examined.

Mr. MacShane: The Secretary of State will be aware that inward investment and industrial relations will be discussed at the United Nations social summit next month in Copenhagen. Will he confirm that neither he nor the Prime Minister will be attending that summit, and that a flunky or a flunkette will go instead? While the majority of European, OECD and third-world countries will be sending heads of state and Ministers

of Labour, is not Britain once again snubbing the summit and sending a message of patronising indifference to the third world?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman gets very agitated about a matter on which no decision has been taken.

Unemployment

10. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the link between falling unemployment and the structure of the United Kingdom labour market.

Mr. Paice: During the 1980s, the Government legislated to make it easier for businesses to give people jobs and to restrict trade union privileges. In the 1990s, unemployment is falling at an early stage of the recovery. I believe that those two facts are inextricably linked.

Mr. Garnier: Has my hon. Friend noticed that in Harborough, unemployment has fallen consistently over the past few years and is now between 25 and 30 per cent. lower than it was at the general election? Is that not a direct consequence of a deregulated and flexible labour market, the absence of the social chapter and national regulations on the minimum wage?

Mr. Paice: Unemployment in Harborough has fallen by 739 in the past year—a fall of 28 per cent. It has followed the trend that has occurred throughout the country. That is happening because the Government have deregulated the labour market. We have a higher proportion of the work force in work than any other major economy in the European Community. In the past 15 years, the Government have radically altered the face of the British industrial scene. We have restored the rights of trade union members, returned democracy to those members and ensured a much better environment for job creation.

Mr. Clelland: Is the Minister aware that the British people no longer have any faith in the Government's unemployment statistics or in statistics which compare unemployment in Britain with that in other European countries? Is it not time that we had a common standard across Europe for measuring unemployment so that statistics could be more reliable and the comparisons more valuable?

Mr. Paice: We have a standard OECD system and its standardised unemployment rates show that unemployment in the United Kingdom is lower than in Spain, Finland, Ireland, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Canada and Australia. Whatever statistics the hon. Gentleman wants to use, the Government's record on reducing unemployment is better than most in the rest of the world.

Mr. David Shaw: Is my hon. Friend aware that those countries that have been most successful in reducing unemployment are those which do not have a minimum wage? Is he further aware that in the United States of America, where the minimum wage has not been increased since 1990 but has been allowed to wither on the vine and is now below United Kingdom benefit levels, employment has increased by some 6 million?

Mr. Paice: I am well aware of that. I am also aware that President Clinton was elected on a platform of increasing the minimum wage, which he has clearly failed to do. Robert Reich, his finance minister, has admitted that to raise it would dampen the recovery and the fall in unemployment that America has seen.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Ewing: Since the Government's policy has virtually destroyed the manufacturing base of the north of Scotland—including industries such as our pulp mills, oil fabrication yards and a smelter—and, more recently, led to the mothballing of three distilleries, is the Prime Minister prepared to allow the Cabinet to sit back and watch the destruction of our tourist industry as a result of the axing of rail services, both sleeper accommodation and Motorail facilities, to the north of Scotland ? Will he, as a courteous man, now instruct the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Scotland to afford the representatives from the north of Scotland a meeting—a request for which was submitted some six weeks ago—tomorrow to discuss those vital issues?

The Prime Minister: Of course I shall look carefully at what the hon. Lady has to say. We are keen to see a successful tourist industry in the north-east of Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. If the hon. Lady looks right across Scotland as well as the rest of the United Kingdom, she will see that manufacturing industry is expanding, doing extremely well, making many things that just a few years ago were simply not made in Britain, and exporting at record levels around the world. In the past year there have been eight successive new monthly records in exports alone.

Mr. William Powell: Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm the Government's support for British agriculture in order to assert that farmers are as entitled as any other of Her Majesty's subjects to earn their living under the law, and that includes selling their young veal calves at a proper market price if they so choose? Will he confirm that causing mayhem at British ports and airports is no way to stop practices in other countries that we have banned here, and that those who do so should take their cause to other countries in the Community and to the European Parliament, not pursue it here?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to stress the importance of the farming industry and entirely right to stress the fact that farmers have a right to carry on their trade within the law, as does everyone else. I think that my hon. Friend and the House know our opposition to veal crates and of the measures taken by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture,

Fisheries and Food to try to ensure that they are taken out of commission not just in the United Kingdom but right across Europe.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister state clearly whether he agrees with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who has said that he would wait an eternity before joining a single currency?

The Prime Minister: I set out in detail the conditions for a single currency, originally as long ago as 1990. I reaffirmed them in some detail last Friday. I made it clear last Friday that not only must the specific Maastricht criteria be met, but that in addition we would require other criteria to be met before we thought it appropriate to consider a single currency. Some years in advance of those being met, it is unwise to say either, "Yes we will proceed," or, "No, we will never proceed."

Mr. Blair: On Friday, of course, the Prime Minister was generally facing both ways. Indeed, Conservative central office was briefing one message on Friday and Downing street another yesterday. If he will not slap down his Chief Secretary, will he say whether he agrees with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is a supporter of monetary union, and who can foresee circumstances in which Britain would join and wants to do so by the end of the century?

The Prime Minister: I have just set out in great detail precisely the circumstances in which we would find it appropriate to consider whether we should proceed to a single currency. The right hon. Gentleman has not yet indicated that for his own party at all. As to unity, we know that 50 of his Members of Parliament defied the Whip on Maastricht, 40 of his Members of Parliament defied the Whip on the European Communities (Finance) Act 1995 and the Labour party has had seven twists and turns over recent years as to whether or not it is in favour of the European Union. I repeat to the right hon. Gentleman that, as far as a single currency later this year is concerned, we would first require all the specific Maastricht criteria to be met.

In addition, we would require other criteria to be met—for example, relative flexibility of employment markets. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will set those out later this week. When those other matters are set out, we shall then consider whether it would be appropriate economically or constitutionally to proceed. I hope now that the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition, having learnt what the right answer is to that question, will fashion his own policy.

Mr. Blair: Let me put it specifically, then. If those circumstances are met, will the Prime Minister join?

The Prime Minister: I have just told the right hon. Gentleman. When and if those circumstances are met, we shall look to see whether it is appropriate and in the British interests to join. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us now whether he would join, yes or no? Does he know whether it would be in the British interest? No, he does not. All that he is concerned to do is to trail along the path behind the Euro-federalists, where he feels most happy.

Mr. Blair *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has had three questions. I really cannot call him again. I am sorry.

Mr. Blair *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I believe that the hon. Gentleman has had his third question. If he wants to reply—*[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister has asked him to reply. In that case, I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Blair: I think—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. It is most unusual for Prime Ministers to ask the Opposition questions at Question Time.

Mr. Blair: I think that it is excellent that the Prime Minister is getting into the habit of asking us questions rather than answering them himself. Can I tell him this, though? Until he decides where he stands on that issue as the Prime Minister of the day, his leadership will remain weak, his Cabinet divided and Britain effectively disabled in Europe.

The Prime Minister: It is interesting to ask the right hon. Gentleman questions. It would be more interesting if he ever provided any answers.

I have set out for the right hon. Gentleman the conditions in which it would be right for us to consider the interests of the United Kingdom. I will not make a judgment that is crucial to the constitutional and economic future of this country until I see the economic circumstances of the day—and, frankly, only a dimwit would ask me to. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is very time-consuming.

Mr. Streeter: Does my right hon. Friend accept that his concept of a European Union of nation states co-operating and working together for their common interests is in touch with the majority view in the country? Does it not contrast starkly with the policies of the Opposition parties, which can be described as a total sell-out to Brussels?

The Prime Minister: I think that this country has a very deep attachment to the nation state. The European Union that it seeks is a European Union based on nation states—a wider European Union, a free market European Union, a decentralised European Union, and not the federal European Union that the Opposition wish for and their Members of the European Parliament clamour for.

Mr. Ashdown: Is the Prime Minister asking us to believe that it is none of his business, and not his Government's responsibility, that school governors across the land are being forced to cut school budgets and sack teachers? Or is he saying that that is a price that our children should be prepared to pay so that he will have room for tax cuts at the next election?

The Prime Minister: As ever, the right hon. Gentleman has his facts wrong. If he looks, he will see the increased spending on teachers, support staff, books

and equipment. He will also see that the Audit Commission regularly identifies significant scope for savings by local authorities—not least Liberal Democrat-run local authorities—and their freedom to transfer more resources to education. The right hon. Gentleman may also learn that authorities are maintaining some 1 million surplus school places. Perhaps next time he asks a question, he will have ascertained some of those facts before doing so.

Mr. Waller: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the publication of new guidance relating to appointments to quangos is an extremely positive and welcome advance? Is not the constant criticism directed at members of such bodies bound in time to become a disincentive, and to prevent public-spirited persons from putting their names forward for membership?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I think that the review will prove extremely useful. It also emphasises that both the number and the real cost of non-departmental bodies have fallen significantly since 1979. As everyone who has examined the matter knows, the Opposition's criticism of such bodies is really based on their dislike of parent choice in schools, their dislike of patient choice for fundholding general practitioners and their dislike of patient choice in hospitals. That is local choice, but they call it quangos. They wish to retain choice centrally now, as they always have.

Q2. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Prentice: Does the Prime Minister agree with the Secretary of State for Education, who believes that a teachers' pay increase could be funded only at the expense of between 7,000 and 10,000 teaching jobs and a spiralling increase in class sizes? How does that square with what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said at lunchtime today—that extra cash is not available and is not needed? Who speaks for the Government on this matter? More important, who speaks for the children in our schools?

The Prime Minister: We speak for the children in the schools. That is why we have given their parents choice, why we have given greater choice in schools, why we have produced performance tables, and why we have produced testing. That is why our crusade is for choice not to close city technology colleges, not to close grant-maintained schools, and not to close every element of choice that parents want and children need.

Mr. Bill Walker: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the Scots favour the Union between Scotland and England and the rest of the United Kingdom because the Scots, with less than 9 per cent. of the UK's population, enjoy far more positions of importance—for instance, in the Cabinet, the proportion is in excess of 20 per cent., whatever the Government—in the military, in trade unions and in industry? That is what the Scots will not give up.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend speaks in a tone that many people will recognise. There is no doubt about the advantages, both to the UK and to Scotland, of Scotland being a full part of the UK. I do not believe that anyone who has studied the problem doubts that for a single second. The talents—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) clearly has not studied it because he does doubt that. That is because he wants an independent Scotland disunited from the UK, in the middle of a European Union where it would have little or no influence, and that would damage the interests of Scots, the interests of Scotland and the wider interests of the UK. That is why his party must never be put in power in any way in Scotland or elsewhere.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could you help me on a way of proceeding? The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) uttered a calumny against a school in London, which he must have known to be untrue—that it did not recognise unions, when it does recognise unions. What redress do I have to put that right?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must make use of the Order Paper by means of an early-day motion, or he can place a parliamentary question seeking to correct what he thinks has been a misleading statement.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Would you advise the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) that my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) said no such thing?

Madam Speaker: I call the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry).

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Until this juncture, I had said nothing in the Chamber today, and it might be helpful if the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) began to recognise who is who before he starts talking about hon. Members.

Madam Speaker: That is a very good point. We should all know the constituencies of hon. Members. I hope that hon. Members know my constituency.

Mr. Enright: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise to the hon. Member for High Peak. I did, of course, mean the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim).

Madam Speaker: There is a world of difference between High Peak and Amber Valley.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I compliment you, as ever, on your sensitive chairing, but may I ask a question in terms of order? If the Prime Minister starts bawling at me in the middle of Prime Minister's Question Time, do I not deserve a right of reply as well?

Madam Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman was making gestures from a seated position and provoking the Prime Minister—

Mr. Salmond: Me?

Madam Speaker: Yes. I do not have to have eyes at the back of my head to watch what the hon. Gentleman is doing. I thought that it was rather unfair on the Prime Minister, and the hon. Gentleman got what he deserved from him.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would you support me in recommending the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) to stick to the classics because his geography is rather weak?

Madam Speaker: That is a very good point.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. At this time yesterday, the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) raised a lengthy point of order about my activities in the House. He had made no attempt to inform me of what he intended to do. Had he done so, I should certainly have been in my place to hear what he said and I should have used that opportunity, with your agreement, to follow up his comments. The main thrust of his point of order was that I had somehow interfered with the Proceeds of Crime Bill, to which many hon. Members wished to speak. He implied that I had filibustered to prevent them from doing so. In fact, the debate lasted one hour 28 minutes and I was the final hon. Member to speak before the hon. Member promoting the Bill wound up the debate. I spoke for five minutes and there was ample opportunity for any hon. Member who had given his name to the Speaker to participate in the debate.

Madam Speaker: I made my views clear on that matter yesterday. I want to hear no more about it. I have given many rulings, all of them the same, to the effect that hon. Members should be informed. If any hon. Member does not understand that, he should come to my office. We have now run off pages of *Hansard* and collected them in a loose-leaf file that can be given to hon. Members so that they will know in future how to behave in the House.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is today giving evidence to the Nolan committee about publication of new guidelines for quangos. As quangos now account for £15 billion of public expenditure, I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman has asked for time to make a statement to the House on that important issue.

Madam Speaker: No, the Minister has not done so.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have given the Home Secretary brief notice of this point of order.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman did not give me notice, but I hope that this is a proper point of order.

Mr. Miller: It is a matter of urgency and I should be grateful if I could raise this point of order now. I received a fax this morning informing me that a Nigerian-owned vessel that had been moored in Ellesmere Port for more than a year is the subject of court action, the result of which is that 50 Nigerian seamen will be forced to leave the vessel on Thursday. They are very anxious because they have no means of getting home and do not know how they will be treated in this country. In view of the urgency of the matter, I wonder whether the Home Secretary could find time to gather some information and put it before the House.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order. Perhaps I can advise the hon. Gentleman, and any other hon. Member who might seek to raise a similar point of order, that the way to proceed is immediately to ask for an interview with the Home Secretary or one of his Ministers and in that way make representations to the Home Office. Such matters should not be raised across the Floor of the House, where they cannot be responded to by the Minister in question.

BILL PRESENTED

REGULATION OF DIET INDUSTRY

Mrs. Alice Mahon, supported by Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Tony Banks, Ms Diane Abbott, Ms Liz Lynne, Ms Mildred Gordon, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Ms Harriet Harman, Ms Clare Short and Mr. Ken Livingstone, presented a Bill to regulate the diet industry; to bring all medicines relating to diets under control; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 March, and to be printed. [Bill 45.]

Workplace Injury Victims

3.38 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that those who are in receipt of an award of compensation in respect of any accident, injury or disease as a consequence of their employment or occupation shall be entitled to benefit from such an award in its entirety; that any negligent employer or other compensator shall be obliged to meet the cost of any social security or other statutory benefit paid to any worker, employee or dependant of any worker or employee as a consequence of any accident, injury or disease resulting from the employment or occupation for which an award of compensation is subsequently made; to make legal aid available in all personal injury litigation in such circumstances, and for connected purposes.

As someone who has been a member of a trade union for nearly 30 years and who is sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, I am proud to introduce this Bill. One of the reasons why I joined a trade union almost 30 years ago was that I realised, along with everyone else, that none of us could be confident that we would not suffer some illness or injury as a consequence of our occupation. Every year, some 150,000 workers suffer injury or illness as a result of their occupation. Thank goodness many workers still receive the support, counsel and advice of trade unions, which will have achieved more than £300 million worth of compensation on behalf of injured workers this year.

Many workers, of course, do not belong to trade unions. As a consequence, they are especially disadvantaged. None the less, all workers, whether members of trade unions or not, find it enormously and increasingly difficult to obtain remedies for illness or injury sustained at work. One reason for that is the lack of access to legal aid to match the resources available to the employers or the insurance companies. My Bill would ensure the availability of legal aid to workers who are injured or ill so that they could challenge the vested interests of insurance companies, which do everything that they can to resist the just claims of sick and injured workers.

My Bill also takes on board the concept of the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), which has been signed by more than 205 members of all Opposition parties and which draws attention to the unfairness of the clawback provisions of section 22 of the Social Security Act 1989. The compensatory recovery unit currently claws back large sums of benefit from people's compensatory awards. It is demonstrably unfair, it makes nonsense of the concept of compensation and it is wholly wrong. Increasingly, hon. Members are finding that constituents are making representations to them about that unfairness, which will soon be comparable with the scale of representations that we all received about the absurd activities of the Child Support Agency. My Bill would amend section 22 of the 1989 Act and make it fairer to the taxpayer and the disadvantaged worker.

At present, the system works in favour of the selfish insurance company and the rogue employer, which are already doing everything possible to stall and frustrate fair and reasonable compensatory settlements for workers. They know that, if they stall, the likelihood of a person receiving just compensation after paying the Department of Social Security is minimal. The

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

system further persuades sick, disadvantaged, very ill and often traumatised people to settle for derisory compensation. Some of the people involved are terminally ill. The system is demonstrably unfair and is not in the interest of the country or taxpayers.

For the sake of sick and disadvantaged workers, many of whom are in great pain and suffering disability, and who need compensation to increase mobility, diminish their discomfort and, in some cases, to provide carers if they are very sick, we must shift the burden of the payment of social security benefits to the compensator—the employer or the employer's insurance company. That would be fair and would establish a level playing field in this unhappy state of affairs. It would mean that the employer or the insurance company would reflect that if they dragged out the proceedings and did not reach a fair and early compensatory settlement with the injured or disadvantaged worker, they could face a larger burden when the case was finally prosecuted through the courts and the worker had the support of legal aid. Not only would employers or insurance companies have to pay proper compensation, but they would repay the taxpayer for social security benefits spent in trying to maintain that sick worker and his or her family.

There would also be some very useful spin-offs from the Bill. If people were paid adequate compensation early, it stands to reason that the national health service and, indeed, the Department of Social Security, would incur less expense.

Secondly, there would be a greater incentive for insurance companies to be much more robust in demanding that employers minimise hazards at work. That might ensure that there was a proper health and safety regime in our factories, offices and laboratories, which there is not at present. There has been considerable slippage in that respect, and it is absurd for people to suggest that we have a good record for health and safety in this country.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): We have.

Mr. Mackinlay: I do not call the 150,000 illnesses and injuries caused each year in places of work a good record. That figure is a disgrace and the House should be ashamed of it. Hon. Members who support the introduction of my Bill are demonstrating their desire to diminish that unacceptable toll of illnesses and injuries suffered by workers.

It is time that the House addressed itself to the great unfairness with which workers who are sick or injured because of their occupation or their place of work are treated. I hope that my Bill will be given a fair wind and that the Government will find time for it to be discussed in Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Bill Etherington, Mr. D.N. Campbell-Savours, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Gordon McMaster, Mr. Andrew Miller, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. John Spellar and Mr. Tony Worthington.

WORKPLACE INJURY VICTIMS

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay accordingly presented a Bill to provide that those who are in receipt of an award of compensation in respect of any accident, injury or disease as a consequence of their employment or occupation shall be entitled to benefit from such an award in its entirety; that any negligent employer or other compensator shall be obliged to meet the cost of any social security or other statutory benefit paid to any worker, employee or dependant of any worker or employee as a consequence of any accident, injury or disease resulting from the employment or occupation for which an award of compensation is subsequently made; to make legal aid available in all personal injury litigation in such circumstances, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday 1 May, and to be printed. [Bill 46.]

Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Financial Settlement for Schools, 1995-96

Madam Speaker: Before we begin, I have to tell the House that I must limit Back-Bench speeches to 10 minutes both in this debate and in the next, on passenger services under railway privatisation.

3.46 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the 1995-96 financial settlement for schools will, in the words of the Secretary of State for Education, 'cause class sizes to shoot up' and 'lead to the loss of thousands of teaching posts', with a consequential detrimental impact on standards and opportunities for young people.

In tabling the motion, it is we in the Labour party, not the Government, who speak for the pupils, parents, governors and teachers who are rightly concerned about what the Government's financial settlement for local government in the coming year will do to our schools and to our children. Those people say, as we say, that that is a cut too far—a cut that will damage education prospects, standards, achievements and opportunities for children in every part of the country.

We are backed not only by those who have traditionally fought for education but by the words of the Secretary of State herself, who clearly admitted the truth in a letter leaked to *The Times Educational Supplement*, in which she gave her Cabinet colleagues a clear picture of what would happen if the Government's increase in expenditure and their predictions of what local authorities should spend did not even manage to meet the sum necessary to take account of the 110,000 extra pupils who will have to be accommodated in schools in the coming year. That is the equivalent of two primary schools in every area of the country. The 1.2 per cent. increase necessary to match that growth in numbers has not been included in the Government's calculations, never mind the 2.5, 2.6 or 2.7 per cent. increase in teachers' pay that the Government will agree later this week.

It is a scandal that while the Secretary of State for Education sits on the sidelines—not sulking, I hope—the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and even, today, the Prime Minister, treat the issue as if they were in the right and governors, parents and teachers should be abused and bemused.

Every governor and every teacher in the country knows exactly what the position is.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what he makes of a council that makes provision for an increase in pay for council bosses but none for teachers' pay or for schools—a council that, on the contrary, cuts those budgets? I refer to Kent county council, which has had a 2.1 per cent. increase in Government funding and is controlled by Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Blunkett: The £8 million shortfall on the Government's determination of what Kent county council can spend on education—known as the standard spending assessment—is dealt with in terms of Government grants and the capping regime, and that precludes the council from being able to spend the money even if it was able to raise it.

Mr. Arnold: That is not true.

Mr. Blunkett: Kent county council—after 20 years—has now, under an alliance between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, opened the first nursery class in two decades and is about to open another eight. It is strange that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) should raise only the issue of financing Kent. The Government are not prepared to provide the necessary spending for the pay increase for teachers, and they are not even prepared to begin to suggest where the money will come from to pay for the much-vaunted promise of the Prime Minister at the Tory party conference that four-year-olds would receive nursery education.

The truth is known by every governing body and parent in the country. The delegation now permitted to governing bodies is used effectively by authorities up and down the country—the average delegation to governing bodies is between 85 per cent. and 90 per cent.—which is why governors and parents are up in arms. It is because it is no longer a battle between the local education authorities and the Government, but a battle between parents and governing bodies and the Government. That is why those involved with schools—often from leafy suburbs—are now suggesting that their task should not be to cut the number of teachers, increase class sizes or reduce the availability of books. Their task should be to fight for standards and opportunities in education.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): May I correct the hon. Gentleman on one point? Kent county council was Conservative-controlled for 104 years, not 20.

In Kent, 50 per cent. of secondary pupils and a significant number of primary school pupils are now educated at grant-maintained schools. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that there should be a reduction in education bureaucracy to match the number who are taught outside the LEA?

Mr. Blunkett: The Secretary of State pointed out to her Treasury colleagues in the leaked letter just before Christmas that the cuts that we are talking about this afternoon would apply equally to grant-maintained schools as to LEA schools—*[Interruption.]* That is in the letter, and it is in brackets to emphasise it. The reason the Secretary of State wished to emphasise that point was to ensure that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was aware that the favoured schools would not escape the cut, and would be affected by an increase in class sizes and reductions in teacher numbers.

Kent's SSA—as we are dealing with Kent—is £55 down per pupil for every primary school and £203 down per pupil for every secondary school. That makes a total of £8.7 million, a figure which the hon. Member for Gravesham shouted was not true. It would appear that the hon. Member for Gravesham has something in common with the Chancellor of the Exchequer—they are both, to use politically correct language, mathematically challenged. Both are under misapprehensions about grant, SSA and the capping regime.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way in a moment. The Chancellor said at lunchtime that there would be no

[Mr. Blunkett]

reason for cuts if only local authorities were prepared to delegate more of their budgets. Labour-controlled Dudley council delegates the most of its budget to schools, while Tory-controlled Wandsworth delegates least. Dudley delegates 93 per cent. while Wandsworth delegates 82 per cent.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's answer a fortnight ago—not this lunchtime—to the suggestion that the money allocated would not match the teachers' pay increase was that local authorities should consider selling off and leasing back their buildings, just as he was doing with the Treasury. If that is intelligent financial management, I am a Dutchman. And if I were a Dutchman, I would experience much better standards of education than under the present regime in this country.

Moreover, it is time that we challenged the Prime Minister. This afternoon, he said in reply to the leader of the Liberal Democrat party that there was no problem because local authorities could simply remove a million surplus places.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): And 13 per cent. in Lancashire.

Mr. Blunkett: As usual, an intervention by the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) sheds no light on the situation and shows that the didactic education that she received with chalk and talk did nothing to expand her learning and understanding.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall have to give way.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman may think that it is funny to have 13 per cent. surplus places in Lancashire, but school governors in my area do not think so because the money spent on those 13 per cent. surplus places should go into the schools. Does he really think that it is necessary to have one bureaucrat at county hall for every 17 teachers in the classroom in my constituency?

Mr. Blunkett: Lancashire faces cuts of £24 million in its budget. Every time a local authority attempts to reduce its surplus places, struggles to persuade its community, involves through consultation parents, governors and teachers, and puts the proposals to the Secretary of State, schools that appear to want to opt out to save themselves from rationalisation have permission to do so from the Secretary of State. Remaining schools must then pay for the unfair distribution of capital and revenue resources that flow from that decision, so children in other schools are further disadvantaged. That has happened throughout the country to the point—

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way in a moment. I have already given way three times. Unlike some Conservative Members, I can count.

A little honesty from Tory Members would be welcome this afternoon. We are addressing a genuine crisis in the way in which excellent schools are facing up to their budgets, and all we get is silly heckling from Tory Members who, instead of representing their communities, their parents and the future of their children, attempt to score inaccurate party political points.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: Which one shall I give way to? Perhaps the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), as he may shed some light on the situation.

Mr. Waterson: Will the hon. Gentleman apply his own nostrum of honesty to the question by telling the House, when he reaches a logical point in his speech, whether a future Labour Government would spend significantly more across the board or adjust the distribution of SSAs? If so, which authorities would gain and which would lose?

Mr. Blunkett: We had it at Prime Minister's Question Time and we have it again now—the Government are now treating the Labour party as the Government and themselves as the Opposition. I have made our position unequivocally clear. If one does away with the bargaining between local education authorities and teachers, excludes governing bodies and schools from the ability to determine what happens with pay and conditions, but then accepts the report of an independent pay review body, one has an obligation to meet the proposed expenditure, unless one is prepared to stand up and say that it is the pupils in schools who must pay the price of that expenditure and the teachers who must face redundancy, instead of the Government.

The Government's dishonesty in suggesting that reductions in standards and opportunities in our schools should now take place, when only a few months ago they were boasting that they intended to improve standards and to match the needs of schools, reveals the duplicity of a Government who have run out of steam and who no longer care about what happens to those who are most vulnerable in our society.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin).

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The hon. Gentleman spoke about schools using their resources properly. As he lives in Sheffield, he will be aware that the neighbouring county of Derbyshire has, in the past 14 years, subsidised school meals to the tune of more than £100 million. This year it plans to subsidise school meals by £4 million. Does he regard that as a good use of education money?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has just cryptically said to me that the hon. Member for West Derbyshire does not look short of a meal or two. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I will answer, because the shortfall faced by Derbyshire is £17 million.

We are in favour of nutritional standards and of school meals that children can afford, because we believe that a well-fed and happy child is one who will learn and respond in our classrooms.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. McLoughlin: As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has just insulted me, will he give way to me again?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who is a representative of Derbyshire.

Mr. Skinner: We should recall that, for many years, the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) and his Tory friends called upon Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council to put up the price of school meals, which were the cheapest in the country. They said that if the county council just put up the cost of those school meals, it would get more money from the Government for teachers and for kids. The truth is that in the past two or three years the cost of school meals has gone up three times, yet Derbyshire pupils get £272 per head less than those in the leafy suburbs of Surrey. That has not done them any good, has it?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree with the powerful point that my hon. Friend has made.

According to yesterday's briefing from the Prime Minister, he said that a compromise, a settlement, a gesture, would be made to find a solution. According to the Chancellor's briefing this lunchtime, no such settlement will be reached. I shall be interested to know whether the Secretary of State for Education has a solution to offer either today or on Thursday, or whether she is simply a pawn, an unwilling one, in a game of Government retrenchment. After all, the Government amendment speaks about a "tough" settlement. That game is obviously more important than investment in our children's future.

I regret that the Secretary of State, who means well and does her best, has become tragically enfeebled. The previous Secretary of State was missed by no one. After five years of utter turmoil, with contradiction following contradiction; after the creation of a national curriculum that caused confusion and chaos in every classroom; and after disagreement and insults being exchanged over tests, this Secretary of State came in with a pledge to be different. She said that she would be gentle and sweep the past under the carpet, but the previous Secretary of State at least managed to get a 1.8 per cent. increase in the SSA even though he did not believe in state education. The new Secretary of State, who is committed to state education, obtained a 1.1 per cent. increase in SSA and only a 0.5 per cent. increase in real spending power—

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it correct for the hon. Gentleman to refer to my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State in the way that he has, saying that he does not believe in state education, when he sent his daughter to a state primary school?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members should be careful in their comments across the Floor of the House. They are themselves responsible for the remarks that they make, but I think that they ought to be responsible in what they say.

Mr. Blunkett: Let me rephrase that, Madam Speaker. The previous Secretary of State showed his commitment to state education by the way in which he tried to destroy it in everything that he did in every classroom, in the conflict that he created with the teachers and in the way in which he undermined morale and confidence. We knew that we were about to have something different, in a Secretary of State who was sent to bury education.

Fortunately, that will not happen, because we are here this afternoon to praise education, to fight for education and to refuse to allow other people to be blamed for the Government's decisions. It was, after all, the Secretary of State who, in a leaked letter to colleagues, wrote the following to explain how she was trying to dig the Government out of a hole of their own making:

"All of this"—

the effort that she is making—

"will be in immediate jeopardy if we now offer teachers either a provocatively low pay settlement or acceptable pay levels only at the cost of sharp increases in class sizes."

That is precisely the issue that we are debating this afternoon—whether the Government are prepared to match the review body's proposals on Thursday, which are, we understand, within the predicted inflation levels, not above them. The implementation of those proposals will ensure that teachers' morale is restored, and, for instance, the Marches school in Shropshire, whose results improved dramatically in the past few years, will not have to cut three or four teachers from its classrooms.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I will not.

This afternoon, we are talking about a challenge to the Secretary of State, in matching the increase in pupil numbers and in matching the need for improvement in investment, books and equipment.

The Office of Standards in Education report, published last week, showed that a third of 14-year-olds are not reaching an adequate standard in maths, English and science. More than half the secondary schools in our country do not have sufficient books in the classroom, as the chief inspector succinctly said in only one sentence of a long report.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way one more time.

Mr. Hawkins: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the fact that so few of our 14-year-olds reach the required educational standard is partly a result of the mad, doctrinaire socialist ideas of comprehensivisation, and the vast waste in Labour-run local education authorities such as Lancashire? That is why schools want to opt out, to ensure that better resources are targeted directly to pupils, not wasted by Labour-run local education authorities.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman shows staggering effrontery. Instead of defending his community's parents against the £24 million cuts that are threatened, he starts abusing and lashing out at everyone around him. What

[Mr. Blunkett]

sort of a party have Conservative Members degenerated into when, instead of defending their schools and their pupils, they simply seek someone else to get tough on?

What about standards and achievement? What about the £20 million cut that the Government are imposing on education support and training, £9 million of which comes out of the appraisal budget, which has done so much to lift the standard of professional work undertaken by teachers? What about the £13 million cut from the inspectorate budget? What about the removal of £14 million from the crucial reading recovery scheme, which is vital to ensure that primary schoolchildren have a real start in life? We face all those funding cuts before the Government have to find the money to move on nursery education.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I will not give way any more. I will continue my speech so that other hon. Members have the chance to speak in the debate.

The Government have illustrated time and again that they believe in rationing excellence and rationing opportunity. That rationing exercise will continue in the way in which funding cuts are implemented and in the way in which they impinge on schools across the country. Excellence for a few and mediocrity for many is not acceptable to Opposition Members.

From Shropshire to Lancashire, from Sheffield to Somerset and from Cornwall to Oxfordshire, people are struggling to defend their services. There are proposals for voluntary income tax contributions and some schools are talking about a three-day week. The last time there was a three-day week was not in the winter of discontent, as was wrongly suggested in the build-up to the previous election, but under the 1973-74 Tory Government when the lights went out and people were told to clean their teeth in the dark. This time perhaps teachers and pupils will be told to work in the dark, to switch off the heating or to bring their own chalk.

The Government's disgraceful amendment has the cheek to congratulate governors and teachers

"for meeting the challenge of education reform".

It is right to give credit to teachers, governors and parents. The spokesman for the Conservative party in Shropshire, speaking at lunchtime today, said that it was an insult to suggest that local authority representatives, members of governing bodies and teachers should take the blame for what was, in his words,

"the responsibility of the Government of the day in terms of funding and support for the service".

We must let our children learn. Our school governors should be concerned about meeting education standards, not struggling with cutting services and undermining their schools. How can children learn if schools are falling into disrepair? Only one fifth of the amount requested for capital investment this year will be granted to schools across the country.

How can the nation face the economic and social challenges of the 21st century with a penny-pinching, underfunding and sanctimonious bunch of ne'er-do-wells running the country? Government Members know all about practising what they preach because so often they preach greed, selfishness and exclusion and then they practise it with their families and friends. It is also evident in what goes on in privatised industry and in quangos up and down the country.

Everyone in Britain is worse off under the Tories. Everyone in Britain is expected to pay more for less in Tory Britain. We offer something very different: we offer hope for the future, investment in children's education and optimism about our country's future success. That is why we are giving our backing to parents, governors and teachers in their fight to save their schools in Britain today.

4.13 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the substantial increase in the real level of education spending since 1979; applauds Government policies to raise standards in schools; acknowledges that this year's settlement is necessarily tough but congratulates teachers and governing bodies for meeting the challenge of education reform; and recognises that parents will judge schools above all by the performance of pupils and the quality of teaching and learning.".

I welcome the opportunity to debate these issues. Conservative Members understand that spending by local authorities—which accounts for a quarter of all Government spending—cannot be immune from tough decisions and economic reality. Public borrowing will have to come down if we are to keep a tight rein on inflation and increase prosperity and jobs. It is a tough local government settlement this year. That is my view and I have made it quite clear. The hon. Gentleman has made quite a lot of a leaked letter. I do not intend to comment on it, save to say that it is of a certain age and that the settlement that we finally reached provides for funding for local authority education to rise by 1.1 per cent. That is, of course, on top of a 2.4 per cent. increase for 1994-95.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does the Secretary of State agree that the teachers' pay award will be provocatively low, or has she changed her mind since that letter was leaked?

Mrs. Shephard: On the pay award, I shall not anticipate the statement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will make in due course on the reports of the review bodies.

The 1.1 per cent. increase masks a substantial rise in some authorities, reflecting their different needs. For example, in inner London boroughs there have been increases as high as 7.5 per cent., in Trafford there are increases of 4.4 per cent. and in Bury there are increases of 3.3 per cent.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said during the debate on the revenue support grant, there are always questions about methodology. He said that he would look at areas of particular concern when considering with local authorities whether improvements could be made next year.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): As the Secretary of State will not anticipate the Prime Minister's statement on the public sector pay award, why

will she not anticipate in the House of Commons what the Chancellor of the Exchequer anticipated on "The World at One" today?

Mrs. Shephard: I did not have the privilege of hearing my right hon. and learned Friend on "The World at One" today. I rather wish that I had, because there have been a number of conflicting reports as to what he might or might not have said.

The Government share the view that it is a tough settlement, but, of course, it should be set in the context of last year's 2.4 per cent. increase in spending and also the following facts. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends should take account of the fact that spending per pupil has gone up in real terms by almost 50 per cent. since 1979.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Can the Minister explain to a constituent who wrote to me why £211 less is spent on children in Northumberland than on children in other counties such as Oxfordshire?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall address in general terms the hon. Gentleman's comments as I proceed. The following facts cannot be ignored by the hon. Gentleman, his constituents and everyone else.

Since 1979, real spending per pupil has gone up by 50 per cent. Spending on equipment and books has gone up by 55 per cent., on repairs and maintenance by 15 per cent. and on support staff by 135 per cent.

The hon. Member for Brightside mentioned the Ofsted report. It is rather interesting, certainly to Conservative Members, that the Labour party voted against the establishment of Ofsted and, therefore, all means of measuring pupils' achievements, standards and attainment, but they are happy enough to quote from the Ofsted report now.

The hon. Gentleman was quoted last week as saying that the recent HMCI report was

"about as unbiased as you can get",

so what does the chief inspector say about resources?

"In overall terms the provision of resources is satisfactory".

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend will have noticed that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) signally failed to answer my question about the need to slim down bureaucracy in the light of more children moving into the grant-maintained sector. That is certainly true of the county of Kent, where spending is out of control. In March last year, the local authority spent £35,000 on a conference at a luxury hotel for head teachers and the only Labour chairman of the Kent county council spent £1,200 of taxpayers' money on takeaway curries from shops in Dartford.

Mrs. Shephard: That would be amusing were it not so shocking. It reminds one of the equally shameful example in Staffordshire where one understands that hard-earned resources have been spent on sending members of a school's staff on relaxing weekends at a health farm.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Does not the Secretary of State realise that it is her policies that are causing stress to so many teachers in the classroom? How can she justify so many schools not having sufficient books, the reduction in teacher numbers when schools have already lost so many teachers and the way in which school swimming, which is now part of the national curriculum, will not be properly funded as a result of her cuts?

Mrs. Shephard: I have no doubt that people in Staffordshire, parents and governors, will note that the hon. Lady is in favour of jacuzzi education.

The hon. Member for Brightside claims that, as a result of the local government settlement, local education authorities will have to cut their budgets. In fact, under the provisional capping regime, all local authorities will be able to increase their cash spending in order to spend more next year than they are spending this year. What they may not be able to do is to meet all their spending aspirations. Many of the stories circulating about budget cuts are the result of authorities complaining that they will not be able to expand their services in quite the way that they had envisaged.

Mr. Blunkett: If the ability to spend is increased by 1.1 per cent. and the rate of inflation, coupled with the teachers' pay increase, is more than 2.5 per cent., how on earth can there be a capacity to spend more? In real terms everyone can see that they will have to spend less.

Mrs. Shephard: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked that question because it coincides exactly with the answer at this point in my speech.

Local education authorities face tough decisions, but they are in the best position to decide their priorities and what they can afford. They can cut their costs because they are still spending millions on running their central bureaucracies and on maintaining surplus places in schools. Last year, the Audit Commission found scope for saving £500 million on the pay bill for local authorities' administrative and clerical staff.

Some authorities are also wasting huge sums on retaining surplus school places. The cost is calculated by the Audit Commission to be at least £250 million a year. I know that it is not always practicable to remove such surplus places—for example, in some rural areas and in areas of population growth—but there is scope to remove some of them, as Warwickshire is trying to demonstrate.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is wrong if, as is the case in Lancashire and other counties, the Government have increased cash resources by 1.4 per cent., for the same counties to cut the delegated budgets to schools by 5.5 per cent? Is not that specifically because they are not making the savings in their overheads at county hall that they should be?

Mrs. Shephard: Lancashire seems to be a good example of that kind of practice. I am amazed that our most recent figures demonstrate that unspent school balances in Lancashire amount to £33 million. Lancashire is an important example of how local authorities can exploit opportunities to have more to spend on teachers in the classroom.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): If the Secretary of State is citing Warwickshire as an authority whose education budget has benefited from the removal of surplus places, she must also explain why the vagaries of the capping limit and the financial settlement have produced a situation in Warwickshire where, despite removing those surplus places, 200 teachers now face the sack and massive cuts will have to be made in the

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

education budget. Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democratic councillors have united in condemning that financial settlement.

Mrs. Shephard: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that the detailed plans for reorganisation in Warwickshire are not yet agreed, but it is, of course, worth noting that it has had just above the average increase in its standard spending assessment.

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Shephard: I will give way, but I am conscious of the time and will soon have to make progress with my speech.

Ms Morris: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. She will be aware that many local authorities have seen an increase in class size to cope with the cuts. Her colleague, the Minister of State, has said repeatedly in the House that he sees no connection between an increase in class size and pupil performance. Does she share his view, or does she share the fears of many parents whose children are now in classes of more than 30 or 40?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall repeat the words that are likely to have been uttered by my hon. Friend. No research exists in this country to show that marginal increases in class sizes harm standards.

I shall deal now with some of the points made by the hon. Member for Brightside. He has not made it clear how much more he and his party intend to spend on education spending in general, how and from where he might get the money, and which of the Labour party's well-known routes he would follow—whether he would tax, borrow or print money. One thing is for certain—the money will come from the taxpayer, who will pay for Labour's usual mix of inefficiency and ideology, not for better education.

The hon. Gentleman has talked a great deal about the threat to teachers' jobs posed by the settlement. We hear those predictions from Labour Members and from Labour councillors year after year. But the truth is that the number of teachers has remained stable at about 390,000 for the past four years, and teacher vacancies are lower than they have ever been. As pupil numbers increase—as they have done over the past few years—it is possible to tighten some staffing ratios, without threatening standards, as the recent improved exam results show. One must put that teacher staffing ratio in the context of a marked increase in spending on non-teaching staff in schools, thereby releasing teachers for their real work of teaching.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend condemn absolutely the scare story that is being put out by certain Liberal Democrat councils, particularly in Devon, that the Government have cut the grant to local authorities? In fact, in Devon it has gone up by 2.2 per cent? Those councils then go on to say that they are likely to lose 300 teachers. That is putting fear into parents in Devon, which is quite wrong and must be condemned.

Mrs. Shephard: Those are indeed extraordinary assertions from a county which, as my right hon. Friend said, has had twice the average increase; and which, we understand, has unspent school balances of more than £10 million, has reserves of £51 million and has increased administrative staff numbers over the past year by 718.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Shephard: I will give way to my hon. Friend, but then I must make progress.

Mr. Elletson: Is my right hon. Friend also aware of the scaremongering of Lancashire county council, which is talking about having to make hundreds of teachers redundant? Will she deal with the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), but which was so blithely and arrogantly ignored by the hon. Member for Brightside? Is it not a disgrace that the county council should be threatening to do that at a time when there is a ratio of one bureaucrat in county hall to every 17 teachers? A further point that Lancashire county council refused to take account of is that there are hundreds of surplus places in secondary schools throughout the county.

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. As I said earlier, a county with unspent school balances of £33 million seems to be making a lot of fuss.

The number of non-manual staff employed by councils increased by 90,000 between 1987 and 1993. The Audit Commission found that less than half that increase resulted from central Government initiatives. So there is room for manouevre—and it is worth reminding ourselves that LEAs have yet to set their own budgets.

Of course, the number of teachers actually employed depends not just on the pay settlement and what LEAs decide, but on how governors deploy the budgets delegated to them. I hope that the hon. Member for Brightside noted carefully what the chief inspector said in his report about the level of balances in schools. He said:

> "A quarter of the primary schools inspected carried forward more than 10 per cent. of their budget. Around one-sixth of secondary schools carried forward over £200 per pupil."

He went on to note:

> "Such deficiencies underline the need to strengthen financial management . . . Some schools had clear reasons for their surpluses . . . others . . . exhibited undue caution in retaining substantial sums for no considered purpose."

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Shephard: I will, but then I really must move on.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall be brief. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the six schools with the largest balances in Britain are grant-maintained schools with balances of more than £500,000 each?

Mrs. Shephard: What the chief inspector says applies to any school, whether LEA or grant-maintained. It is obvious that schools must manage their resources carefully and to the benefit of their pupils. Our latest estimate is that nationally schools held about £700 million in balances at the end of 1993-94. The clear message of that is that there is scope for substantial efficiency savings.

What we have heard today is the usual tired old story. The Opposition's approach is, and always will be, concerned with input rather than output; with money going in, not results coming out; with excuses for

deficiencies rather than efforts for achievements. Perhaps I should congratulate the hon. Member for Brightside on the service that he has performed this afternoon: he has revealed the truth. Despite the carefully crafted images of the new Labour party, despite the carefully cultivated middle class-friendly, "trust me" approach of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), and despite the phrases so cleverly constructed somewhere in the smartest part of north London, the hon. Member for Brightside has blown the lot. He has confirmed—as, no doubt, his hon. Friends will do again during the debate—that the Labour party is still the same old Labour party: the party that always costs you more and, as the hon. Gentleman has confirmed this afternoon, the party that intends to go on costing you more, but with no idea of where the money will come from, except that it must come from the taxpayer.

I read with interest what the hon. Gentleman said last week. Here we have the authentic voice: he will have to be reported to high command. He said:

"I believe we must see three key roads to success within the education system: raising standards, increasing achievement and providing opportunities."

Those are, of course, admirable aims. It so happens that they are precisely the education policies of the present Government, pursued in the teeth of objection from the Opposition parties.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Shephard: No. I have said that I cannot give way any more, in the interests of those who wish to speak later.

If the hon. Member for Brightside and his party now support the raising of standards, why did they say that tests for children were educationally unsound? How could they vote against testing in the Education Reform Act 1988? If they agree with increasing achievement, why did they say that performance tables were an unacceptable management tool in the assessment of school performance? Why did they vote against the publication of such information in 1980?

If the hon. Gentleman and his party now support the provision of opportunity, why, when we introduced grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges, did they say that they would abolish grant-maintained status and force CTCs back under LEA control? Why did they then vote against choice and diversity in education, as provided for in the Education Reform Act? Of course, we cannot be sure about anything that Labour thinks, because some Labour Members have done a U-turn and others have not. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield has reminded us frequently that GM schools are state schools, and that parents have the right to choose schools. Other Opposition Members share his views and demonstrate that by their use of GM schools, but the hon. Member for Brightside opposes GM schools. He said:

"We are against inequity wherever it exists, and that is why we oppose grant-maintained status."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 430.]

In December, he assured his fellow Labour Members that Labour had no intention of continuing GM status, so who speaks for Labour? I accept, of course, that we should be wary of anything that the hon. Gentleman says about new Labour education policies, because the last one that he announced was axed within two hours of him making it by the Labour high command.

The real issue for quality education is outputs. Our reforms in providing a framework for accountability, and our spending decisions in the past 15 years represent a substantial commitment to raising standards in our schools. The facts speak for themselves. More than 43 per cent. of 15-year-olds achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C or higher in 1994, compared with 33 per cent. in 1989; one in three young people are entering higher education, compared with one in eight in 1979; a record 73 per cent. of 16-year-olds are following full-time education, up from 42 per cent. in 1979-1980.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East) *rose—*

Mrs. Shephard: I am sorry, but I must finish my speech now.

Those achievements are a marvellous tribute to our schools, to their teachers and their governing bodies, and to our further and higher education institutions.

If we consider the international picture, we have a record to be proud of. We spend a higher percentage of gross domestic product on public education than Germany or Japan, and we have the highest graduation rate in the European Union. It is on those achievements that schools and colleges will be judged.

The Opposition have a simple policy development system. When the Government announce a new policy, they oppose it. When that policy proves popular, they claim it as their own, and then they promise to double, treble or quadruple the amount that the Government are spending on it. It is quite simple: all one needs is the gall to do it.

Our record speaks for itself. While the Opposition have been dithering, the Government have been doing. While they have been demanding and denigrating, we have been delivering. The threat to education is real. It comes from the Opposition Benches. We shall continue to deliver and to raise standards for all our children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I remind all hon. Members who hope to take part in the debate that speeches are now restricted to 10 minutes, with the exception of that by the spokesman for the Liberal Democrat party.

4.36 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I propose to deal exclusively with the small part of the speech of the Secretary of State for Education which dealt with the question under debate: this year's payment round to local authorities and, specifically, its effect on education.

The Secretary of State said loftily that she did not propose to deal with the subject of the letter that she sent to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I understand why that is, but some of us do not feel the same restraint as it does not put us in the position in which it puts the Secretary of State. That leaked letter leaves her with two alternatives: to explain why she has undergone such a massive conversion in the past six weeks, or to admit that she intends to administer a policy that six weeks ago she said would be disastrous for the education service. Perhaps the Minister replying to the debate will tell us which of those alternatives the Government intend to choose.

[Mr. Roy Hattersley]

The memorandum said that the proposal by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to increase the standard spending assessment by 0.3 per cent. at a time when school rolls were increasing by 1.5 per cent. would produce a real reduction in expenditure of 1.2 per cent. per pupil. Let us operate exactly the same methodology and statistical technique with the present figures. They show that, when school rolls are increasing by 1.5 per cent., a 1.1 per cent. increase in the SSA produces a real reduction in expenditure per pupil of somewhere between 0.3 and 0.4 per cent.—a view confirmed by the Secretary of State's statisticians this morning. That is the basic figure of the present equation as demonstrated by her memorandum. That is also before we take into account the increase that schools are bound to face because of the increase in teachers' pay.

Let me tell the Secretary of State what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said at about 1 pm today. Incidentally, the Government would work a great deal more effectively if members of the Cabinet talked to each other from time to time. At 1.10 pm today, the Chancellor said that there would not be another penny to help pay for teachers' salaries. I will now remind the Secretary of State what she said to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about that situation six weeks ago. She said that the cost of the teachers' pay settlement, assuming that it was something like 2.7 per cent. or 2.9 per cent., would be £90 million.

The Secretary of State asked my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) where the money was to come from, but she might tell us where the £90 million that she demanded six weeks ago was to come from. She said that if the £90 million was not available, the equivalent of 70,000 or 100,000 teachers would have to be sacrificed. The money is not forthcoming, and the only possible alternative for local education authorities and individual governors is to do what the Secretary of State warned the Chancellor of the Duchy would have to be done and reduce the number of teachers in our schools. We do not have to argue about that because that was the Secretary of State's opinion six weeks ago. I want her or her junior Minister to get up and tell us whether she still believes that that will be the disaster set out in her memorandum, or whether there has been an extraordinary change of heart.

I would describe the Secretary of State as the convert of the year, had not the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) appeared on television yesterday evening with a great revelation that he wanted to make to the world—that local democracy meant that local authorities ought to be able to raise local taxes according to the demands of their constituents. I welcome his conversion to the policy that the Labour party has advocated for the past 15 years.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No, certainly not when I have only 10 minutes.

I welcome the conversion of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, but he is not so significant a figure as the Secretary of State—to whom I would, of course, give way immediately even though I have only 10 minutes. Does she stand by what she said in her memorandum about the reduction in the number of teachers and the need for a further £90 million, or has she adopted another view? I suspect that she will say that it does not matter now and that the memorandum was merely a mistake, because at the north of England education conference she offered the extraordinary view that class numbers were not relevant to performance and results. The Minister of State nods. I hope that he will try to convince the independent schools, the city technology colleges and the grant-maintained schools of that point, as those that I know best use as their great pitch to get extra pupils and persuade parents to spend money the fact that they can offer smaller class sizes than the state system.

Is the Minister of State really telling us that a group of 15 pupils preparing for university entrance will do no better than a group of 30 or 35? At the other end of the spectrum, is he saying to schools in my constituency—where many children are learning English as a second language, and where there are many statemented children who need special attention, whether with general learning, numeracy or literacy—that pupils will make the same progress in a class of 35 as they would in a class of 20? If the Minister believes that, he is not fit to hold the office that he currently holds. Every educationist in the country knows that class sizes are crucial to performance. The Secretary of State chooses to say the opposite simply because she is imposing increased class sizes this year.

The Secretary of State is also doing something else. She said in her memorandum that to pick out teachers for special treatment, when everyone from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry upward—or downward, depending on how one looks at it—says that people's wages should be determined by their efforts, at a time when teachers are beginning to co-operate in many of the reforms and proposals that she and her predecessors have introduced, is a wilful misunderstanding of the situation. She is now "provoking" teachers—her own word in the memorandum—when, above all else, schools need a little quiet, a little sensible progress and a little understanding. According to her own words, by picking out teachers she is anticipating and causing undoubted chaos.

I hope that the Secretary of State will not even consider taking my word for it; she must take the word of those running our schools—the governors. I was a Member of Parliament when, two or three Secretaries of State for Education ago—they come and go so quickly and with so little distinction that it is impossible to be sure how many ago it was—a new system of local management was introduced. I am strongly in favour of local management and I like the idea of governors being appointed not because of their political persuasion but because they have an objective interest in the welfare of our schools. They are committed to the schools' progress.

Mr. Dunn: Where has the right hon. Gentleman been for the past 20 years?

Mr. Hattersley: I have been making sure that my entry in the House of Commons guide was always accurate.

Governors were appointed to bring their objective views to bear on the schools' future. What do they say? They say that the Government are risking chaos and risking the reduction in class sizes. It is not the biased and prejudiced Liberal and Labour education authorities saying that, but the school governors who were appointed to be objective according to the Government's own proposals.

What did the Department for Education say this morning when it was asked what it would do if the governors rebelled? It said that the government of schools would have to go back to the politically biased education authorities of which we have heard so much criticism in the past five years.

The Secretary of State is going to preside over chaos in our schools. She is going to increase class sizes and do away with the good will that has been created with some difficulty with the teachers' unions. She will also do one other thing that I regard as especially unforgivable: she will squeeze education budgets in such a way that the schools that need most get least and the schools that need least get most.

The Secretary of State spoke of surpluses, but her memorandum to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster contained no such talk; nor was there any talk of bureaucratic waste or how to solve the problem without extra money. She speaks today about surpluses, but she knows—or needs to be reminded—that grant-maintained schools, partly because of the corrupt way in which they have been financed, have surpluses in their accounts which are on average 60 per cent. higher than those of state-maintained schools. Once more, grant-maintained schools will come out of this financially better than the generality of schools. That is the corruption of a divided education system. One of the reasons why we confirm—and I certainly confirm—that we shall continue our fight against that divided education system is that when the squeeze comes, it is always the schools that need most which get the least. That is what the right hon. Lady is prophesying and what she is making certain today.

4.47 pm

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I share my colleagues' pleasure in participating in this debate, but I must say at the outset how disagreeable it is that we should be witnessing such blatant politicking by the Opposition, which serves no purpose other than to worry and upset teachers and parents to the detriment of the education provided for our children. Politicking at the expense of our children is the worst form of politicking.

It was interesting to hear the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) mention the £90 million which may or may not have to be produced to subvent an extra payment for teachers. In debates such as this, when we are talking about a specific subject, it is always easy to forget that every bit of expenditure has to be viewed in the context of the Government's entire expenditure. We can say that every sum of money for any particular service is most important, but the debate must take place in the context of the total amount of money available for public expenditure. I shall say a little more about that later.

Like most people—certainly like most hon. Members—I believe that education is a very high priority. I was proud to be part of the very reforms which I believe have been the basis on which the Conservative party has been able noticeably to improve the education of our children, from the earliest age through to the increasing numbers going into higher and further education, which has been a great achievement. I remind Opposition Members that the national curriculum, testing, and local management of schools did not exist before 1979. They came into being as a result of the hard work and endeavour of the Conservative party in Government. They were forced through—I was part of the process that introduced every one of those reforms—despite much resistance from Opposition Members. Despite that, it has been interesting to see and hear Opposition Members change and claim that those reforms were their idea in the first place.

I am an unashamedly strong supporter of the Government's current economic policies. It is essential that we support and sustain the current efforts to ensure that the economy is on a sound footing. Part of that policy must be restraint, reduction and maintenance—within a straitjacket—of public expenditure, which has to be set against the whole business of encouraging growth and wealth production. If we are to survive in a competitive world, which will become increasingly competitive, we should be concerned about the battle against inflation and the battle against punitive public expenditure for many years to come. Any party in responsible Government will have to consider that.

No one knows better than I the cost of teachers to local authorities. Having lived through 10 years of local government, I know perfectly well precisely how much the cost of a 1 per cent. increase in teachers' pay means to a local authority budget. I do not speak in ignorance: I realise that teachers' pay is a very high expenditure item. Few people would disagree that teachers are a very high priority and should be a high priority in local government expenditure. I have always thought it more important to protect teacher numbers than to protect some of the other items on which my local authority, from time to time, has placed priority. Indeed, I argued that case against all other expenditure to try to protect what I thought was most important. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been in precisely the same position and has done precisely as I have.

Local authorities have a special duty to address expenditure at every level and to protect sharp end services such as education and community care. It is all too easy for them to say that they will attack the sharp end services so that they can protect all the other services that they think are more important. I will cite the example of the borough in which my constituency lies—the London borough of Merton—and explain why I think that this debate is being orchestrated nationally simply to upset and to scare parents and governors in the hope that they will make unwise decisions from which the Opposition parties may make political capital.

Merton council has been Labour controlled for the past five years. When Labour came to power, it was in receipt of quite considerable reserves. Like every new administration, however, it had its particular priorities and desires to make changes and to introduce new ideas. Also, of course, central administration was increased quite dramatically. As the central administration expanded, so did the amount of money that the local authority needed to finance it on a revenue basis. Then, of course, came changes, new priorities and battles in different services; some people were made redundant, which is an expensive exercise, as anyone in local government who has ever tried to make people redundant will understand.

In the London borough of Merton over the past five years we have experienced an inability to look carefully at capital and revenue expenditure and to plan for more than one year at a time which has resulted in stop-go policies and financing that would happen nationally were such a disaster as a Labour Government ever to occur. The recently Labour-controlled council of the London

[Dame Angela Rumbold]

borough of Merton, which has turned an authority with substantial balances into one with a current £12 million deficit, is a clear example of precisely what can happen through bad management, lack of planning and a total misunderstanding of the way in which revenue capital must be managed.

Faced with proposals for a tough standard spending assessment settlement this year, the borough has produced the usual knee-jerk reaction: it says that it will cut each school's budget by 7.5 per cent. and that youth services and music provision will have to be cut by 50 per cent. Youth provision has been carefully managed in my local authority. Being an inner and an outer borough, we experience some of the same problems as inner London boroughs. Youth services are therefore one of the more important provisions. To reduce provision by 50 per cent. and then to rant and rave at the Conservative party about law and order seems to be facing both ways at the same time with remarkable efficiency. I am not surprised that there was a near riot of young people and youth workers outside the town hall last night over the outrageous and disgraceful way in which they believed that the budget had been managed.

All that is despite the 2.4 per cent. increase in the provisional standard spending assessment for education in the coming year, which represents—proportionately—a larger share of the national funding for education. Even with rising teachers' pay, it must be possible in the context of overall expenditure to reduce the number of so-called indicator projects, security commissions, equality officers and so forth, to name but a few pet projects that my Labour-controlled council has implemented, and thus to address the serious problem of how to retain essential services such as education and, most importantly, to avoid making any of its teachers redundant or cutting youth services.

I doubt whether the London borough of Merton is all that different from many Liberal Democrat and Labour-controlled councils across the country. It saddens me to say this, but the distressing truth is that councils are conducting a cynical exercise in exploitation of the Government's financial policies at the expense of their own ability to manage cost-effectively and in the interests of their absurd, absolutely ridiculous, love affair with gesture politics.

4.57 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I declare an interest and remind the House that I am an adviser to two teacher unions. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) advised members of the Cabinet to talk to each other. He was wasting his breath, because on the few occasions when Cabinet members talk to each other, they do not seem to take any notice of what is said. Indeed, no notice was taken by her Cabinet colleagues of the pleading by the Secretary of State for more cash for education. One would have thought that she would have been bitterly disappointed by that rejection, but if she was, she certainly did not show it today. She painted an amazingly rosy picture of the education service, yet she must know of the deep concerns of all of those who work for, and are involved in, the education service; people who—frankly—deserve far more praise for their work than they receive. Many of them are wondering why they have had to go through so much to achieve so little.

I shall take just one example—class size, which has been referred to several times. As a result of the Government's figures, we now know that the number of primary pupils in classes of more than 30 has risen by 19 per cent. in the past two years—more than a million primary school pupils are now in classes of more than 30 and, in England alone, almost 100,000 children are in classes of more than 36 pupils. A similar picture of increased class sizes is emerging for secondary schools.

The Government used to believe that class size mattered. It is interesting to reflect that the 1983 Conservative manifesto boasted:

"The average number of children per teacher is the lowest ever".

Even later, the Conservatives still thought that class size mattered. The 1987 Conservative manifesto boasted:

"There are more teachers in proportion to pupils than ever before".

Only now, when the situation is worsening, have they changed their tune.

The Minister of State told the House:

"there is no proven causal connection between class size and educational output."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 767.]

The Minister is nodding to confirm that that is what he said.

The hon. Gentleman should know that Sir John Cassels, a distinguished member of the National Commission on Education, certainly did not agree with him when he spoke on the radio only last night. I am sure that by now he must be aware of the hundreds of thousands of parents, teachers, governors and pupils who fundamentally disagree with him, and who believe that class size matters.

I wish that the Minister would listen to the views of just one parent, whose opinion was quoted in a survey carried out by Exeter university last year. She said succinctly:

"Any half-wit should realise that increasing class size is detrimental to a child's education".

Yet, sadly, class sizes are on the rise, and the quality of education provision is set to fall because of the Government's funding policies.

Last week, I published an analysis of the Government's figures for the money that they expect local education authorities to spend on each pupil—figures that, unlike the Government's attempts to mask the cuts, take into account both inflation and the rising number of pupils. Those figures are startling. After the difficult years that education has already faced, the Government's local government financial settlement this year means that, on average, LEAs in England are being expected to cope with £50 less in real terms for each primary pupil and a staggering £194 less in real terms for each secondary pupil. Realistically, that means a cut of £10,000 in the budget of a 200-pupil primary school and a staggering cut of £126,000 in the budget of a 650-pupil secondary school.

During Prime Minister's questions earlier today the Prime Minister accused my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) of having his facts wrong. I should like the Minister of State to tell me now whether

those facts, as I believe them to be, are correct or incorrect. The Minister is not rising to speak, so clearly he is confirming that the Government are imposing real cuts.

The hon. Gentleman will also know that in some parts of the country the position is far worse. In Northumberland, for example, some of which is covered by the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), the cut is £72 per primary pupil and £223 per secondary pupil.

The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) mentioned her concern about what is happening in Merton. I hope that she is as worried as I am about what the Government cut will mean for Merton—a cut of £48 per primary pupil. The right hon. Lady is shaking her head, but that figure is based on the Government's own statistics, updated allowing for inflation. It represents the standard spending assessment per pupil, as supplied by the Government. For Merton it means a cut of £48 per primary pupil and £216 per secondary pupil.

Dame Angela Rumbold: Those are fine figures, but may I remind the hon. Gentleman that there is about £2.5 million of reserves in the balances for education spending alone? I hope that he will take on board the fact that when the council comes to make a budget, as I trust that it will, there will still be money there both for it to budget properly to maintain its teachers and for the necessary spending on children.

Mr. Foster: I am certain that everybody who lives in Merton will have noticed what the right hon. Lady has said. She described cuts of £48 per primary pupil and £216 per secondary pupil as "fine figures". I hope that that will be published far and wide in her constituency.

Far worse cuts are being made in other parts of the country. Because of the inadequacies of the area cost adjustments, in all the south-western counties we shall start from a base of £130 less per pupil even before the cuts that I have mentioned are imposed.

Ministers and other Conservative Members have, of course, already started accusing Opposition Members of crying wolf. It is true that in the past it has been possible for some local education authorities to take money from other service areas and deprive those areas so as to prevent major cuts in the education service, but many of those possibilities have dried up, now that we have had year after year of cuts in the other sectors. Even within many LEAs, the opportunities to take away central support money have now disappeared.

We now see the ludicrous process of Ofsted inspectors travelling round schools identifying problems, and then finding that there is no one left at LEA advisory level to provide the schools with any help in trying to put right what is wrong. Rising pupil numbers are not the only problem. There will be—indeed, there have already been—cuts in the money available for books and equipment in many schools, and there is a shortage of money for repairs and maintenance. There is now a staggering backlog of £4.3 billion worth of repairs and maintenance of school buildings.

What is the point of the Minister promoting much-improved policies for special educational needs work when the money will not be available to carry that work out? Certainly there will be no money available for any of the much-needed expansion in nursery education.

Despite all that, the Minister of State still claims, as he did on 19 December, that

> "The plea from LEAs that they do not have much money will not wash".—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 1514.]

He is talking complete hogwash.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): What on earth is the Minister saying to authorities such as Northumberland, which last year was allowed an extra £12 million in its standard spending assessment but was told that it could not spend more than £2 million because of the capping limits?

Mr. Foster: My right hon. Friend makes a telling point, revealing not only the absurdity of the local government financial settlement but the lack of understanding of local education authorities that Conservative Members display.

If the Minister and his colleagues take no notice of what I say, or of what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) says, I hope that they will at least start to listen to the views expressed by Conservative supporters throughout the country, especially those working as school governors. They know that education has been cut to the bone, and that the Government are now forcing cuts into the bone. Governors are being asked to do more and more, yet are given less and less with which to do it.

Things will get worse unless the Government fully fund the teachers' pay award. Nothing short of full funding immediately will do. The Liberal Democrats are committed to restoring the cuts and to funding the teachers' pay increase in its entirety. We are also committed to further boosting the funding for education, and we have an honest answer to the question of how we shall pay for it. We have made it clear that if there is no other way, we would increase income tax by 1p in the pound. I hope that the hon. Member for Brightside, or whoever winds up for the Labour party, will give an equally clear explanation of where Labour would find the money.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one way in which money could be released for the sharp end of education would be to cut back the central bureaucracy of an education authority, especially if more than half the secondary schools in the area were grant maintained? The Liberal Democrats in Kent have signally failed to do that.

Mr. Foster: I explained the problems which many local education authorities were having because their central services have been pared to the bone. They are not able to deliver the level of support which many schools are now demanding.

It is crucial that we all understand that, in this increasingly global market, we boost investment in the education service. Despite the weasel words of the Prime Minister and the Government, the Conservative party still prefers to cut education provision in the classroom primarily—as we all know—to save money which is to be stored for possible tax bribes before the next election. The Conservatives are putting their party before the needs of the country.

5.9 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I shall not follow the comments of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster),

[Mr. Keith Mans]

except to say that I had thought that we might hear the odd word about the Liberal Democrats' education policy in relation to grant-maintained schools and the other initiatives which the Government have brought forward. I heard nothing, however, and I can only assume that the hon. Gentleman still believes what he said at the end of 1993, when he pointed out that there was virtually no difference between the Liberal Democrat party's attitude towards education and that of the Labour party.

Mr. Don Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mans: No, I only have 10 minutes in which to speak. The hon. Gentleman has had his chance to make his points.

Everyone who has spoken in the debate today realises that this year's education settlement is a tight one. It is not fully appreciated that many LEAs—Lancashire being but one—have made a tight settlement for themselves even tighter for their schools. Lancashire, for instance, has had a 1.1 per cent. SSA increase. That has been translated into a 5.5 per cent. decrease in the delegated budget which the Labour-controlled authority has given to the schools under its control.

The only possible conclusion to be drawn from that is that Lancashire and other authorities—mainly controlled by the Liberal Democrats or the Labour party—have given less priority to education this year than has been given in previous years. They may well have had a case if they had increased the delegated budget by the same amount in cash terms as the Government had given them, but they have not done that. Instead, they have cut the budget in real terms.

Instead of demonstrating against Government cuts, the governors and head teachers in Oxfordshire be demonstrating against the cuts imposed by their own county council, and if they wish to set an illegal budget, they consider carefully the consequences of doing so. Where do they think the money for that illegal budget will come from? Are they proposing to increase the public sector borrowing requirement nationally to cope with illegal budgets? Are they proposing a tax increase, or are they proposing that cuts should hit some other part of the community, such as health or community care? Those in Oxfordshire and other parts of the country should pay more attention to the cuts which are being imposed because of overheads at county hall.

In that context, my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) made a good point in saying that, for every 17 teachers in the county of Lancashire—I suspect the figures are not too different in other counties—there is one bureaucrat. That is where cuts should be imposed.

Across the country, a huge number of surplus places need to be taken out. Many county councils have been bad at being proactive. They have failed to anticipate the numbers coming forward for primary education, and failed to anticipate that there would be a decline in the numbers going into secondary education.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is tragic that Lancashire does not take out surplus secondary school places, but very frequently does try to take out primary places, where there is a deficit. There is a shortage of primary places, yet the council is always trying to close primary places.

Mr. Mans: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is very important that, when one is looking at the number of places required—

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mans: No, I have only 10 minutes.

It is important to ensure that a council takes up the surplus places as soon as possible, otherwise it will not have the money to fund extra primary places. Later in the cycle, the council might have to take out a few primary school places, if the numbers are going down, to fund the extra secondary places that may come along. A lot of LEAs—particularly Lancashire—are bad at that.

If schools feel that, as a result of being under local authority control, they are not getting the full amount of money from the budget that the local authority has been given by the Government, they should seriously consider whether they wish to remain under local authority control. That is the only logical conclusion. If the delegated budgets are cut by more than the amount of money given by the Government, it makes sense for many schools to consider carefully whether they would be better off applying for grant-maintained status.

When grant-maintained schools are created, some of the first people who take up that option for the education of their children are Opposition Members and Labour chairmen of local authorities and of education committees. They all seem to know where the best schools are and they send their children to them, despite the fact that they happen to be grant-maintained schools. That is what is happening in the Labour party. While there are certainly a few Labour Members who do not agree with that view, the fact is that the party's members are voting with their feet and sending their children to the schools that they think will be best for their children. That choice has been provided by this Conservative Government.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will explain—not necessarily this evening, but perhaps in the form of a letter—how the figures on the area cost adjustment are arrived at. I am certain that there were good reasons why this was necessary in the past, but I submit that there is now much less of an imbalance in terms of wage costs and other matters between the north and the south. I strongly recommend that my hon. Friend looks closely at the way in which the area cost adjustment applies, particularly in places such as Lancashire, and also further south in places such as Northamptonshire.

I believe sincerely that our education system needs to change, and that it is changing from being essentially a resource and input-led system to a results-led system. It is changing from—in the terms of the Labour party—a grand experiment in social engineering, which is what it was during the 1960s and 1970s, to a system which prepares children properly for life in the world that exists today and that will exist tomorrow. That is why I am sure that the Government's education policy is succeeding, while the policy suggested by the Opposition—although we have yet to hear anything about it—would undoubtedly fail.

5.18 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): As local education authorities throughout England prepare their budgets, the true size of the cuts in money likely to be available for primary and secondary pupils has been revealed by the Government, via parliamentary questions. West country LEAs have been particularly badly hit, starting as they do from a lower point than other LEAs due to the unfairness of the area cost adjustment. But if one compares the changes in real terms in the budgets for next year with this year through the SSA per pupil, there will be a real cash cut in Avon of £56 for each primary school pupil, and a staggering £184 for each secondary school pupil. Somerset will lose £46 and £176 respectively, and the corresponding figures for Gloucestershire are £41 and £183. On average, in just one year local education authorities are expected to cope with a real-terms cut of 2.5 per cent. or £50 per primary pupil and a draconian 6.9 per cent. or £194 per secondary pupil. Those cuts are in addition to cuts in previous years.

It is even worse in the west country, where the SSA per pupil is £130 below the English average at primary level and £134 at secondary level. Contrast that with the statement made by the Minister of State on 19 December 1994, when he said:

"the plea from LEAs that they do not have enough money will not wash".—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 1514.]

How out of touch can one get?

Last month, the Secretary of State told the North of England conference:

"You will still need to find ways of making the money go further".

What does that mean for class sizes, special educational needs, school repairs, and governors' and teachers' morale?

Since January 1992, the number of primary school pupils in classes of more than 30 has increased by 19 per cent. In January 1994, the figure rose to more than 1 million for the first time in many years. In Avon, there has been a staggering increase in the number of primary school children in large classes: between 1992 and 1994, there was a 32 per cent. increase, representing 6,486 more children in classes of more than 30 pupils. The increase in Somerset was 8 per cent.; in Gloucestershire it was 25 per cent.; and in Wiltshire it was an almost unbelievable 45 per cent. I am not surprised that no Conservative Members representing constituencies in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire are in the Chamber today. *[Interruption.]* May I say to the Minister of State that I am here to speak for the west country on behalf of the Opposition.

What is the Government's response? In 1983, the Conservative party manifesto said:

"The average number of children per teacher is the lowest ever",

and in 1987, its manifesto boasted:

"There are more teachers in proportion to pupils than ever before".

It presumably made those statements in the belief that the lower the pupil-teacher ratio, the better. People had a right to expect further improvement. Between 1970-71 and 1980-81, pupil-teacher ratios in primary schools improved from 27:1 to 22:3 and in secondary schools from 17:8 to 16:4. But following the unprecedented rises to which I referred, the Minister of State said in the House on 13 December 1994:

"There is no proven causal connection between class size and educational output".—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 767.]

He must know that he is wrong.

In 1994, Professor Neville Bennett of Exeter university undertook a survey of the views of head teachers, chairs of governors, teachers and parents. He found not only a clear consensus that increasing class size adversely affects teaching and learning, but that 90 per cent. of parents with children in classes of more than 30 showed deep satisfaction.

A teacher-governor in my constituency summed up the position admirably when he wrote to me this week saying:

"I am unable to give as much attention to each individual's needs as I should, because there are so many others requiring it as well".

What does "making the money go further" mean for school buildings and repairs? The chair of governors of Hanham high school in Avon wrote to me saying that the Department for Education had turned down its application for replacement of what he described as "decrepit, depressing and antiquated" buildings. In my constituency, Bannerman Road school—a two-storey primary school built in 1877—is in desperate need of replacement.

On special educational needs, in two primary schools in my constituency the proportions of children with special educational needs are 50 per cent. and 54 per cent. Teachers try to motivate little children who are identified as having "low self-esteem". The chair of governors of Little Hayes nursery school in Bristol recently wrote to me saying:

"I would like to state, on behalf of the Governors of the above-named school, how increasingly worried governing bodies are becoming because of the gradual reduction in worth of monies that Governing bodies are receiving.

As Chair of a school without a delegated budget I am acutely aware of the reduction in services due to the lack of money that Councils are receiving. Services that should have been held centrally for the school to use are no longer there having either been cut completely or having been privatised and are no longer accessible to schools without a delegated budget.

As a country Britain has claimed that Education was for all for over a century, but it now appears that every parent needs to subsidise their local authority, to some extent, to keep their children's schools working."

The Secretary of State says that the money must go further. What planet is she on? If she has £184 less to spend on her household shopping next year, how will she make the money go further? She will have to cut something out. In Avon, the main policy criterion has been to protect the schools' budget, to the detriment of services as diverse as discretionary awards, peripatetic music tuition and new nursery class provision, leading to further protest.

The head teacher of Redcliffe nursery school in my constituency wrote to me saying:

"It concerns me greatly that once again Nursery Schools, their children and staff are being discriminated against both at a local and national level. The DFE has made no GEST allocation for nursery schools. This also raises the question of equal opportunities for staff working in Nursery Schools."

She called for an investigation into the DFE's continuing discrimination against nursery schools and asked how that fits with the Government's proposed policy of nursery education for all four-year-olds.

[Ms Jean Corston]

LEAs are powerless to resist that inexorable onslaught. I regret that counties throughout England are facing a dilemma that has been all too familiar in Avon, where restrictions have been placed on spending by capping criteria every year since 1990-91. It is not good enough for Conservative Members to point the finger at LEAs. They should look to their Front Bench, for that is where the blame lies. If they really want more money for our schools, they should join us in the Lobby tonight to condemn the detrimental impact of the 1995-96 settlement on standards and opportunities for our children and young people.

5.26 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): May I draw the attention of the House to the motion on the Order Paper in the name of the Leader of the Opposition? The six names of Opposition Members who support it include the shadow Chief Whip and the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party. However, the list does not include the shadow Treasury spokesman, which is a startling omission. Hon. Members may find it deeply significant that no member of the shadow Treasury team is prepared to put his name to the motion. Another extraordinary and startling omission is that the motion does not mention the teachers' pay awards. That shows the true import that Opposition Members attach to today's debate.

The speeches that we have heard from Opposition Members so far have been predictable: the usual demands for more money and the usual silence about where it would come from.

Mr. Don Foster: That is not true of speeches by Liberal Democrat Members.

Mr. Pawsey: On this occasion, I shall excuse the hon. Gentleman from those strictures. He may, however, come in for adverse comments later.

It would be helpful if Opposition Members would occasionally bend their minds, however distasteful that may be, to the sordid problem of money. If they intend to make more funds available to local authorities, through them to the education service and through it to schools, where will they get it from? Do they intend to raise it from taxation or will they make savings in other services? If they take the former route of imposing higher taxes, has that been agreed by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)? That is no academic point, because it is crucial and central to today's debate. Hon. Members will understand that there is a world of difference between some vague, well-intentioned phrase quoted in a television studio and a firm, costed, unconditional pledge on how much cash will be provided and when. That is what counts and that will underline the true importance that Opposition Members attach to education. It is no good complaining that funds are inadequate if, at the same time, Opposition Members are not prepared to say where the money will come from.

Like everyone else, I would like more money for education and that is why I applaud the Government for embarking on the remarkable increase in education spending that has occurred since we were first elected in 1979. The Government have increased spending per pupil by 47 per cent. in real terms, an amount probably without precedent in recent times. Spending on books and equipment is up by 31 per cent. in real terms and teachers have not been forgotten either. Their pay has increased by almost 60 per cent., again in real terms.

Given those substantial increases, I sometimes wonder whether the taxpayer has always received value for money. I suspect that it is only since the Government's reforms of 1988 that educational attainment has shown a real improvement when compared with the 1960s and 1970s. It was, after all, Jim Callaghan who started the great debate in 1976 with his speech at Ruskin college.

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): That is right.

Mr. Pawsey: I am delighted to note the assent of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson).

Hon. Members will recall that the education reforms have included the introduction of the national curriculum and testing; the establishment of Ofsted, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already referred; the introduction of GCSEs; the local management of schools; and the introduction of grant-maintained schools. All those reforms and a host of other measures are set to improve the quality and standard of state education.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend must forgive me, but I just have 10 minutes in which to speak.

Since today's debate is about funding and has been held at the initiative of Her Majesty's Opposition, it is worth considering some of the ideas being actively promoted by the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. They need some consideration—not a lot—but it would be useful to know exactly where they stand on grant-maintained schools. Will they allow them to continue or not? Some Opposition Members appreciate the benefits of those schools and send their children to them. Let me make it clear immediately that I do not criticise them in any way for that. As parents, they naturally want the best for their children and are able to exercise the freedom and choice given to them and every other parent by the Government. What I and my hon. Friends find unacceptable, however, is that while some Opposition Members send their children to those schools, at the same time other members of the same party are actively seeking their abolition. That suggests a degree of confusion or worse, which is intolerable. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that I have woken up Opposition Members, because, frankly, their attitude in today's debate is almost dozy. The debate has been held at their initiative, but the fact that so few of them are present shows how much they care about education.

The abolition of grant-maintained schools has spending implications. If Opposition Members want those schools to be returned to local education authorities, what will that cost? Currently those schools are run efficiently and effectively. They give parents what they want for their children, vide the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition. If those schools are brought back under the control of LEAs to satisfy the ideological views of a small number of small-minded people, it will be at a cost to the education budget.

Another idea mooted by one Opposition spokesman—sadly he is not present this afternoon—is that a graduate tax should be introduced in place of the interest-free

student loan. Perhaps Opposition Members can tell the House what that idea would cost to implement. It would mean, presumably, that the current Student Loans Company would be wound up and new arrangements made through the Inland Revenue. That is unlikely to be a cheap exercise.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: No, I am sorry, but I am almost out of time.

It is a truism that one can spend a pound only once. That applies to teachers, books, schools or crack-brained measures designed to satisfy the more socialist instincts of the National Union of Teachers.

On local authority spending, I believe that it is now time to reconsider the capping legislation—I know that a number of hon. Friends share my view. I must add that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) had the courtesy to write to me to say that he intended to mention me in his speech. I wonder how that courtesy compares with that shown by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) when he referred to my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten)? I suspect that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who is now not here, remembers the traditions of the House far better than some other Opposition Members.

I am not ashamed to say that I believe that the capping mechanism should now be removed, because the socialist republics that ran some of our great cities in the 1980s—the Manchesters, the Liverpools, the Sheffields and some of the London boroughs—have greatly modified their position in the wake of four successive general election defeats. The capping legislation should therefore be substantially amended to restore to local authorities the right to decide their own level of local spending in accordance the right with perceived local needs, which certainly includes education.

5.36 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I shall confine my remarks to the effects of the 1995-96 settlement on Barnsley. It has not only highlighted a crisis in education generally, but, in particular, highlighted the problems faced by Barnsley. It threatens the advances that we have made in nursery education provision, but, most worrying of all, it will certainly halt the steady improvements that have been made in primary and secondary educational attainment.

It would appear that, nationally, the Government have been too preoccupied with their policy of featherbedding the private school sector while standards in schools in the public sector have fallen. By allowing that to happen, the sad fact is that the Government are not only failing our children but failing to address the important question of Britain's future. Britain can survive in a competitive global market only if we maintain good educational standards. The educational standards achieved under the Government have not come up to what Ministers would have us believe. For example, a recent survey revealed that one third of 14-year-olds are not mastering basic English, mathematics and science. That survey also revealed that one in six adults has severe literacy and numeracy difficulties. Those educated in the 1960s and the 1970s fare better than those taught in the 1980s, which contradicts the point made by the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins). I was a teacher in the 1970s and I can at least claim that I helped young people to achieve.

Education in Barnsley has been seriously threatened. We had a long battle to persuade the Minister that the standard spending assessment formula treated Barnsley unfairly. The review of the criteria was hailed as a chance to achieve a fairer distribution of SSAs, but it has not brought any appreciation of our problem—at least, in our experience. This year, for example, Barnsley's maximum expenditure limit is only 0.5 per cent. more than our 1994-95 equivalent budget, which is only 0.5 per cent. greater than the SSA level. That compares with the average allowance above SSAs for metropolitan districts of 4.5 per cent. Obviously, Barnsley has been unfairly treated.

Already music services to schools have been lost as a result of a failure to fund properly in past years. That is an especially hurtful blow in a region that has fought hard to keep some semblance of cultural activities alive in its schools. In addition, the community education programme has been closed, as has the schools swimming programme. All those cuts, caused by a lack of Government funding, add to the demoralisation of a community that has had more than its fair share of knocks.

Between 1991 and 1994, for example, the number of our secondary school pupils has increased by 5 per cent. One would have expected that, in a rational society, the resources that Government provide would at least be proportionate to the pupil increase, but of course we are talking about irrational government.

In a typical Barnsley secondary school, the standstill budget will mean a further steep staff reduction of five teachers. A reduction of five teachers in each school will mean that there will be no special educational needs teaching in the school curriculum. Currently there are 36 periods per week in maths and English for children with special educational needs. At present, 13 additional periods are offered per week for children who have learning difficulties in science classes, but the cut will mean that the number of pupils in classes will increase from 22 to 28. There will also be a reduction in arts and technology teaching. Currently there are 16 periods a week in art, music and information technology. That could disappear altogether, and it would seriously affect the delivery of the national curriculum in those lesson areas.

As recently as a few weeks ago, I attended two school speech days; one at Willowgarth school, on the east side of Barnsley, the other at Penistone grammar school, in my constituency. Willowgarth is situated in the village of Grimethorpe, where the last colliery closure in the Barnsley area took place. The teaching staff are proud of the fact that they have done a first-class job in helping to provide the community with hope and a good school for its children to attend. Now their efforts have been threatened by a lack of funding. The governors at Penistone grammar school told me that they were struggling to ensure that the school could maintain its good record. They were afraid, however, that without a commensurate increase in resourcing to meet the increase in pupil numbers the school and, more importantly, the community, would lose out.

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

Barnsley has been confronted by some severe spending pressures in education. For example, the number of children with a statutory entitlement to free meals increased by 58 per cent., from 6,081 in 1990 to 9,591 in 1994, resulting in an increased cost of £1 million. The number of children eligible for a clothes grant has increased in the same period by 54 per cent. and now stands at almost 11,000, resulting in an increased cost of £200,000.

Special educational needs have increased at an alarming rate: from 1.3 per cent. of pupils in 1990 to 3.1 per cent. to date. That has resulted in an extra cost of £3.2 million.

Another increased spending pressure that will obviously bear heavily on Barnsley is the funding of the teachers' pay settlements. The School Teachers Review Body will recommend a 2.7 per cent. increase. The increase must be paid, but I urge the Minister to impress on Government that it must be met by Government funding, rather than leaving it to local authorities.

The sad thing is that the cuts have come at a time when things have been steadily improving in Barnsley schools. Although the Department for Education's league tables show that Barnsley schools are considerably below the national average, the overall school performance index illustrates an improvement between 1989 and 1994. Now the progress and the achievement of individual schools are threatened by financial constraints.

Barnsley is an authority that works well with its governing bodies. In the past year, the town has held the first educational conference for governors and staff. That was followed by a series of meetings, when a vision statement of the education service was developed and its aims and objectives were established. The tragedy is that the objectives are now placed in jeopardy by the budget.

Finally, I urge the Minister to ask the Secretary of State for Education to bring pressure to bear on the Secretary of State for the Environment to meet Barnsley's council leaders and to consider sympathetically a formula that will allow the Barnsley community to progress towards its educational objectives.

Mr. Pawsey: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During my remarks I may not have mentioned the fact that I am a parliamentary adviser to the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. If I did not do so, may I ask that it now be recorded in the *Official Report*?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member did not declare that interest earlier. I am grateful that he has now remembered to do so.

5.45 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) spoke this afternoon and also spoke on local government finance last week, although I believe that the Liberal Democrats' local government finance spokesman is the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). On both occasions, the hon. Member for Bath rather glancingly criticised the area cost adjustment and the way in which it is calculated. Perhaps the reason why the hon. Member for Newbury is not present this afternoon and was silent last week is that the county in which his constituency lies, Berkshire, benefits from the area cost adjustment.

On local government finance in general, the Liberals in the west country are campaigning heavily about the area cost adjustment, and we also heard from the Labour Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston).

We need to be realistic. Conservative Members agree with the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration about considering the issue and trying to resolve it in the coming year, but the idea that there is a bag of gold at the end of the rainbow that will resolve all these budgetary problems is far-fetched.

The hon. Member for Bath also referred to the Liberal policy of an increase in income tax of a penny in the pound to finance education, one of the Liberal Democrats' supposedly popular policies. Those who study the Liberal Democrats' pledges and policies believe that the actual cost would amount to 2.5 pennies in the pound. However, for every constituent who wants a penny or 2.5p spent on education, there will be some who want the same amount or more to be spent on law and order, defence, health or pensions and social security. Before we have gone very far, we shall be well in excess of a 30p in the pound basic rate of income tax. I hope that the House will consider that.

The response of Conservative Members of Parliament with constituencies in Somerset to the local government finance settlement was made in the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) last Wednesday. I am glad to see him in the Chamber. I should like to take some of those arguments further, because there has been a hysterical campaign, not only in Somerset but in Devon.

Schools have been given indicative budgets. Sespiteincreases in Government assistance and despite increases—albeit small—in the amount that Somerset and Devon can spend up to the capping limit, those schools have been told to make substantial cuts in their budgets. Therefore, conclusions are being drawn about the number of teacher redundancies that might result.

Not surprisingly, people are worried; some are very angry. There have been marches. My hon. Friends and I have had many letters. We have had petition forms, referring, I may say, to a cut in Government support—and, as I said, there has been no cut in Government support. That is a typical lie.

The Conservative county councillors in Somerset have proposed alternatives to the Liberal budget, but the response, rather curiously, of the ruling majority party is to say, "There is no alternative." The Liberal Democrats plan to go ahead with their indicative budgets, their sacking of teachers and their causing of deep chaos in schools in my constituency and those of my hon. Friends.

In addition to the alternative budgets of Conservative county councillors, I have a few more points to consider. Last year, Somerset county council increased its staff by 500—so it was not exactly the tight year that some people have suggested. It claimed that 200 teachers would have to be sacked last year, but instead 98 teachers and 166 classroom assistants were recruited.

A note from the Library, which is based on a written answer from 17 October 1994, shows how much of their education budget the various local education authorities have delegated to schools. Somerset is about a third of the way up the list, with 86.2 per cent. of its total education budget delegated to schools. The hon. Member for Bath—I am glad to see that he is in his place—referred to

Northumberland. During the same period, it delegated 88.9 per cent. of its education budget to schools. At the top of the list is Hertfordshire, which delegated 91.3 per cent. of its education budget to schools, and Berkshire delegated 90 per cent. Of course, schools would have more money if Somerset and other local authorities delegated more of their education budgets to them.

Reference was also made to the balances held by schools. I appreciate that some schools have deliberately saved balances year after year in order to fund specific projects. Therefore, I do not wish to encourage schools to dig deep into their funding reserves or spend their balances in one year. A written answer of 19 January 1995, at column *641* of *Hansard*, to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), shows that Somerset has £6.6 million in school balances. It is interesting to compare that with Devon, which has a much larger pupil population, at £10.3 million.

Those councillors in Somerset who are anxious to save mainstream education services might consider some perhaps more controversial proposals. For example, they could reverse, or at least postpone, the Liberal policy to have children start school at a younger age—the rising fives issue. The previous Conservative administration made a rather controversial decision about that and saved a considerable amount of money. That decision has now been reversed, but I believe that at least a postponement would save money.

We also have to look at the cost of maintaining very small schools. A school in my constituency that is about to close has only 12 pupils and at the time of the previous financial assessment it had 15 pupils. I do not see how one can make effective education provision for a school of that size. The school received funding of £70,000 and, as the Member of Parliament for that area, I found it very difficult to justify that sort of financial commitment.

In conclusion, I refer to the important matter of the forthcoming pay award for teachers. Since 1990 there has been an average increase of 36 per cent. in teachers' pay, which contrasts with a 23 per cent. increase for the whole economy. Teachers have not fared badly in recent years and we want to see that trend continue. We want to maintain recruitment levels and maintain and improve morale in the teaching profession.

I pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in that respect. She inherited certain difficulties when she assumed her post, to which other hon. Members have referred. I have said harsh things about her predecessor and I do not wish to return to them. I am sure that all hon. Members recognise the difficult position that the Secretary of State inherited when she took over the job and we appreciate the progress that she has made.

We must leave it to my right hon. Friend to judge how far she will go with the review body's recommendations. She must make the right decisions and she faces a difficult task. She may decide to phase in some of the recommendations, but if she decides to implement all of them at or above the level of inflation, she must expect the support of her Cabinet colleagues in dealing with the problems that will arise from meeting the pay increase.

For example, I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth mentioned the capping limit, which will be reviewed next year. Perhaps the Secretary of State will have to look at it this year. Conservative Members support capping as a way of dealing with authorities that have no regard for the financial burdens that they place on their constituents. In view of the recent reforms of local government finance, we should look carefully at the concept of capping as a way for the Treasury to decide the meticulous funding arrangements of fairly responsible local authorities. I have my arguments with Somerset, but I would not describe it as a Lambeth or a Camden.

We must look at the capping limit next year and we must maintain pressure on the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for the Environment in order to secure a better settlement next year. If we can expect a better settlement next year, local authorities may be convinced to hold the line this year in the face of what we all accept is a very tough financial settlement.

5.55 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey)—my Conservative colleague from Warwickshire—is not in his seat because he raised some points in his speech to which I wish to refer.

The hon. Gentleman talked about Labour's views on grant-maintained schools. To my knowledge, no Labour Front-Bench spokesperson has said that parents should not send their children to GM schools. We are concerned about the lack of local democratic accountability in GM schools, the unfair comparative funding arrangements and the entry criteria in some schools. The Labour party's aim is to ensure that every pupil benefits from fair funding, that each GM school has an element of local democratic accountability, and that the entry criteria provide equal opportunities for all. I also remind the hon. Gentleman—no doubt he will read it in *Hansard* tomorrow—that Kenilworth secondary school in his constituency, which has a fine reputation for high academic standards, is a comprehensive school that has not opted out.

Parents in Warwickshire are very angry about the funding cuts in children's education. Parents and teachers are angry because 200 teaching jobs may be lost and class sizes will increase. In some schools, there are as many as 40 pupils in a class. Standards will inevitably fall and the provision of special needs education will be reduced, affecting the most vulnerable pupils. Section 11 funding will also be cut and I have been told that that could result in the loss of three teachers from one school.

The anger is not confined to Opposition politicians, parents, teachers or governors. In Warwickshire, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors have united in criticising the financial settlement's impact. The Government would have us believe that it is all about overspending local authorities that are unable to make proper budget savings. However, the headmaster of St. Francis primary school in Bedworth, Mr. Seamus Crowe, has said that the argument of parents and teachers

"is not with the county council but with the Government".

Conservative politicians in Warwickshire are supporting Labour's case—but it is not Labour's case; it is the case of the children, the parents and the governors who want to see decent education standards in that county. Warwickshire has always been a prudent local authority; it was praised in its recent audit report. It was poll tax capped only when it was under Conservative control—for two years running. Warwickshire has always been a relatively low spender per pupil on education. If it were

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

to comply with the Government's standard spending assessment, it would have to cut its education budget by £10 million, despite the fact that it is such a low spender. If it made the cuts in its standard spending assessment that the Government seem to suggest, it would probably fall through the statistical floor on education spending.

When I made similar points in a debate last week on the financial settlement, the Secretary of State for the Environment suggested that I was making a plea for special treatment for Warwickshire and that other counties disagreed with the claim. One can imagine his surprise when the reply came not from the Opposition but from behind him. I quote with approval the comments of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth):

"Warwickshire is not asking for special treatment, but for a fair deal. Our frustration is that year after year after year our representations appear to be ignored. It is no surprise that in a zero-sum game other local authorities are not interested in easing Warwickshire's position. If we care about the quality of our democracy, we should be strengthening the independence and scope of elected local government for which a strong mechanism of accountability now exists through the council tax. Does my right hon. Friend agree that our future quality of life, as well as our economic competitiveness, depends to a large extent on whether we invest in our schools? I therefore very much regret the Government's proposals for capping and SSAs—certainly as they bite in Warwickshire—which run counter to all these purposes."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1995; Vol. 253, c. 1113.]

Those were the words of a Conservative Member for Warwickshire, so it has nothing to do with party politics. It is not special pleading; it is concern that the impact on schools in Warwickshire is so damaging that even the Conservatives in the county are concerned about it.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, who I am pleased to see has now resumed his seat, said that the cap must be removed and I agree with him, certainly for Warwickshire. I welcome the conversion of the hon. Gentleman to Labour party policy for Warwickshire.

There has been a long campaign by Warwickshire Members and councillors to change the SSA criteria, and it has been supported by all parties. Claims of lax council spending will not wash in Warwickshire; it is plain unfair victimisation of the children of Warwickshire by the Government.

The education budget has already been cut to the bone. Discretionary awards have been cut in Shakespeare's county, where if young people want to become actors, they cannot get a discretionary award to do it. May I make a special plea as a lawyer? When I was young, I was able to get a grant to pursue my legal career. That is barely possible now; in practice, it is impossible. The opportunities offered to previous generations no longer seem to be available in Warwickshire.

The youth service budget has been halved. One third of primary classes have more than 30 pupils; 10 per cent. of classes have more than 35 pupils; and, if cuts are imposed this year, many will have more than 40 pupils. Pupil-teacher ratios are in the bottom quartile of LEAs in England and Wales, and the county has already made 20 per cent. savings in administration and elsewhere to put £2 million into primary schools.

Education spending per head in Warwickshire has fallen to 96 per cent. of the English county average, while our school-age population is 2.5 per cent. above the English county average. So the county is not only efficiently run; it has cut services to the bone.

The 1995 budget is balanced only by no contribution to the education budget for any pay or price increases, by not providing any of the £1 million needed to fund the extra 874 pupils in Warwickshire schools next year and an overall 2.5 per cent. reduction in all budgets. That totals a cut of £9 million for Warwickshire's education department, because of the cuts and increased spending pressures.

This year, a primary school pupil will be worth £1,024 until April, but after April the figure will be £993. The contribution for a 15-year-old is £1,864, but after April it will fall to £1,807. In my constituency, the effect on Polesworth comprehensive, which is to take 62 extra pupils, will be £112,000 slashed off the budget. Race Leys middle school at Bedworth will lose £43,000 and two teachers. St. Francis RC primary school in Bedworth will lose a teacher and have classes of more than 40 pupils.

On Friday, I spoke to the headmaster of Nicholas Chamberlaine comprehensive school, who told me that the school faces budget cuts identified by the county of £70,000, including a deficit carried forward because the school was unable to meet the 2 per cent. underfunded pay rises for 1994-95 of £30,000. If staff pay rises for 1995-96 are not funded, the school will face a further reduction of £36,000—a cut of £136,000 in one school budget.

The school has identified the following proposals to make those savings. Seven teachers will have to go. Class sizes will be increased by two thirds across the board, with significant health and safety implications as some workshops cannot properly accommodate full classes. There will be fewer choices at GCSE, with no minority A-level subjects such as religious education or German and fewer books for pupils. The school fabric, which is already deteriorating, will not be able to have the repairs that it needs. There will be no capital investment in any new equipment. Information technology provision will deteriorate further and the school library has already closed. How in all conscience can any Government say that they care about education, yet seek to force such cuts?

I could explain the effect of the cuts on other schools in Warwickshire, but Warwickshire needs—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Time is up.

6.5 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Like a number of hon. Members in the Chamber this afternoon, I come from Kent, a county that faces a 1 per cent. cut in the delegated budget for schools. It is the first time that that has ever happened in the county of Kent. No provision has been made for any increase in the pay of teachers. It has been imposed by the Liberal Democrat-Labour pact which is now controlling Kent county council.

It is particularly disgraceful given that the Government funding for Kent county council is increasing by 2.1 per cent. in the coming year. One might ask why the council has got the county into such a predicament. During the first two years of control by the Lib-Lab pact, the co-chairs of education were breezing around the county

playing Lady Bountiful and distributing sweeties to an extent that would have shamed Evita Peron. The council spent the £20 million windfall that arose from interest rates on the council debt being very much less than forecast. It blew those funds. It now faces finding some £6.5 million to pay for higher interest rates.

Needless to say, the council does not have the money. It has blown the £10 million proceeds of land sales negotiated by the previous Conservative Administration. It has held sharp conferences at four-star hotels, such as the Great Danes hotel at Maidstone and the Imperial at Hythe, with left-wing academics and pressure group spokesmen. Those conferences cost thousands of pounds of council tax payers' money.

The council spent further thousands of pounds on anti-grant-maintained schools campaigns and propaganda and, only recently, it spent £4,100 on propaganda leaflets sent to the parents of school children in Kent.

Perhaps the most criminal of all is the obesity of the central educational bureaucracy in Kent. In Kent, we are proud that 88 of our schools have decided to become grant-maintained—44 of them decided when the county was under Conservative control and 44 further schools decided to do so under Liberal and Labour control. Under the Conservatives, 174 administrators' jobs went. Under Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the central education administration of Kent county council has increased from 965 to 1,162 full-time equivalent staff. That is a 20 per cent. increase in the central administration of education that cost millions of pounds.

It is quite clear that the Lib-Lab pact has no intention to cut proportionately the central administration of education. Had it done so for the 44 schools that have gone grant maintained under its period of control, £6.5 million could have been saved and spent on the schools budget. It has not cut the central administration to reflect the departure of the further education colleges of Kent into independence or of the Kent careers service. Not only is it keeping up the spending on the central bureaucracy, it is increasing it. It has made no provision for an increase in teachers' pay, but it has made provision for an increase in the pay of the education bureaucrats right up to the overpaid director of education now spending his time on political campaigning.

Kent county council's bureaucracy is now so bloated that the county auditors have recommended an inquiry into education support and administration services and their structures. So determined has the Lib-Lab pact been to preserve the bureaucracy that in this year of cuts it has decided to make a provision of £480,000 to replace funds expected to be taken by schools when they become grant maintained during the course of the year.

Where has the Kent Lib-Lab pact decided to make its cuts? It has decided to cut 1 per cent. off school budgets. It has decided that there shall be no more discretionary awards for vocational courses at further education colleges and no more help for school transport for youngsters of 16 and older from poorer families going to their place of education. It has decided to cut 20 per cent. off adult education in the county and £2 million off school buildings maintenance. But it has decided to cut only £800,000 off central services. The cuts fall on the sharp end as usual.

The cuts proposed by the coalition of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats—I notice that the Liberal Democrat education spokesman is so embarrassed that he has abandoned his seat—

Mr. Don Foster: I am over here.

Mr. Arnold: The proposed cuts are so nasty that the two Lady Bountifuls—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is no longer possible for me to hear the hon. Gentleman because of the noise from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Arnold: The Opposition parties clearly do not want to hear the facts. The people of Kent should be told what is going on. It is significant that the two Lady Bountifuls, the co-chairs, are nowhere to be seen. They have left it to the director of education to argue a political case for the Lib-Lab cuts programme. The cuts are provocative. They hit the public and the school children. They have been made for clear party-political reasons. They are a smoke screen.

We have heard speeches this afternoon from several hon. Members from counties and boroughs which may have been squeezed, but Kent has not. The politicians in Kent want to keep up with the Joneses and in order to do so they have hit Kent schools hard. They have cut £11 million from the education budget rather than from the bureaucracy. The grant-maintained school issue alone is worth £6.5 million. They could have cut the administration for further education and for the career service which is no longer provided. They could have cut the propaganda. I have asked the leader of the council to cost the conferences and the propaganda.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Arnold: They could also utilise the underspent part of the education standard spending assessment which is the equivalent of £14.2 million.

Hon. Members: Give way.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a decision that must be made by the hon. Member who has the Floor, not by others in sedentary positions.

Mr. Arnold: The Lib-Lab pact could have cut the £11 million from the £27 million of the central departments which also have provisions for a pay increase. It could have used the windfalls from lower interest rates and land sales amounting to £30 million which the Lib-Lab pact has blown. It could also use Kent county council's reserves.

Mr. Dunn: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the political leaflet issued by the director of education on the authority of the Lib-Lab co-chairmen was delivered to staff at grant-maintained schools but was not shown to governing bodies who had no knowledge of it, and that some head teachers in north-west Kent refused to deliver the leaflet because they felt it to be political?

Mr. Arnold: The leaflet was run out so fast that I am told that even the chief executive of the county council did not see it, so desperate was the Lib-Lab pact to pre-empt the results of its own folly.

[Mr. Arnold]

My only conclusion from this sorry disgrace of a cut in Kent's school budgets, which has never happened before, is that the Lib-Lab pact that is running Kent county council is either incompetent or playing politics.

6.14 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): I have no wish to proceed down the leafy lanes of Kent, which has been described as the garden of England. My contribution is the first to be made by an hon. Member representing a Welsh consistency.

The debate is most timely because there is a basic need to highlight the crisis in our schools brought about as a result of the local authority settlement. In the process, our children have been sold short and that in turn means that we will not reap the benefits of their potential tomorrow. Education is vital to Britain's international competitiveness and economic efficiency.

It has been said many times that charity begins at home. I have received a letter dated 6 January from Mr. J. P. Walsh, the Gwent county treasurer. He pointed out that when Gwent prepared its base budget it aimed to protect vital services such as education, but it was found that an increase of £14 million would be needed just to stand still and without restoring earlier cuts.

Under the settlement terms, Gwent county council was allowed to increase its budget by only 0.5 per cent., or £1.4 million. There was, therefore, a need to reduce spending by £12.5 million. Of that sum, £7 million will be taken from reserves, but the remaining £5.5 million will need to be found by making cuts. Mr. Walsh went on to say that for education that would mean a cut of £2.4 million and that schools could be affected. I took that matter up with the Welsh Office. On 26 January the Under-Secretary of State for Wales agreed that the settlement was tough, but he called for further efficiency improvements.

Long ago, it was said that it is the wearer who knows where the shoe pinches. I have received a letter dated 5 December from Mr. M. J. McCarthy, the headteacher of St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic primary school in my constituency. He pointed out that the recent inspectors' report on the school was highly favourable and that it was particularly pleasing to receive such a report because the school serves an economically deprived area.

Yet Mr. McCarthy said:

"We have recently heard that the schools budget for 1995-96 is to be substantially reduced and this despite careful management of previous budgets which have regularly produced a small surplus at the end of each financial year. The proposed budget reduction will result in the loss of one of the teachers who helps to make this school such a success. Resources will be stretched to the limit, the composition of classes will be affected and it will be more difficult for the remaining staff to provide the levels of care and support that have hitherto been the case."

Mr. McCarthy proceeded to call on me as the Member of Parliament for the area to intervene with the authorities on behalf of the school. The basic point that I wish to make is that the position in that school is the direct result of the self-described "tough" policy being implemented by the Welsh Office and the Department for Education.

Since the correspondence to which I have referred, I have received a flood of letters from concerned parents who are anxious about the welfare and future education of their children. Typical of those is Mrs. A.E. Morris of 16, Llanwern road, Newport. She writes:

"My daughter Sian and my son Rhys both attend the above school,"—

St. Gabriel's—

"I am concerned to learn that because of rules which govern funding, St. Gabriel's is to lose a teacher . . . which I find totally unacceptable."

She calls for "swift and appropriate" action to remedy the situation. I heartily endorse that.

The situation in St. Gabriel's has happened and is happening in other schools in Newport. Indeed, the education cuts in Newport are mirrored throughout the country, as we have witnessed in the debate this evening. Yet education is vital to social cohesion and social justice, about which the Prime Minister claims to be so concerned. I am reminded of the words of Dickens in "A Tale of Two Cities":

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times".

Let us update those words a little. It is certainly a good time for Sir Iain Vallance, the chairman of British Telecommunications plc. I did a little research in the Library on his remuneration and emoluments and found that, up to 31 March 1994, he received a salary of £465,000 plus bonuses of £185,000. Other benefits total £13,000, making a total of £663,000 per annum. He also had pension payments of £43,000 and what are known as "unfunded" pension contributions of a further £51,000. He had shares amounting to £17,084 and share options totalling £612,659—

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you can help me on the relevance of what the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) is saying to the debate on the financial settlement for schools 1995-96.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am usually fairly tolerant when hon. Members make a passing reference or seek to make some short comparison. I am less happy when it becomes extended and the main point of the debate becomes lost. The hon. Member for Newport, East is fast getting to that point.

Mr. Hughes: I have come to the end of the point that I wanted to make. I would say, however, that, compared with Sir Iain Vallance of BT, it is not so good for the children in our state schools at the present time, particularly those in socially deprived areas, as I have illustrated in the case of St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic primary school in Newport.

It is time for the Government to loosen the purse strings and to change their policies root and branch, otherwise the classes will "shoot up"—to use the words of the present Secretary of State for Education. Instead, though, the Government are carrying out a policy of austerity, with a view to creating some sort of economic bonanza, as we approach the general election. The education of our children is too important to be treated in that way. After 15 years in office, the Government are unlikely to change. The leopard does not change its spots. It is time for the Government to give way to a Labour Administration, who will fully recognise the importance of education and fund it accordingly.

6.24 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I do not want to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), but I would say to my hon. Friend the Minister of State that I do not want him to depart from the policies that the Government have maintained since 1979, because to do so would mean reversing the increase of nearly 50 per cent. in spending on schools that we have seen. I [illegible] much support increasing funding for schools when the economic climate allows. The very fact that we have managed to do that since 1979 is a tribute to the way in which we have run the economy. We have not had to introduce massive slashing programmes, as happened in 1976 when the Labour party was in Government. That is what we inherited.

I urge my hon. Friend, therefore, to pursue with vigour the policies that the Conservative party and the Government have followed. They are the policies that are condemned by the Opposition one day but held up the next as though they invented them. We have seen that time and again. Indeed, I read at the weekend of the chief education officer in Liverpool, who last year sent a letter to all parents telling them that schools should not become grant maintained, only to send his own child to just such a school. That is the kind of educational hypocrisy that we hear from the left of the Labour party these days.

I pay tribute to all the teachers in our schools who work so hard to achieve the improvement that we have seen in examination results. It is a credit to the parents and to the teachers. Some of the nonsensical decisions have been removed from local education authorities as a direct result of the policy which allows schools to become grant maintained and thus freed from the shackles of the local authority.

In March 1987, when I had just entered the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) answered an Adjournment debate. Some 170 parents came and sat in the Strangers Gallery to exercise their right to make representations through their Member of Parliament and to the Minister about the saving of the sixth form in Ecclesbourne school. It was one of the first schools in Derbyshire to become grant maintained. What the county council tried to do—to take away the sixth forms—was nonsense. That school has gone from strength to strength since becoming grant maintained.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East) *rose—*

Mr. Enright *rose—*

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand that Netherthorpe school is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). The head of that school, which is now grant maintained, recently said:

"We have been grant-maintained for 4½ years. The advantages include: more effective decision making; money nearer to the students (more books; equipment; teachers; non-teaching staff; better maintained buildings). Better staff training. Increased parental support."

I think that we should be shouting from the top—

Mr. Barnes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I am in the House, is it in order for the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) to comment on a school in my constituency but not to give way so that I can make a counter-argument?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. The tradition of the House is well known: it is up to the hon. Member who has the Floor to decide whether to give way.

Mr. McLoughlin: The problem, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the shortness of time.

Over the past 14 years, Derbyshire county council has subsidised school meals to the tune of some £100 million. When I challenged the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on that matter, he said that he was informed that I have not been short of school meals. Indeed, I have not—nor, I suggest, has his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), who will shortly be winding up for the Opposition. The hon. Member for Brightside did not comment at all on whether he thought that it was a good thing that Derbyshire had expended some £100 million in the past 14 years on subsidising school meals. If that £100 million had been given directly to schools, Derbyshire's education would be in a far better state today.

Derbyshire allocates less to schools than any other shire county. There is more money to be allocated to schools. Before talking about cutting the number of teachers, Derbyshire should ask itself whether its administration is as efficient as it might be. We have a right to ask why it is not giving money directly to schools.

Mr. Barnes *rose—*

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman has already asked me to give way. He must realise that I cannot do so, because the winding-up speeches are about to begin.

I end by saying that the flexibility is available to allow county councils to put more money into schools.

6.30 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on the way in which he speared the Government. I also congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, East (Ms Corston), for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien), for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) and for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), who—unlike many Conservative Members—did what a Member of Parliament is supposed to do: they defended the interests of their constituents, and they did so very eloquently.

When the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) was replaced by the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) as Secretary of State for Education, many saw the right hon. Lady as a lamb going among the educational wolves. She was to be the great conciliator—the professional whose experience and commitment would correct the imbalance caused by the disastrous tenure of her predecessors. The right hon. Lady came as sweetness and light to the chaos inflicted on pupils, teachers, parents and governors, and her initial input appeared benevolent. She rapidly moved on to ground long occupied by the Opposition Front Bench: she cleared the confusion over the Government's intentions in regard to standard attainment tests and amended the national curriculum following the excessive demands originally made by the Government. The commentators spoke of the refreshingly engaging style of

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the Secretary of State—a person who was at home in the job, far removed from the ideologues in her party who pressed for ever more radical change for its own sake.

All of that was dispelled by the leaking of the Secretary of State's letter to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. She was revealed in that letter, which was printed in full in *The Times Educational Supplement* on 20 January, as—I hope that the right hon. Lady will pardon the pun—not a lamb but, in education terms, a wolf in chic clothing. That missive contained a clinical analysis of the political cost to the Government of the 1995-96 education settlement; nowhere was there a hint of the huge educational loss to our country, the frustration of parents, the undermining of teachers, the disenchantment of governors or the injury to pupils. What the Secretary of State did say, unequivocally, was that—as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) pointed out—up to 10,000 teaching jobs would go, and class sizes would rocket. Even when she wrote that letter, the right hon. Lady knew full well what the results of the Government's parsimony would be. It

"would be seen as provocative",

she wrote; there would be

"a renewed battle with the teachers".

Crucially, she concluded that

"it would be a great pity to lose the ground we have gained and face new disruption in our schools".

How right she was.

It appears, however, that the Secretary of State's political plea has fallen on deaf ears. The long years of confrontation in education were prematurely written off. According to *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* today, the Government are about to take on not only the teachers but the school governors, which will mean increased turmoil for our children—to the outrage of their parents. Those parents know exactly whom to blame. The Secretary of State herself said:

"Pupil numbers next year will go up by 1.5 per cent., so an increase"—

in education spending—

"of 0.3 per cent. implies a cash fall. The increase could make no contribution towards any pay award: staffing ratios will have to be tightened to balance the books before LEAs even start to consider how to fund the pay settlement".

The Secretary of State said much in her speech today about the bureaucracy which allegedly remained in local education authorities. She had the temerity to quote the Office for Standards in Education, so I will do the same. According to paragraph 224 of Ofsted's report,

"Almost all LEAs have experienced significant reductions in staff numbers in the last five years."

Paragraph 226 states:

"Where budgets were reduced, LEAs generally sought to protect schools by improving economies in their own administration cost".

Paragraph 227 states that support services are

"extensively used and generally valued by schools, including grant-maintained schools."

It does not seem to me that Ofsted was condemning LEAs: quite the reverse—it was giving credit where it was due and praising LEAs which do a tremendous job in difficult circumstances.

Peculiarly, given the way in which the Government have operated historically, the shire counties are likely to be hit most heavily. Essex has had £1.4 million cut from its assessment, but faces an extra bill of £8.5 million, which means a £9.9 million shortfall. Northumberland will face a similar shortfall of £5.4 million.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): That figure is correct. Northumberland has a special problem, because it operates a three-tier system. Four fifths of the population live in one corner, while the remaining one fifth inhabit the rural parts. If schools in Northumberland are closed, they will be closed in the rural parts, which are Tory dominated.

Mr. Kilfoyle: It is a sad fact that rural areas will be hit as much as metropolitan areas were in the past, although metropolitan authorities will suffer nearly as much: Birmingham faces a shortfall of £8.1 million, and St Helens a shortfall of £4.9 million.

As the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), a noted educationist, is present, I will also cite Warwickshire, whose 300 schools have £57 million in unspent balances. Unspent balances are part of the Government's argument, but Warwickshire's balances are unevenly spread: one third of schools have no balances, one third have modest balances of between 2 and 3 per cent., while the remaining third hold sufficient reserves to cater for the worst effects of the 5.8 per cent. reduction in the real value of their budgets in 1995-96 but nothing for 1996-97. The council estimates that between 140 and 200 teaching jobs will go, probably to be joined by 23 section 11-funded jobs. In addition, class sizes will go over the 40 mark.

Croft middle school in Nuneaton represents a microcosm of Warwickshire's dilemma, which in turn epitomises what is happening throughout the country. It is a popular school, oversubscribed by 19—if we take the standard number—with a roll of 299. A special educational needs audit under the new code of practice, using nationally recognised criteria, revealed 134 children—some 43 per cent.—with level 1, 2 and 3 needs. The school has reserves of £14,523, but those reserves are already committed to teaching and support services for the final quarter of the school year 1994-95—not the financial year. Its budget allocation in 1994-95 totalled £425,385. Its allocation for next year, including the allowance for extra pupil adjustment, will be only £400,235. In real terms, that means the loss of two teaching posts to a middle school in middle England—12.4 posts rather than 14.4—and huge classes.In 1994, the fifth year in the school contained classes of 27, 26 and 29; in 1995 there will be two classes of 38 and 39. In year six, there were two classes of 35 and 34 in 1994; those will become two classes of 41 each in 1995. How does that relate to the Secretary of State's proclaimed wish for stability in our schools and the raising of standards?

Reference has been made to the role of the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I hope that the Chancellor will feel able to go along to Abbey Road primary school in his constituency and explain why it will lose £21,000 next year—or perhaps he should visit Cotgrave Highfield primary school, which will lose £20,000. A total of £442,000 will be taken from 41 primary schools in the Chancellor's constituency to fund tax cuts at the next general election. But even that is generous compared with what is happening in secondary schools in the Chancellor's constituency. They are to lose

£551,000 between them. Does he think that voters' memories will be so short as not to take note of that when the election comes?

There will be less chance to address the problems of literacy and numeracy, which were highlighted by the adult literacy and basic skills unit. In recent years, the reading age in primary schools has dropped. The fresh round of cuts will do little to remedy that. If we end up with disenchanted, harassed and undermined teachers, and with even less one-to-one contact with children most in need, the graph will continue to plummet.

It may not be popular with Conservative Members to say so, but the settlement is an unwarranted imposition on teachers and it must be set in the context of other cuts in education, including £20 million from school effectiveness grants and £13 million from the planned inspection budget. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said earlier, the reading recovery programme has been scrapped. Discretionary grants are all but a thing of the past. The youth and community service has been decimated. For example, a delegation from Shropshire could not get a hearing from Conservative Members, so it came to see me in Liverpool about 15 mainly rural youth and community projects that were being scrapped in the face of cuts imposed by the Government. Nor are Labour authorities left out: Wigan district council has been forced to dismember its youth and community provision, and to subsume it into leisure services to have any hope of providing any service for some of the more alienated sections of our community—the young and the disadvantaged. The sorry tale goes and on, but I must comment on some of the speeches that were made earlier.

The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) made a disgraceful attack on Kent county council. He was joined by the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), who in interventions made laudatory remarks about grant-maintained schools. He talked about the waste of money that had been perpetrated by Kent county council. I also had a delegation from his constituency. It came to see me because four schools in his constituency, two of which went grant maintained, were sharing the same playing fields. According to the parents, they could not interest the hon. Gentleman because one of the GM schools had managed to separate off six out of the eight football pitches and to put up a huge fence. While that was going on, the hon. Gentleman sat on the fence—although I hope that he did not literally sit on the fence that the school put around the playing fields as it has been topped by razor wire. That is the sort of education in the community that the Conservative party cares for.

I appreciate the pressures of time, but I should like to mention the attack by a series of Conservative Members, mainly in interventions, on Lancashire county council. They failed to point out two important facts: first, Lancashire has a £2 million shortfall in the forthcoming year; secondly, the cuts in the standard spending assessment per pupil next year mean expenditure cuts of 2.6 per cent. for primary school pupils and 7 per cent. for secondary school pupils. You can go back and explain that to your constituents: those cuts are not down to Lancashire authority—they lie entirely at the door of your own Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he must address the Chair.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Mans *rose—*

Mr. Kilfoyle: I must finish my speech.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire behaved disgracefully in attacking a neutral civil servant, the chief education officer of Liverpool city council who, so far as I am aware, is a member of no political party, does not live in the city of Liverpool and sends his fourth child to the local school, which is not in Liverpool, but in the constituency of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I believe that that officer's local school is grant maintained. For him to be attacked in the Chamber as an extension of the Labour party is disgraceful.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire also made a facetious comment about school dinners and pointed in my direction. I am the first to admit that I enjoyed school dinners so much that I used to go for more in the holidays. The reason was simple: when I was a child, local authorities could provide deprived families with school dinners in the holidays. Now local authorities cannot even provide school dinners for kids in need in the towns and countryside of this once great nation. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take that on board.

I urge hon. Members to support our motion.

6.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): From time to time, the debate has been informative, but the main thing of which the House has been informed is how few Opposition Members have bothered to turn up for their own debate on a subject that they claim is important to them. I have been watching throughout the debate, and I have counted as few as two or three, to often as many as six or seven Opposition Back Benchers in attendance. That illustrates something about their motivation.

That also demonstrates the confusion of thought among Opposition Members. I shall take one example. I made a careful note of the words of the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham)—I made a note of the few words of Opposition Members that I thought were worth while. His words, however, were instructive. He opened his remarks by saying, "Standards in the maintained education sector have fallen." He followed that a few minutes later by saying, "Things have been steadily improving in Barnsley schools." The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He should either join us in taking pride in the improvements that have taken place in education consistently in the past several years, or he should maintain the opposite view. He cannot have both views.

Mr. Clapham *rose—*

Mr. Forth: He will now try to square the circle.

Mr. Clapham: The point that I clearly made, and that the Minister should take on board, is that the siphoning off of resources for the private sector clearly leaves Barnsley having to make up the shortfall because of a lack of funding from the Government.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman neatly makes the other point that I wanted to make about the debate. He

[Mr. Forth]

epitomises the confusion that exists among Opposition Members about the connection between spending and educational quality. However one considers education, whether in relation to the results in our much-welcomed performance tables, to expenditure per pupil in different authorities, to class sizes or to any other measure, no demonstrable connection exists between money in and quality of education out, or between class sizes and quality of education.

The real determinants of the quality of education in this country, as elsewhere in the world, is the quality of teaching, what happens in the classroom and the degree of parental support. It is not simply about money, which Opposition Members seem unable to grasp.

Mr. Blunkett: In that case, why is the money spent by parents on private day education twice as much as the money made available for the equivalent education in the average state school?

Mr. Forth: I have always defended the absolute right of parents to exercise their choice in sending their children to schools. I personally chose to send my children to state schools. I was happy to do so and I believe they received a good education, but I equally welcome those of my hon. Friends, colleagues and others outside who make the personal decision to send their children to private schools, for whatever reason. It is their decision and their choice.

We have confusion among Opposition Members. The proportion of primary pupils in classes of more than 30 has fallen from 26.5 per cent. in 1979 to 23.2 per cent. now. The proportion of secondary pupils in such classes has fallen from 9.9 per cent. in 1979 to 5.3 per cent. now. Many of my hon. Friends have quoted the figures about real expenditure in education since 1979. We take 1979 as our starting point because that is the last time Opposition Members were in Government. That is the only way in which we can judge their real commitment to education. On any indicator one may choose, things are significantly better now than they were in 1979.

Mr. Don Foster: If there is no connection between "cash in and performance out", why has the Secretary of State urged her Cabinet colleagues to give more money to the education service?

Mr. Forth: It is clearly one of the functions of Government Departments to make a perfectly legitimate argument for their expenditure, something that the hon. Gentleman cannot and probably never will understand. It is something normal and natural which occurs every year and throughout Government. For the hon. Gentleman to give it such mystical significance shows that he has missed the point entirely.

The real point of the debate is this: it must be understood that local education authorities have enormous flexibility and freedom in the way in which they can determine their priorities and expenditure within their overall totals.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Does my hon. Friend agree that it might improve the way in which local authorities set their budgets and publish their figures if they declared precisely which items of expenditure related to statutory requirements and which related to non-statutory requirements? At the moment, when constituents look at local authority education budgets, it is very difficult for them to determine which items of expenditure are required by law and which are the result of good old-fashioned socialism.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend raises a very important issue which leads me to my next point.

One decision that authorities must make is how to allocate their expenditure. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) gave us a graphic example of this. He told us that Kent had chosen to increase its education bureaucracy by nearly 200 members of staff. In other words, it increased not the number of people in the classrooms but the number in the county council buildings. My figures also show that in Devon, for example, the number of local authority staff has gone up by some 700; in Oxfordshire, numbers have increased by more than 200; and in Warwickshire by nearly 500. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) told us that in Somerset the number of non-education staff—not teachers—has also gone up by some 500.

It is for local authorities to make such decisions, but they cannot at the same time cry wolf and, having increased the number of bureaucrats, say that they are forced to cut the number of teachers. They cannot have it both ways.

I now cite other recent examples, culled at random from newspapers, about priority spending decisions made by authorities across the country. The *Birmingham Evening Mail* of 3 February carried an article with the headline "City Row On Hyatt Takeover". It stated:

"City Labour leaders want to buy a majority stake in Birmingham's luxury Hyatt Hotel".

That seems to be the sort of priority adopted by one local education authority. It is also reported:

"Birmingham schools were accused last year by the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers of hoarding £17 million in their combined reserves.

One school in Erdington was said to have had a surplus of more than £400,000 stashed away."

The *Manchester Evening News* stated:

"Schools in Salford are under threat from huge cuts despite the council having a staggering £13.5m in reserves . . . Some members of the ruling Labour group believe the surplus should now be used instead of making devastating savings in town hall departments."

However, it is not all bad news. Also in the ever-instructive *Manchester Evening News*, but on 24 January, I found a good news story entitled "Hard-up heads' £1 million lift". The article states:

"Hard-up headmasters in Oldham are likely to get a surprise £1 million boost for the coming year.

The increase will be recommended to a meeting by the education committee next month by chairman Coun David Jones."

That illustrates a different point. If authorities choose to make such priority decisions, it proves that many could increase the money spent on education if they had made sensible use of their balances and decided to give education sufficient priority.

However, it is not only authorities that can make such priority decisions. Schools also have the same degree of flexibility. Thanks to delegated budgets and the local management of schools, which were eventually praised by

many Opposition Members, schools have the capacity to order their priorities and make their own spending decisions to a very large extent.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Although the Minister might challenge it, the evidence from the midlands is very different. We have a £70 million deficit; we are going to lose 1,000 teachers; and there is no question but that class sizes will increase. Governors and parents in the west midlands will not accept the Minister's red herrings because they know the reality of the underfunding from which their schools are suffering.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken on a number of points. He has completely forgotten the example of the Hyatt hotel. If one of the Labour-controlled west midlands authorities wants to make that sort of spending decision, it is open to that authority to do so, but it has to account to its electors. The hon. Gentleman should not come to the Chamber and complain about the cuts threatened as a result of that decision.

I have been in the Department for Education long enough to have reached my fourth year of hearing whingeing and cries of wolf. I have heard the story so often that I can repeat it in my sleep. Every year the story is that there will be devastating cuts in the number of teachers. We have yet to see those cuts; every year, the number remains broadly the same across the country.

Mr. Hattersley: If this is all whingeing and cries of wolf, and if there is so much money sloshing around in the system—I see that the Minister nods his head in confirmation—why did the Secretary of State write to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to say that without an extra £90 million there would be chaos in the education service?

Mr. Forth: Of course, the Secretary of State has to make her case for her Department, as does every other Secretary of State. If the right hon. Gentleman's memory goes back that far, he will probably recall doing the same when he was a Secretary of State, except that at that time, in 1976, cuts were forced on the Labour Government by the International Monetary Fund which led to deep cuts in spending on education, health and the whole spectrum—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The class is getting distinctly unruly. I cannot hear the Minister and I wish to do so.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You are well aware of the rules governing the making of controversial comments about other hon. Members. It appears that the Minister is saying that the Secretary of State might not have been telling the whole truth when she wrote that letter.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. I heard no such thing.

Mr. Forth: In order to illustrate my point about schools' flexibility in the use of their budgets, I cannot resist quoting *The Guardian*, which is something that I rarely do. I never read *The Guardian* so this had to be brought to my attention. On 1 February, it—

Mr. Blunkett: What does the Minister read?

Mr. Forth: For the hon. Gentleman's edification, my principal reading each day is *The Sun*, which I find universally uplifting. The article in *The Guardian* read as follows:

"Eight women teachers from Picknalls First School, Uttoxeter"—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is quite impossible for me to hear the Minister. I especially deprecate noises from Front Benchers making it impossible for me to hear what is being said.

Mr. Forth: I shall not be deterred from completing this little quotation. The article states:

"Eight women teachers from Picknalls First School, Uttoxeter, spent a day among the Jacuzzis, whirlpools and health lectures of Hoar Cross Hall . . . and the £250 bill for their visit was paid for by public funds after being approved by their chairman of governors . . . Staffordshire county council said that it was up to an individual school how it spent its budget on education and training."

The point is that that was a decision made by the school. We may think it bizarre, but, in these allegedly hard-pressed times—we know that there is more than £500 million in school reserves and balances—that was the school's decision. We respect the decisions made by schools in choosing their priorities. We understand that some schools may choose to have higher reserves, while others schools may choose to use their money to adjust and alter classes sizes or pupil-teacher ratios. We understand that and accept and applaud their freedom to make those decisions. We accept that different local education authorities will decide on different priorities, perhaps to invest in hotels or to do other things, but we object when they come along and try to blame the Government for cuts that may or may not have to be made in education. That will not wash.

We have found out today that Opposition Members have failed consistently to understand the nature of education and its funding. I hope that, having listened to the debate, the few Opposition Members who were present earlier and my hon. Friends will, without hesitation, reject the motion and support the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 260, Noes 295.

Division No. 65] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Bell, Stuart
Ainger, Nick	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Bennett, Andrew F
Allen, Graham	Benton, Joe
Alton, David	Bermingham, Gerald
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Berry, Roger
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Betts, Clive
Armstrong, Hilary	Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Blunkett, David
Ashton, Joe	Boateng, Paul
Austin-Walker, John	Boyes, Roland
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Bradley, Keith
Barnes, Harry	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Barron, Kevin	Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Battle, John	Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bayley, Hugh	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret	Burden, Richard
Beith, Rt Hon A J	Byers, Stephen

Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'd, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'shawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wiltshire)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr John Cummings and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Pu'cll)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff, North)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Birm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the substantial increase in the real level of education spending since 1979; applauds Government policies to raise standards in schools; acknowledges that this year's settlement is necessarily tough but congratulates teachers and governing bodies for meeting the challenge of education reform; and recognises that parents will judge schools above all by the performance of pupils and the quality of teaching and learning.

Passenger Services under Rail Privatisation

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Before we start the debate I remind the House that there will be a continued limit of 10 minutes on Back-Bench speeches, and that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House calls on the Government to fulfil its repeated promises that Passenger Train Services would only be franchised on the basis of current time tables.

I am sure that I have the House with me when I send our condolences to my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), who would normally have wound up the debate tonight.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): The Government side of the House wishes to be associated with those condolences.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for saying that, and I am sure that he shares our concern and our feeling for my hon. Friend at this time.

This is the second major debate on the consequences of rail privatisation, and if the Government continue with their trail of broken promises on how services will be improved, I do not think that it will be the last. Until now, the Government's position on the franchising of passenger services has at least had the merit of being clear and unequivocal.

In the Committee that considered the Bill that became the Railways Act 1993, Ministers fell over themselves to state, and then to reiterate, that franchising would be based on the existing level of service. On Second Reading, the then Minister for Public Transport, now the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who was to take the Bill through Committee, said unambiguously:

"I wish to make it absolutely clear that we intend the franchising director, when he is appointed, to start franchising with the existing timetable and existing services."

The then Secretary of State had earlier said the same, telling the House:

"we expect the franchises—indeed, it will be the case—to be on the basis of the present timetable".—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 159-244.]

Those are not isolated references. So far I have counted at least 17 occasions, either in the House or in another place, on which Ministers gave assurances in terms that the franchises would be based on the current timetables and the existing level of services.

A week ago, the franchising director produced his first set of service specifications for four of the franchises. As the House well knows, the minimum standards set represent a cut of about 20 per cent. below the level of existing services overall and a cut of about 45 per cent. for the Gatwick Express.

The most significant aspect of those extensive cuts in minimum standards is the fact that, unlike the Rail Regulator, over whom the Secretary of State has no control, the franchising director is, in the words of the Minister in Committee, a "creature" of the Secretary of State. So to that extent it is clear that the Secretary of State knew about, and assented to, those minimum standards. In any case, his fixing of the franchising director's budget means that he has indirect control over how far cuts are enforced and to what extent improvements are allowed for. The Secretary of State is therefore charged with flatly breaking every ministerial promise that the base for franchising would be the current timetable. There is nothing particularly remarkable in that—it is his stock-in-trade. Indeed, given the right hon. Gentleman's record, one might say that he rates as a serial promise-breaker.

The Secretary of State's predecessor promised that through-ticketing stations would be fully maintained; this Secretary of State is set to cut them by 80 per cent. His predecessor promised that tickets would be fully inter-available between lines run by different train operators; this Secretary of State is presiding over the crumbling of that facility. His predecessor promised that there would be no investment hiatus due to privatisation; last year, under this Secretary of State, no new orders were issued for rolling stock for the first time since the war. His predecessor said after Lockerbie that airport security would be stepped up and that money was not an issue, and this Secretary of State told the House a week ago that he took channel tunnel security very seriously. We now know that, only four days previously, he had authorised a cut of 30 per cent. in the security division of his Department.

The right hon. Gentleman's predecessor promised repeatedly in 1993-94 that Railtrack would remain in the public sector for the foreseeable future; this Secretary of State has offered it for sale first, simply to provide money for tax cuts at the next election. The Secretary of State gave a clear understanding to Asea and Brown Boveri that it would get a follow-on order for 40 additional Networker trains for the Kent services. Yesterday, the right hon. Gentleman peremptorily cancelled that order, and put 750 jobs and the very survival of the carriage works at York at risk.

The Secretary of State will say anything, promise anything and give any commitment, so long as he is not required to deliver. Can anyone believe a word that the right hon. Gentleman says? He has raised used-car salesmanship to a new art form. Reading the small print simply is not enough. It is not so much a case of "read my lips" as take every statement that he makes with a pinch of salt. However, like all persistent delinquents, this old lag has a string of excuses as long as your arm.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Do you feel that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is using parliamentary language with regard to the Secretary of State? I suggest that he should retract what he has said.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I presumed that the hon. Gentleman's words were said with a certain lightness of touch. If that were so, I think what he said was acceptable. If it were put in a different way or with a different tone, I might take a different view.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. My remarks were meant in that vein, and I am glad that you saw it that way.

We have heard a string of excuses, most of which have been trotted out tonight in the Government's amendment. The first excuse in the amendment is that the franchising director's report

"for the first time, introduces guarantees of service for passengers".

That simply is not true. British Rail has been contracted for many years to provide services as a condition of its public service obligation grant, in accordance with the 1988 timetable.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): The hon. Gentleman is speaking about guarantees of service. Could he be specific about the guarantees that he would provide in terms of service timetabling? Is he providing a guarantee that he would renationalise the railways in due course? He spoke about cuts in investment. What investment would the hon. Gentleman like to see?

Mr. Meacher: We were content with the contractual arrangements that have existed with British Rail. I have repeatedly made it clear that we believe in increased investment in the rail infrastructure by comparison with that of the present Government. If increased investment in the channel tunnel is stripped out, investment in the rest of the network has steadily deteriorated year after year. We would never have allowed that to happen.

The next excuse is a real old offender's gambit. The Government amendment

"supports the Government in its determination not to freeze the existing timetable".

Of course, no one ever asked for that. We were demanding that there should not be cuts, and that existing services should be the basis on which to build improvements.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that the whole purpose of bringing in the private sector is precisely to allow the private sector to offer more services than are offered by the current timetable? Opposition Members do not understand the private sector because almost none of them has any experience of it, and they do not realise that the whole basis of the scheme is to improve customer services by increasing services beyond the current timetable.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman should perhaps contain himself. If he really believes that, frankly he will believe anything. I would simply say to him that if, as he believes, the private sector will restore the current level of services, why has not the Secretary of State guaranteed it in the first place as a basis for the franchises?

Another excuse is rolled out in the Government amendment, which makes the same point as the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins). The amendment states that the Government are determined to

"create space for the private sector to develop new and additional services".

Frankly, that is pure fantasy. I do not deny that, in some cases, there may be some improvement on the reduced standards, but surely the key point is that private operators cannot be made to produce those improvements in any case at all. If the right hon. Gentleman seriously believes that existing service levels will be restored, what is the point in reducing standards by 20 per cent. in the first place?

Never at a loss for another wheeze, the Secretary of State advanced another non-sequitur this week. He said that there would be no problem in keeping to the current timetables, because the shadow franchise operators had assured him that they would continue to run the existing level of services and improve on it. Surely even the right hon. Gentleman can see that that is a pointless claim. The shadow franchise operators are still subsidiaries of British Rail and they have a sense of public service. The question is not what will happen when the services are run by British Rail, but what will happen when they are run by private operators who are guided purely by commercial self-interest. The Secretary of State ought to address himself to that.

We now come to the biggest whopper from the Secretary of State in his vain attempt to defend the indefensible. The Government amendment states said proposals will

"develop new and additional services based on current timetables"—

that is patently not true—

"which are more attuned to the needs of passengers".

That claim simply does not stand up to examination, and I shall explain why.

Great Western Railways is one of the flagship franchises being offered for sale. On the London to Cardiff run in 1979, there were 26 trains per day, with a mean journey time of 1 hour 43 minutes. This year, there are 19 trains per day, with a mean journey time of exactly two hours. Under the passenger service requirement, the franchising director—for which read the Government—is proposing a minimum of 12 trains a day, with a mean journey time of 2 hours 5 minutes. Is that attuned to the needs of passengers?

That is not an exceptional case, and in fact it is typical of the timetables that are now being proposed. Let us take, for example, the London to Plymouth run. In 1981, there were 16 trains a day, with a first arrival from London at 10.49 am. This year, there are 12 trains a day, with a first arrival from London at 11.21 am. Under the passenger service requirements, the Government now propose a minimum of nine trains a day, the first of which will arrive from London by 12 noon. Is that

"more attuned to the needs of passengers"?

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I hope that hon. Gentleman will answer my question, because it was addressed to the Secretary of State. Do Conservative Members believe that those substantial cuts are

"attuned to the needs of passengers"?

Mr. Key: The answer is probably yes, because in the days when I lived down in that part of the world there was no motorway to London, nor an airline operating a daily service to Heathrow. So that probably was the pattern of service on the railway. It may well be

"attuned to the needs of passengers",

but we need privatisation to take much more account of present-day needs, instead of British Rail running a railway to suit itself.

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that significant cuts on the rail system can simply be justified by saying that there has been an upgrading of the roads and an improvement in air travel, I suggest that he tries to

[Mr. Meacher]

convince his constituents, who I believe will be extremely angry when they realise the extensive cuts involved in that passenger service requirement.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way again to the hon. Gentleman.

Exactly the same picture emerges, whatever the major line, such as the London to Penzance line or the important service from Newbury to London. Furthermore, an important point that has not been brought out is the fact that the Great Western passenger service requirements link all major stations to London but not to each other. It would therefore be perfectly possible, apart from in peak hours, to meet the specification laid down with no service between Bristol Parkway and Swindon, and no service between Swindon and Reading. Is that

"more attuned to the needs of passengers"?

The Secretary of State does not offer a response because the answer is clear. I shall address my next remarks to the Minister for Railways and Roads. Perhaps the person who drew up the Great Western passenger service requirement believes that Sir John Betjeman's "friendly bombs" have already dropped on Slough. For, according to the specification, despite the fact that it has four InterCity services, it needs none in future. Is that

"more attuned to the needs of"

the electorate of Slough? They must wonder what is the point of having a Minister for Railways and Roads to represent the constituency if he cannot even get the trains to stop at his station.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Now that the Minister has his present job, perhaps he does not need a train anyway.

Mr. Meacher: Perhaps he needs a one-way ticket, and it may not be long before he gets one.

The passenger service requirement is supposed to protect services, yet it cuts the very services that are least viable. In those, I include the limited Slough stops, as well as extensions to the Carmarthen route once a day, and the Fishguard boat-trains, for example. Those are being omitted, leaving only the "fat" services protected. The changes will be attuned not to the needs of passengers but to the profits of commercial operators. The cavalier disregard of passengers' needs is summed up—there are many examples of it—by the Dawlish specification, which says that it must have

"at least 1 train a day, departing London at or after 9.45 am and arriving Dawlish at or before 8 pm."

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Perhaps it goes via Peterborough.

Mr. Meacher: I did not check on that, but it may be compatible to go via Peterborough. As the journey time is well under three hours, that allows departure from London at any time from 9.45 am to 5 pm, so the poor Dawlish residents will have no say on whether their one train suits their day-travel market or simply the needs of those visiting Dawlish from London.

Curiously, the South West Trains passenger service requirement is exactly the opposite. I wonder how that comes about. It is over-precise rather than vague, but is still not to the advantage of passengers. For instance, on the London to Weymouth line, a faster train is specified every hour to Weymouth but with higher frequencies at main stops and protected frequencies at smaller places. I understand from those operating the service that the trouble is that because the passenger service requirement spells out that the fast train to Weymouth must stop at all those stations, thereby preventing the service from being speeded up, and because the passenger service requirement does not allow those smaller stations to be served by restored local train services, the franchising director specification does not allow for—indeed, it prevents—any improvement. Is that

"attuned to the needs of passengers"?

This is only the start of the cuts that privatisation will bring. The passenger service requirements that we are debating exclude any Great Western InterCity services west of Swansea, any through services from Swansea via Winchester to Reading, despite the fact that the journey goes through eight Tory constituencies—I wonder what the effect will be there—and any 15-minute service, as at present, on the Gatwick Express. Indeed, they exclude any service whatever from Gatwick after 7 pm. That is only the beginning. Today we have seen the scalpel; in future, we shall certainly see the axe as the Motorail service is chopped, sleeper services to Fort William are ended, and off-peak, late-night, early-morning and weekend services are eroded everywhere.

Moreover, the wording of the Secretary of State's objectives, instructions and guidance document for the franchising directors is as ominous as it is clear. Paragraph 18 says:

"For the initial letting of franchises, your specification of minimum service levels for railway passenger services is to be based on that being provided by BR immediately prior to franchising".

If what we have seen today is supposed to be based on current timetables, what cuts will future lettings of franchises open up?

Those passenger service requirements are not a step towards improving services for passengers; they are a step towards protecting the commercially most profitable routes in order to make franchises that nobody wants to buy just a bit more saleable. It is a policy driven by dogma, fuelled by endless broken promises and marked by almost universal opposition in the country. If it continues to be pursued, we shall ensure that it plays a major role in bringing about the Government's downfall.

7.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the Franchising Director's consultation document on Passenger Service Requirements which, for the first time, introduces guarantees of service for passengers; supports the Government in its determination not to freeze the existing timetable but to create space for the private sector to develop new and additional services based on current timetables which are more attuned to the needs of passengers; supports the Government in its determination to halt the decline in railway use by both passengers and freight customers; and condemns Her Majesty's Opposition for continuing to rely on scare tactics as a substitute for a policy which would enhance passenger services."

In all my years in the House, I have never before been accused of being a systematic liar. Perhaps, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will not allow me to use that word, even about myself. So perhaps I should say a systematic

purveyor of terminological inexactitudes. Taken from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), it is a privilege and honour that I shall cherish, particularly in the light of the speech that he has just made. His talking about "cuts" demonstrates that he has not the beginning of an understanding of the privatisation process. He talked about new timetables being proposed, when on no occasion did the franchising director mention—much less propose—a timetable. As for Cardiff, in case he wants an argument I have the proof before me to show that he was factually wrong on both counts. Interestingly, the word "consultation", which is what the franchising director is about, including statutory consultations with rail users' committees and local authorities, never passed the hon. Gentleman's lips. If, in those terms, I am a purveyor of terminological inexactitudes, I am delighted to be so labelled by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. Let us now get on with the debate.

Since 1948, when it was nationalised, British Rail has invested £54 billion in the network only to see its share of passenger travel slashed from 17 per cent. to just 5 per cent. During that time BR has had almost unlimited freedom to alter services with little or no reference to the passenger and too often to the disadvantage of those who pay.

Unlike the Labour party, I am determined to reverse that sad decline and to see our railways revitalised; delivering the services that the passenger wants rather than what the network chooses to provide.

We can do this only by changing BR's bureaucratic, nationalised structure—by providing private finance, investment and management skills; and, especially, the private sector's sensitivity to the customer. I realise that that is an unfortunate fact that the hon. Member for Oldham, West does not like, but those private sector skills, investments and sensitivities have transformed other transport undertakings such as British Airways and the long-distance coach industry. I am confident they will do the same for the railways. The hon. Gentleman has not produced a single argument to suggest otherwise.

Passengers and those who work on the railways should have confidence and pride in the service—secure in the knowledge that private train operators will be tailoring their services to what the traveller wants. Operators have real commercial incentives to do so. I understand why the hon. Member for Oldham, West has difficulty with the concept of the private sector, but let me repeat slowly—perhaps it will help the hon. Gentleman—that operators have a real commercial incentive in tailoring their services to what the traveller wants. Just like other private businesses—from supermarkets to car makers—those operators will want to retain existing customers and attract new ones. The key to doing that is to provide passengers with trains at the time they want to travel.

The stimulus is there. Extra trains may cost operators not much more than the price of the electricity or diesel to power them and the wages of the staff to operate them. That gives a commercially minded railwayman a powerful motive for creating new services and new demand. But if we want a railway which is more responsive to passengers, we need a much clearer way of determining the pattern of passenger services. That is where passenger service requirements come in. For the first time, they will provide a guaranteed level of service for passengers, which operators will be contractually obliged to meet.

I must repeat to the hon. Member for Oldham, West—that I shall keep on doing so until he grasps that salient fact—that PSRs are not timetables. They specify the service pattern that operators will be required to provide in terms of frequency of services, maximum journey times, first and last trains, weekend services and, where appropriate, levels of crowding—all for the first time.

There is no need for PSRs to specify services in detail in the way that they appear in a timetable; indeed to do so would simply fossilise services, making them completely unresponsive to changes in passenger demand. The PSRs that have been announced, however, are based on the existing timetable, exactly as we have always promised. I endorse what the hon. Member for Oldham, West quoted from my predecessor who said:

> "I have made that clear . . . we expect the franchises . . . to be on the basis of the present timetable."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 159.]

He did not say that they would be identical to the present timetable, but "on the basis of". I stand by that.

In cases where services are heavily dependent on subsidy—incidentally hon. Members will have noted that the hon. Member for Oldham, West did not mention anything to do with that—that subsidy will continue and PSRs will require the operator to run services which, to all intents and purposes, match the present level of services very closely.

For services which are commercially viable, we can afford to allow the operator greater flexibility to respond to market demands. Even in those cases, the PSR—the guaranteed requirement—for such services takes as a yardstick the services specified in the existing timetable. Moreover the combined effect of the PSR and the commercial incentive can be expected to deliver services that are just as comprehensive as those operated by BR at present—possibly more so.

That is not just wishful thinking. The evidence is there in the track access contracts which the operators have agreed with Railtrack. For each of the four train operating units whose PSRs were announced last week, the access agreements give the operators both sufficient train paths to provide the existing services, and extra paths to provide additional services. The operators could have negotiated those rights only in the expectation that they want to provide services in excess of existing services.

Do not take my word for it. Listen to those operating the services at present. I realise that it is embarrassing for the hon. Member for Oldham, West, but the managing director of South West Trains said:

> "We firmly believe that the route to success lies in attracting more people to our services and this means more, not less trains. We plan further new services this May."

The managing director of Great Western Trains said:

> "The current timetable provides more services than the minimum requirement, in line with customer demand and commercial justification. The timetable plan for May 1995 maintains the current level of services and consideration is being given to the introduction of additional ones."

The managing director of Gatwick Express said:

> "We . . . have no plans to reduce our service frequency."

[Dr. Brian Mawhinney]

The managing director of London-Tilbury-Southend line said:

"LTS Rail introduced additional off-peak trains in May 1994. No significant changes are envisaged for May 1995. Completion of the £150 million LTS resignalling project in 1996 will provide further opportunities to encourage car users to switch to LTS Rail. We have negotiated a track access contract which provides scope for this."

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): Since my right hon. Friend is talking about the railway line that runs to my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), does he agree that, in the past 20 years, that line has become famous as the misery line? What is now suggested offers, for once, the hope of resignalling; eventually new rolling stock and a better service with more off-peak and perhaps even peak services. It will therefore offer a better deal to the people of Southend.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend is exactly right. It seems clear to everyone except the Labour party that if British Rail sees opportunities, the private sector will see even more opportunities, because that is its characteristic. The Labour party fails to understand that.

Mr. Meacher: It appears, unfortunately, that the right hon. Gentleman has read out a section of his speech that was prepared before he listened to mine. He has not taken into account my central point that all the managers from whom he has quoted are employees of British Rail. They, of course, have a commitment to expansion and public service. What he must address is the likely attitude of private operators, who are motivated purely by commercial self-interest.

Dr. Mawhinney: Not only did I take that point into consideration, I dismissed it, as I just told my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West. The problem with the hon. Member for Oldham, West is that he has no understanding of how the private sector works. It is interested in delivering more services and attracting new customers at marginal cost, because that is at the heart of commercial incentive. That incentive is good for the passengers, good for the operators and, incidentally, good for the taxpayer as well.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: No, I want to make progress. This is a short debate and I will follow the example of the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

Mr. Meacher: I gave way.

Dr. Mawhinney: And so have I. *[Interruption.]* I can understand why Opposition Members may dismiss their spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West, but I just gave way to him, too.

No one can seriously doubt our commitment to ensuring that services in future are broadly based on the services run by BR at present. Indeed, just last week, the franchising director said:

"I am determined to achieve the best possible service for passengers, and I will take into account commitments by bidders to improve on existing timetables when evaluating bids for these franchises."

The PSRs offer passengers more than the simple freezing of the existing timetable. I turn again to my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West because I have even better news for him, and indeed for the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay).

Take commuters on the London-Tilbury-Southend line, for example. Because the passenger service requirement specifies maximum load factors for peak services, they will receive a guarantee that the operator will have to put on extra trains if demand for services increases, instead of simply cramming more people into existing trains. That is exactly why for years that line has been called the misery line; the misery is at an end.

Secondly, PSRs allow the private operator space to develop commercially viable services in line with passenger demand, in addition to the guaranteed requirement. Specifying the existing timetable, as the hon. Member for Oldham, West would have us do, would reduce the scope for such initiative and deprive passengers of the very benefits that privatisation is designed to bring. The difference between us is that Conservative Members understand the way in which the private sector works and he does not—but, given his background, that is probably understandable.

Matching services to what customers want is precisely what the private sector does best. That is clearly demonstrated by previous privatisations and there is every reason to expect the same logic to apply to the railways. It is a logic that the Opposition have always denied—I acknowledge that they have the virtue of consistency—and they have always been proved wrong.

Let me correct one misapprehension that obviously afflicts the Labour party. To hear its members talk, one would think that the passenger service requirements had been decided and cast in stone. As I said earlier, that is not so, although the hon. Member for Oldham, West failed to recognise it. The announcement last week was of the start of a consultation process. Indeed, the hon. Member for Oldham, West will have to become used to the fact that that is how we do business nowadays. Instead of the centralised bureaucratic decision making so beloved of the Labour party, whereby the hon. Member for Oldham, West would sit on the Front Bench and determine the time, speed and location of every train in the nation, users of the railway are being consulted about what they want to happen. Passenger power is returning to the railways.

Mr. Mackinlay: On that narrow point, can the Secretary of State tell us how the member of the public who feels aggrieved can complain, and know to whom to complain, bearing in mind the multiplicity of franchises and the interests of Railtrack? Who will run that one-stop shop where he can complain about the diminished rail service and obtain a remedy?

Dr. Mawhinney: The responsibility to respond to a complaint will lie with the specific company that runs the service.

Mr. Mackinlay: How will he know?

Dr. Mawhinney: I think that we shall be able to help the hon. Gentleman in time. He needs to be patient.

Mr. Mackinlay: Ah. *[Laughter]*

Dr. Mawhinney: I hope that my hon. Friends will safely log that bout of laughter as the privatisation process develops.

Of course, the hon. Member for Oldham, West does not recognise any of that. He is too busy playing the tired old Opposition game—the tactic that they have used before every privatisation. He is trying to scare people. He will bemoan a job worry here, threaten a service cut there; anything to put at risk the service that he claims to support. With friends like him, the railways will always be in big trouble.

Still, the Opposition have always been wrong before. Privatisation has brought new services, better standards and more choice. They will be wrong again.

I drew attention in our previous debate to the endearing admission by the Leader of the Opposition that the British people do not trust Labour. How true; how very true. Tonight the hon. Member for Oldham, West has simply dug his party into an even deeper hole. His leader will be cross—perhaps I should say "crosser"—with him. The British people will compare his rhetoric—for we shall remind them—with the reality of the new railway, and they will trust Labour even less.

Our plans for the railways offer something new for passengers; they offer guarantees. For the first time there will be an absolute guarantee of service levels. No Labour Government ever offered passengers such an assurance, and the hon. Member for Oldham, West refused to do so this evening. No Liberal appears even to understand it. On 27 January, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) warned that if the

"minimum service requirements for the rail network are at any less than those we experienced before privatisation, then the Government has betrayed the travelling public".

There were no passenger service guarantees before privatisation.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West issued an even sillier press release on the same day. As he has demonstrated again tonight, he simply does not understand how the market economy works. He said:

"The Secretary of State's appeal to the train operators to provide more than they are contracted to do is whistling in the wind".

He asked:

"What operator in their right mind would take the risk of providing more than a bare minimum of services for which they will get no subsidy?"

The operators have replied with a stinging rebuke. They want more services and, unlike the hon. Member for Oldham, West, they both know what they are talking about and can deliver. At least they understand the elementary basis on which the private sector works.

Operators are aware of the commercial opportunities that privatisation will bring. They recognise the incentives in the new system to provide services above passenger service requirement levels. They know that they will make more money if they can attract more passengers on to rail. They realise that most of their costs will be covered by the guaranteed level of services. Therefore, additional services will be possible on the basis of marginal costs.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West simply does not understand any of that. He is out of touch and out of tune. This evening, the hon. Gentleman gave us his synthetic rage rendition, but we all noticed what he did not say. There was no mention of nationalisation, not a word about whether a Labour Government would return the railways to state control, no mention of any policy to reverse 50 years of decline, not a word about what a Labour Government would do to encourage more use of the railways. There was no mention of how Labour would fund investment; not a word about guaranteeing services.

I offer the hon. Member for Oldham, West the sympathy of the whole House, but he and his leader must simply soldier on in silence until the union leaders tell him what is the deal that they must accept for clause IV. Then he can tell us what he really thinks he has been told to think.

As I sat listening to the hon. Member for Oldham, West, I had a feeling that he reminded me of someone. Just before he sat down, it occurred to me who he reminded me of; it was one of those old-fashioned British Rail station announcers. Hon. Members will remember the people who used to make a muffled sound—like this—full of noise, but with nothing intelligible coming out. The Labour party has no policy and no intelligent thought, and says nothing intelligible on behalf of passengers. There is no chance that the House will support the hon. Gentleman tonight. The House will support the amendment.

7.58 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I always enjoy the Secretary of State's performances. He reminds me of a small boy banging a dustbin lid in the dark to drive away the ghosties. He does it with such panache; there is no factual basis, but a lot of panache, and I do admire that.

The Secretary of State and the Conservative party do not represent the passengers and are not at all interested in them. It is important that the House should admit that. The Conservatives are interested in the movement of money. That is what interests them—not the provision of services but the movement of money, and the ability of private financiers or private companies to cream off from state assets that which will improve their own finances. On 14 December British Rail announced the service cuts that it would be forced to make because it was required to improve its financial position by 10 per cent. this year. That announcement so frightened the Secretary of State that, as soon as it became public, he rushed out a statement to say that of course he did not want cuts and that he favoured the line that he has pushed tonight.

British Rail told the truth: it was required to cut its finances by 10 per cent. which would directly affect its current operations. Because the Secretary of State made a great fuss and said that there would be no cuts, that the existing timetable would continue and that all would be well, it became very clear that he had to act.

Between 14 December and today there has been a considerable amount of straightforward and hard-nosed negotiation and, somehow or other, British Rail's external financing limit has been expanded by £64 million. That

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

has made the difference, and British Rail is now able to confirm that it will maintain its existing services and withdraw its threats of 14 December to cut services.

It is important to describe the money-go-round in considerable detail. Sir Alfred Sherman said recently that he could not see any point in denationalising or selling off any industry that did not make money. He could not see the logic behind the Government's decision to privatise the railways.

For the past five years the Government have pushed British Rail to change its work patterns and to undertake considerable reorganisation and modernisation. If, at the end of that period, British Rail was unable to demonstrate increased profits—indeed, even climb back to the small increases that it had made on some lines in the early 1980s—it would be clear that it would not be able to make enormous profits in the future.

The reality is that heavy subsidies will be provided. The regulator has said that track access charges will be reduced and the railways will earn 8 per cent. on the new assets. The Secretary of State has not explained to the House how the system will fragment British Rail. Calculating assets at a different rate will mean that the taxpayer will pay a great deal more in subsidies in the future. The Secretary of State has assured us, "Don't worry, that money will go around the system. It will be recirculated and it will return to the Treasury when there is a profit."

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The hon. Lady will know that, under Treasury rules, a subsidy can be guaranteed for a socially necessary service for only three years. Is that correct?

Mrs. Dunwoody: The passenger service obligation is very important, as is what will happen to the passenger transport executives which have had direct input into the services that they thought were important. They cannot guarantee the future of those passenger services which the Secretary of State talked about tonight because they do not know what the level of funding will be or what extra expenses they will face.

Fragmentation of the service continues apace and the cost of privatisation—which will be borne almost entirely by the taxpayer—is boosted by totally unnecessary expenditure. The British Rail Business Systems Bureau Services currently leases systems software which is used to control the mainframe computers at Crewe and Nottingham.

Two products are leased from Computer Associates, an American software supplier, and there is a licence fee for each package—only two fees in all. Due to the fragmentation of the specialist systems, that company is saying that, following privatisation, it will require a licence fee for each package for each company. There will be at least 80 companies, so it does not take long to work out what the cost will be for new software—that is before we add the expense of computers and the reorganisation that we have heard so much about.

British Rail has invested £1.5 billion in the new Eurostar in the past few years. The Government intend to carve up those assets and to offer them free of charge to the private sector. They have done that before in the privatisation process and undoubtedly they will do it again here. They will not use the assets to improve facilities throughout the British Rail system or to provide the extra services that the Secretary of State makes so much play about.

I do not know who will build all those wonderful new trains, but I do know that they will not be built by British companies or by British workers. However, the money will come from British taxpayers—that will be our only future involvement in the new trains.

The Secretary of State and his colleagues are proposing a three-card trick of monumental effrontery which will take large sums of money from the railway system and which will generate large sums of money for the private sector—not only the transport element, but the estate agents, lawyers and accountants who are presently working in the system—at great cost to the passengers.

What is happening to British Rail is outrageous. It has undergone enormous change in the past five years and it needs a period of stability. It needs an opportunity to develop in order to meet the challenges posed by other forms of transport. Rail competes with road and air transport, but the Government have not made clear the challenges that British Rail faces.

I am afraid that we may be seeing the end of the railway system in this country. However, we will not see an end to asset stripping because, whichever way one looks at it, privatisation is a giant asset-stripping process. It is a very efficient way of taking money out of taxpayers' pockets, and the cost in social need and increased pollution, apart from the finance involved, will be stupendous.

8.7 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. This is the first speech that I have made about rail privatisation since I served on the Standing Committee which considered the Railways Bill 18 months ago. What a joy that was—I see one or two friendly, and not so friendly, faces on the Opposition Benches.

During the Committee's consideration—when I was parliamentary private secretary to the then Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor)—I wondered whether it would be better to break up British Rail and recreate some of the old regional companies, such as LNER, the Great Western and so on, that existed before nationalisation.

Privatisation by franchise will provide opportunities for new companies and entrepreneurs to enter the railways market. I am confident that British Rail's managers who have transferred to some of the new companies will contribute to an enhanced rail performance. Rail passengers will benefit from the greater degree of autonomy and commercial freedom within the system. It is important that the Rail Regulator does not shackle the new companies to such an extent that they are unable to innovate, introduce new and different services and try new pricing arrangements.

When we privatised British Airways, we did not insist that the company should ensure that through-ticketing arrangements for flights were available in every city and town. Of course, in practice, they are so available, because it is in British Airways' commercial interests to ensure that potential air travellers deal with a customer-friendly business and can get tickets easily. So, too, is it in the interests of all the rail operating companies to ensure that

it is easy for passengers to buy rail tickets, which is why, under the new arrangements, far from there being fewer outlets from which to buy tickets, I would expect there to be more.

Similarly, far from simply operating the minimum number of services as specified by the franchising director, the train operating companies will be looking to get more people on to the railways and to run more services for passengers. As my right hon. Friend has said before now, the early feedback we are getting from operators is that that is exactly what they want to do; they want to run more services. That is what private enterprise is all about.

The hostility of Opposition Members to rail privatisation simply illustrates that they do not understand private enterprise and demonstrates once again that, despite the flowery, reassuring words that the Leader of the Opposition might offer the middle classes, the Labour party has not changed its spots. It still dislikes and distrusts private enterprise and free markets. Of course, the reason why the Labour party is able to get away with its scaremongering tactics at the moment is that privatisation has not yet come about and the positive developments which I believe will occur have not yet taken place.

I have come across an extremely interesting development that I shall relate to the House. For a few years the Green party has been running excursions in Yorkshire—a number of them have travelled on the Settle to Carlisle line. Last year, members of the Green party came to me with some concern about the track access charges which had been quoted by Railtrack and I took it up on their behalf. I was also concerned about the effect that privatisation might have on steam-hauled excursion trips.

I am a life member of the A4 Locomotive Society. Along with two others, my father bought the Sir Nigel Gresley from British Railways back in 1966. He is now president of the A4 Locomotive Society. I was concerned about whether the new regime might lead to fewer trips being available for steam engines on the new privatised railways—not a bit of it.

The March edition of *The Railway Magazine* contains two interesting articles. The first tells how Flying Scotsman Railways is taking over the operation of BR's special trains unit and will be running charter operations including steam trips similar to those run by BR. The second article relates the emergence of a new company called Days Out, which is run by an individual called Mel Chamberlain and has

"a whole trainload of ideas for railtours during 1995."

Days Out is planning to run around 60 steam excursions, some hauled by the Sir Nigel Gresley, and *The Railway Magazine* has described the company's programme for 1995 as "formidable". I shall quote directly from the article:

"The package and diversity of tours planned is impressive and with improved customer facilities, and lower ticket prices, Days Out may well succeed. If Mel Chamberlain does not manage to persuade the long-lost tourer back, it won't be through lack of trying."

That is only the tip of the iceberg. New people will come to the railways and new ideas will be introduced. Competition is already being introduced into one sector of the railways. At the end of the day, the key question for Days Out is whether it can sell the seats. There will be a significant number of new seats and I hope that Days Out can do just that.

In the private sector the existing management of the gas, telecommunications and electricity companies, the existing management has always managed to improve the performance of once-sleepy nationalised industries. The privatised industries suddenly started to pay more attention to the needs of their customers rather than to the needs of the providers of their subsidies—the politicians and civil servants. They started to tackle the inefficiencies and restrictive practices which kept costs—and therefore prices—too high. That, along with tough regulation, is why telephone charges have fallen by 30 per cent. since 1984, gas prices have fallen by 23 per cent. since 1986 and the prices charged by local electricity companies such as Yorkshire Electricity have fallen by 15 per cent. since privatisation in 1990.

In the days when I had a proper job as a sales manager in industry, I spent a great deal of time travelling around the north of England and Scotland and, because I was not grand enough to have a mobile telephone, I had to use public phone boxes. It was an absolute nightmare finding one, and when I did, it usually did not work—in contrast to what happens today.

At the time of the privatisation of British Telecom, the Labour party said that public telephones would disappear from the streets and roads of Britain. In fact, there are more public phone boxes in existence today than ever before. There were 77,000 in 1984 and there are 127,000 today—and, what is more, they work. In those days it used to take six months to get a telephone installed in one's home; now it takes seven days.

Privatisation has led to improved services. Despite all the negative gloom and doom-mongering by the Opposition, it is just possible that we are on the verge of a new and exciting era when the railways can reverse the trend of decades of fewer passengers travelling by train. Nationalisation failed to reverse that trend; private enterprise now has the opportunity to achieve it by introducing new ideas, new capital and new services. I very much hope that it succeeds.

8.17 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The speech of the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and that of the Secretary of State will go down in the annals of history as a categorical triumph of hope over experience. If, in later years, we want to measure the words that have been uttered in the House tonight, I suspect that the balance of prediction will lie more accurately with those of us opposed to the entire process than with those who are advocating it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), at a meeting with the rail franchising director—one of the many hobgoblin figures created by the legislation—reminded Mr. Salmon and the rest of us that when Frankenstein was first created it was a benevolent idea and it was only subsequently that things went wrong and the monster developed a life of its own. That applies to the process of privatisation generally. The fragmentation is debilitating not just the existing rail network but the capacity of Transport Ministers to exercise the degree of ministerial direction that is now required.

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

I shall be specific and limited in referring to two decisions taken in December by the franchising director: first, that the sleeper services to Carlisle and Fort William respectively, and Motorail services generally, would not be included in the franchise that will be awarded in due course to ScotRail; and, secondly, what will happen beyond March to May this year in regard to direct links between London and the north of Scotland. I do so in the terms of the motion because I would argue that there has been a grotesque breach of faith and a downright breach of categorical assurances that were given to the House and to representatives of the highlands.

Let us take the phrase "based on" the passenger rail timetable of May 1994. I accept one of the points that the Minister made. I am not here tonight to argue—I draw a slight distinction with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—for an exact replica of May 1994. It is reasonable to anticipate that "based on" can mean, for example, the existing three passenger services a day between Glasgow and Oban, but that they might run at different times. That can be debated, but it is a reasonable distinction to draw.

But that is quantifiably different from saying that passenger services to, for example, Fort William will be based on the May 1994 timetable but with the exception that there will be no sleeper or Motorail services. That is of a different degree and is a categorical breach of faith.

On 17 February 1993, in a letter to Councillor Duncan McPherson, the convenor of Highland regional council, the then Minister for Public Transport said:

"I assured you that the franchise"—

the one to which I have referred—

"will be based on British Rail's 1994 timetable."

By 15 April 1993, the Minister was even more categorical. He told the Standing Committee that there would not be picking and choosing by the franchising director and that all the services then running would be franchised—"then" being May 1994. That is not the case. There has been picking and choosing by the franchising director and he has decided not to include the sleeper and Motorail services to which I referred.

On 25 May, the former Minister said that the franchising director would consult the appropriate local authorities. He has not done so. It is not just the franchising director who has not consulted local authorities, but the Ministers themselves who are not even willing to meet and listen to the local authority representatives who are travelling on a block booking from Fort William on the sleeper service to lobby the Scottish Grand Committee tomorrow.

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts) *rose—*

Mr. Kennedy: I shall happily give way to the Minister because so far his silence and unwillingness even to respond to the request has spoken volumes.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman will understand that Mr. Salmon has given an early indication of the approach that he is minded to take towards the sleeper services and Motorail, but the hon. Gentleman will know that he has not yet published a passenger service requirement covering those services. He will do so later in the year and that will be the opportunity for those towards whom he has an obligation to consult to say what they think about what is and is not included in the proposals. Anything that happens in advance of that will be decisions made by British Rail under the present arrangements of the protected nationalised railway system.

Mr. Kennedy: The Minister has not been in his present position very long and it shows from that intervention. He clearly does not understand what is involved. I shall quote directly Mr. Salmon's words in a letter of 2 February to the convenor of Highland regional council.

Incidentally, yesterday, the Minister's Department denied that it had ever received an approach from Highland regional council in a letter dated 21 December. That is strange because the first sentence of the letter from the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising begins:

"Thank you for your letter of 21 December to the Secretary of State for Transport."

Someone in the Department must have received it because it was quickly handed on to the director for him to reply. However, yesterday the Department denied any such receipt. The Minister might like to find out what is going on inside his Department before he lectures the rest of us.

What Mr. Salmon says stands in stark contrast to the blandishments that we have just heard. First, he acknowledges that, exceptionally, the announcement of 14 December was made in advance of the start of the consultation on ScotRail and west coast services. He continues:

"Clearly, if British Rail proceed with the proposed changes in the May timetable, then these services will be withdrawn before OPRAF starts its consultation process. We would not, in such circumstances, include these particular services in the PSR consultation."

I repeat:

"We would not, in such circumstances, include these services in the PSR consultation."

The Minister has just advised us that the services would be part of the PSR consultation, so who is right—the Minister or the director of franchising? What is said in the letter dated 2 February stands contradicts completely what the Minister has just said at the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman quoted Mr. Salmon's letter in which he explained that if services were withdrawn before he starts his consultation on the passenger service requirements he would not be including those services in his passenger service requirement. The hon. Gentleman will know that there is nothing to stop local authorities or rail users consultative councils, or right hon. and hon. Members, putting forward whatever views they have on inclusions in or exclusions from the PSR. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will avail himself of that opportunity if the hypothetical circumstances that he outlined pertain at the time.

Mr. Kennedy: Well, well, we have already moved our ground in the course of the past five minutes at the Dispatch Box. Let us be clear about one thing. There is a world of difference between consulting over a proposed level of service in a proposed timetable and consulting over a service that does not even feature in the timetable. There is light years' difference in that. Such retrospective consultation makes little sense.

Secondly, the body which, under the legislation, is charged with having the biggest say in the consultation is the rail users consultative committee. What does Major

General Lennox Napier, the chairman of the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee, say? He has written to Mr. Salmon, our dear friend, in the following terms:

"By making a separate announcement about sleeper services and Motorail prior to releasing details of any of the PSRs, you appear to have pre-empted the consultation process on a highly controversial aspect of your proposals . . . Therefore, to allow time for a proper consultation process to take place, I am writing to request you:

(a) to consult the relevant consultative committees about your decision . . . and,

(b), not to permit the operators to discontinue any of the relevant services until your consultation with the consultative committees is complete and you have considered their representations on the subject."

That is the chairman of the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee, set up under the legislation by the Government, speaking on behalf of that body. Does the Minister endorse and support those sentiments? If so, that would send a useful signal to our friend Mr. Salmon on what he should do. Will the Minister clarify that? Does he support that expression? The Minister is uncharacteristically reticent. That tells us all we need to know.

The person to whom we shall be looking with regard to this disgraceful abuse of the guidelines that were laid down by the legislation and the contempt that has been shown for the consultative process has to be the Rail Regulator. I and my hon. Friends had a useful meeting with Mr. Swift last week when he made it clear that where evidence was forthcoming that suggested a breach of faith or irregular procedures he would want to consider that. I express the strong hope that he will do so. Because the great difference between the four franchises announced for consultation last week and the forthcoming one that affects Scotland is that in England and Wales there will be a proper public opportunity to be consulted and to express views through the legislation about everything, but in Scotland there will not. The Minister must face up to that.

Therefore, on the wider aspect, in conclusion, clearly the Minister does not have an answer, but his civil servants might be able to dredge one up for him at the end of the debate.

I simply say that when it is environmental policy to try to move more people off the roads on to rail, when it is agreed tourism policy for the Scottish economy that we want to develop our existing links to the south, and when we have just opened a channel tunnel which physically plugs us on to the rail network and infrastructure of the continent of Europe, to be cancelling all UK Motorail services and sleepers to Carlisle and Fort William is a retrograde step of some considerable madness. When that is accompanied by bad faith and bad practice, the House should vote to condemn it at 10 o'clock tonight.

8.30 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): When I hear the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) speaking with such authority about rail privatisation, my mind goes back to the debate in which the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who is now the Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman, spoke about gas privatisation. He said proudly:

"16 million British Gas consumers can expect only one result—to pay increased gas prices, higher than the rate of inflation, for years to come."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 793.]

How history has proved him wrong. I believe that it will prove the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye wrong on this occasion.

Listening to the Opposition, one would believe that they were experts. Yet they know that state ownership in this country has failed. Across the world, country after country has followed the example of the Conservative Government and introduced privatisation. In 1979, the nationalised industries were costing the taxpayer £50 million a week. Today, they earn £60 million a week. Even the Labour party has now lost the will to fight on the issue, and that is typified in its debate about the future of clause IV. The reason why it has changed its mind is that it knows that it has got it wrong in the past. The Government have invested billions in British Rail, and since the war some £54 billion has been invested in the railways. In 1953, some 17 per cent. of journeys were by train, and 24 per cent. of goods. Today, both figures are nearer 5 per cent. and falling.

The concept of state ownership is bankrupt. Why? In my constituency, I have no fewer than 12 railway stations, and rail privatisation is always a lively issue. The service from Purley, in the heart of my constituency, to Victoria is not bad at all. There are four trains an hour, and a cheap-day return costs something like £3.20—not a lot of money. Those trains are empty. Yet the A23 through Streatham is jammed full with cars. Why? It is because the railways are perceived to be unreliable and inconvenient. In the peak hours, commuters pay £7.20. They need to use the train, but are faced with crowded, unreliable, unpunctual and, often, dirty trains.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ottaway: I am sorry, but unless I am given injury time, I cannot give way.

Those customers are dissatisfied. They have no way to complain. Is not that typical of all the old nationalised industries—a centralised bureaucracy funded by taxpayers' money, concerned more with supply than with what the market demands? Why do we not have fewer trains in the daytime and more in the rush hour? The reason is that the railways are stuck on the old requirements to supply services. It astonishes me that Opposition Members—indeed, members of the public—want us to continue that.

This is where the whole ethos of privatisation comes into the matter. Nationalisation was a central feature of post-war Labour Governments, but few people today deny that it imposed intolerable burdens on the national economy. Labour naively believed that control of the railways would be vested in the people. In reality, power was transferred to monopoly providers and monopoly producer unions. The real power was exercised by civil servants, who became the protector and confidant of the industry's self-interest and, indeed, on occasions, the politicians in power.

Privatisation is now copied throughout the world. I had the good fortune last week to go to Japan, with the President of the Board of Trade, and went on the privatised railway from Tokyo to Nagoya. In a recent report, the transport correspondent of *The Times* said:

"Japan is demonstrating that privatised railway companies can be not only efficient and profitable but also popular with investors."

[Mr. Ottaway]

As I sat on that comfortable high-speed train, knowing that it was run by private money, I knew precisely what he meant.

I welcome the passenger service requirements, because they will provide a customer safeguard of a minimum level of service. We all know that the expected level of service will be considerably higher, because the incentive to provide more services is there. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—unfortunately, he is not here now—rather played around with the possibility that the service between Dawlish and the west country may go via Peterborough. What he completely ignored—this shows his ignorance of the workings of capitalism—is that if there was a demand for more services, the operators would provide them.

In future, the customer will be able to rely on two components: a guaranteed minimum service, and a commercially responsive addition to that service. The first operators have already been announced. We have seen the reaction. I do not know how many hon. Members have received the brochure from Great Western Railways, entitled "Business First". It starts with the comforting headline:

"Cruise in comfort at an altitude of 6½ feet".

It says:

"now, as a dynamic company with a brand new look and a stronger than ever commitment to customer service, we can offer you the standard of travel that truly meets your demands".

It has

"brand new staff . . . Each is a highly trained professional".

It will provide

"high quality refreshments and even, on selected services, video and audio entertainment during your journey".

One can also choose various price structures.

We are talking about the old British Rail, but we live in a new world. When the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that she feared the demise of the old British Rail, she was absolutely right. We have a new railway coming and a new type of service.

Why do the Opposition continue their opposition to privatisation and make the same old arguments of doom and gloom? They were wrong about every other privatisation. They will be wrong about this one. One has only to look at some of the quotations that they have come up with in recent years to see that. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), when shadow energy spokesman, said about electricity privatisation:

"It strikes me that a minimum estimate of the cost of privatisation to the consumer in terms of price increases is 20 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1988; Vol. 143, c. 723.]

He was wrong.

The hon. Member for Gordon, whom I quoted earlier, said that electricity privatisation

"will result in higher prices for the whole population".—[*Official Report*, 10 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 585.]

He was wrong.

The right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), when shadow energy spokesman, said on the privatisation of British Gas:

"There is no evidence that the Bill will improve efficiency, provide a better service, produce cheaper gas or, least of all, create competition."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 780.]

How wrong he was.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said of the privatisation of British Steel that it was

"a shoddy measure which promises destabilising uncertainty. It is totally irrelevant to the real interests of the industry".—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 238.]

The fact is that British Steel, having made losses of £1.7 million, made profits of £733 million.

The late John Smith, who was then the right hon. Member for Lanarkshire, North and who was not often wrong, said that privatising British Airways

" is a bad deal for the airline and for the British taxpayer".

Let us go back to the hon. Member for Garscadden, who is constantly putting his foot in it. He said that British Airways

"will be the pantomime horse of capitalism if it is anything at all."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1979; Vol. 974, c. 53, 125.]

The fact is that British Airways has run up a profit of more than £2.7 billion.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The debate is on rail passenger services. The fact is that the Tory central office briefs do not stretch to a word on rail services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Ottaway: It is not a Conservative central office brief, but a pamphlet that I wrote. The hon. Gentleman is free to read it any time he likes.

The point that I am trying to make is that the Labour party's forecasts about the future of privatisation have been wrong. There is no reason why we should listen to it this time any more than we have in the past.

Every privatisation has brought increased investment and service to the customer. This privatisation should be no different. Its dependence on public funding has let down British Rail in the past, and the Government now want to put it on a sound financial footing. Not only is Labour incapable of reforming public services, but it remains unsure whether to cling to the past and call for renationalisation or whether to try to push for a pale imitation of Conservative policy—a rose by any other name. While the Labour party ties itself up in arguments about clause IV, the rest of the world has had the debate and reached a conclusion. Privatisation has worked and has been copied throughout the world. Let us allow the benefits to be felt by the railways.

8.38 pm

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I thought that we were here this evening to speak about passenger services under rail privatisation, not to be given some quotations about other utilities that have been privatised. Let us stick to the subject itself.

I have three areas of doubt that I want to bring to the attention of the Government: first, from a Scottish perspective, the funding situation; secondly, the infrastructure; and thirdly, the withdrawal of services. I want to give practical reasons for my doubts on whether, under privatisation, passenger services will be improved. First, let me deal with funding.

Over the past 15 to 20 years, the funding of British Rail in Scotland has relied almost exclusively on the passenger transport executive in Strathclyde region. Since 1975,

some £400 million has been invested in Strathclyde's railways—about £30 million a year. We are told that, because of changes in the franchising system, the sum will be increased to a staggering £112 million next year—three times the amount expected from the local PTE. We are also told that, although the money will come from the Government in the first year, there is no guarantee that it will continue to do so.

At the same time, new unitary authorities are being introduced in Scotland. Can hon. Members imagine small unitary authorities being able to go on financing the railways to the tune of £112 million? How will they apportion the cost? They will start to fight among themselves.

At present, there is only one train from Argyll to Helensburgh; Cunninghame—the area represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) and me, which will become the North Ayrshire unitary authority—has some 10 stations, with trains running the length and breadth of both our constituencies. How can the Government expect funding to continue in the same way when two local authorities have been merged into, as it were, a central bank?

Unless assurances are given, the whole network will suffer. There must be funding either from the top downwards or from the local authorities upwards, and we clearly cannot expect funding from the bottom up to continue. The Scottish Office and the Department of Transport must become involved. None of the changes will be clear to those who will become responsible for most of the funding, and the figures must be stated in a way that they can understand.

I am also doubtful about the continuation of high standards in infrastructure. The Forth bridge, which is described internationally as the eighth wonder of the world, was built to standards that we in Scotland know as "Clyde class", but it is now badly corroded. Earlier this year, I visited the bridge with my hon. Friends the Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke). Although we went on the say-so of Railtrack, it was clear to us as we went underneath the bridge in a boat that the cross-members were corroded. The Scottish Office says that the problems are purely cosmetic, but the failure to paint the bridge during the past couple of years has obviously resulted in terminal damage. Railtrack, which owns it, has failed in its duty to maintain the eighth wonder of the world; meanwhile, it is taking some £170 million a year from ScotRail.

I am told that stocks are now at their lowest-ever level, and that no rail clips have been ordered in the past few months. That will obviously affect passengers in the future. Last month, for the first time, ScotRail failed to meet the standards of the much-hailed passenger charter in either its eastern or its central section. How can it be held responsible, when most of the failures that have been identified are Railtrack's responsibility? This is the beginning of what will result from full-scale privatisation of the railways.

Signalling and infrastructure faults have been identified as Railtrack's problem. I understand that the signalling system at Haymarket remains incomplete even now, some nine months after its inception, and that a further £1 million needs to be spent if delays are not to continue. It is nonsensical to split responsibilities. Earlier, someone asked who would be responsible for explaining why a train was late. It is clear that there will be more difficulties than ever. Only this week, my train to Glasgow Central was delayed; faulty signals were blamed, and Railtrack was said to be the source of the problem. There is, however, no suggestion that ScotRail will be compensated, and again passengers will suffer.

Fortunately, much of what I was going to say about the withdrawal of services has already been said by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), but the Government must answer our concerns about the threat to sleeper services in Scotland. I am told that the regulator proposes a cut from five to two. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the problems caused by the restriction to 16 coaches at Euston. I do not know how the services will be run with split trains; perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us. We have already heard about the problems involved in the withdrawal of Motorail.

That is all the tip of the iceberg. Given that every route in Scotland is currently subsidised, how can those routes be maintained in the private sector? It is nonsensical; it is a joke. The Government's snide remarks show how seriously they treat the problem. This week we have seen perhaps the most ludicrous aspect of rail travel as it now is. A picture in the local press today shows a railway carriage being taken down the road for repair. Perhaps the Government want that to happen to all railway carriages.

The late Robert Adley, who chaired the Transport Select Committee, called rail privatisation the poll tax on wheels. Unfortunately, there will be no wheels to tax.

8.48 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): The hon. Member for Cunningham, South (Mr. Donohoe) put a forceful argument for privatisation. He said that things were pretty bad, and would become worse with privatisation. I believe that they will become better.

The west country has been mentioned a fair amount this evening. In my experience, rail services there have become progressively worse, especially in the past two years. The new timetable considerably lengthens the journey time to Totnes, one of the two British Rail stations in my constituency. I think that part of British Rail's programme is to make the journeys slower so that when trains arrive late it need not pay so much compensation under the passengers charter. If my experience is anything to go by, the situation has got worse and I hope that privatisation will make it better.

British Rail uses a raft of excuses—"BR-speak," as I call it. For example, slugs on the line stop heavyweight carriages dead in their tracks; bridges are in a perpetual state of repairs; floods always cover the line between Taunton and Exeter, not to mention the cursed sea at Dawlish, which is always going over the tracks just beyond that town. Freak thunderstorms cause power failures in Cornwall; not only does that county seem to be in permanent darkness, but the trains are always shunted on to sidings and fleets of buses take people from one station to another to connect with other trains. Then there is the ubiquitous phantom of Westbury—the cow that is so regularly seen on the line. Whenever the train is on time, the driver stops dead because he says that there is a cow on the line. One always hears at Paddington that the delay has been caused by a cow—it is more like Bombay or Delhi than Westbury—and if there is no cow on the line, then signals, points and crossings will do the trick.

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

For the past three months, no train to Totnes or Ivybridge that I have been on has been on time. That is borne out by a parliamentary answer that I received in July last year, when the then Minister said that in 1991 only 62.6 per cent. of trains arrived in Plymouth on time, in 1992 only 61.2 per cent. arrived on time, and in 1993 only 61.9 per cent. arrived on time. Fewer than two thirds of trains arrived according to the timetable time.

The one exception is the sleeper. Here I should like to take a little credit; one does not get much credit in this place, and I never get the credit, but I played a part in stopping the Government, with BR, taking off the sleeper service to Penzance. When I was in Liverpool, I had a reputation for preventing BR from taking off sleeper services to the north-west, although it did just that as soon as I was transferred to South Hams. My hon. Friend the Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that the sleeper service is to be included in the franchise document, so it is safe for the next two or three years, although it will have to be used more if it is to be saved.

I said that the sleeper always arrives on time, but that is not quite true. A few months ago, I was waiting in Exeter station for the sleeper at 1 o'clock. I waited until 2.30 in the morning, but no sleeper arrived, though I pay tribute to BR for providing free cups of tea and blankets.

The problem with west country services is not only that the timetable has slipped but that trains arrive progressively later than the timetable time, with a difference of some 15 or 20 minutes, which produces growing anxiety in the minds of travellers that they will arrive late if they go by rail. More people are taking to the road, which is the last thing that we want as our west country roads are already saturated with cars which I suspect are driven by people who would have gone by rail but for the feeling that rail services are unreliable.

Rail travel is also expensive. It is more expensive to travel first class from London to Plymouth than to travel Apex from London to Gibraltar by plane—1200 miles by air is cheaper than 227 miles by train—and it takes longer to go to Plymouth by train than to go to Paris or Brussels. No wonder we in the west country feel somewhat discriminated against—like some sort of outpost of Europe, with Cornwall feeling that even more than Devon.

The problem of delays and the slowness of trains to Totnes is even worse on Sundays, when it is virtually impossible to travel from Totnes to London in under four hours. The other day it took me five and a half hours because of cows on the line at Westbury. We tend to get diverted on Sundays via Yeovil and Chippenham. Although both are beautiful parts of the country, many of us do not appreciate that unscheduled guided tour of the region.

One of the problems with BR is overmanning. I do not know whether this is correct, but I am told that there have to be two men in the cab in trains travelling between London and Reading because the train goes at 125 mph. If it goes at 110 mph, only one is needed. The unions have insisted on doubling the staff by putting an extra man in the cab. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell me whether there are two men in the cab when trains go through Slough at 125 mph even though only one is actually doing anything.

Mr. Watts: I must confess that I have not counted the number of men in the cab when trains go through Slough at 125 mph—or, indeed, when they stop at Slough, as they do and will continue to do.

Mr. Steen: That is helpful. The Minister will no doubt find that out, but I am told that it is the case.

On the journey from London to Totnes, every few seconds someone clips one's ticket. Every time the train stops, another man clips the ticket. My ticket looks like one of the sheets in my passport because there are so many ticket collectors. They are good and nice, and they add a certain presence on the train, but we do not need so many of them. The restrictive practices involved in overmanning are well illustrated by the number of ticket collectors. I hope that that will not happen after privatisation.

Trains have been so late that I have been using the charter. I have collected so many vouchers that every time I go to Totnes I can now dine royally in the BR restaurant car. The only snag is that the restaurant cars are being taken up. I am sure that there will be a great improvement after privatisation.

I am a great railway enthusiast and I am well known for the support that I have given to BR and InterCity. The managing director of rail services in the west country does an excellent job, but the problem is that the service is in decline. To entice people back on to railways, we need faster and cheaper railways, and more reliable services.

On summer weekends, a train travels from Paddington to Totnes in just under two and a half hours. It is an exhilarating journey. The train is always full to the gunnels, with people hanging out of the windows, egging the driver on. One would like to see more of that. In winter, the trains are full of depressed passengers, paying through the nose, having their tickets clipped incessantly, and drowning their sorrows in powdered coffee and tea from the buffet, or in French water and wine. Would you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, expect to find English wine or water on SNCF trains in France? Can you imagine the French serving exclusively English wine or water on SNCF? Of course not—only French wine and French water would be served. When the service is privatised, I hope that British goods, and not all that European stuff, will be served on trains because British goods are not served on French trains.

The final reason why we should give privatisation a throw is that it may give the Government the opportunity to put some of the money that they invest in railways into building new railways. I want more money to be spent on new railway lines. I do not see why we could not have new railway lines if the money given in subsidy to British Rail were released and used for new lines between, for example, Exeter and Plymouth. That is what everyone wants. In Italy and France, new lines and motorways are built in minutes, so why not in this country?

I am all for the service in my region being privatised. It cannot be worse than it is now. The region is crying out for improved infrastructure and if privatisation will provide that, I am all for it.

8.58 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): You will be pleased to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I intend to speak with exemplary brevity and, somewhat unusually in this debate, about rail passenger services.

As a member of the Select Committee on Transport, I sat through about 150 hours of its inquiry into the Government's rail privatisation plans. As a member of the Standing Committee which debated the Railways Act 1993, I sat through about 100 hours of debate on the detail of the privatisation programme. I can also say in all honesty that I have attended every debate in the House on rail privatisation since April 1992. Throughout that dauntingly long process, Ministers have repeated like a mantra the notion that franchises would be based on the existing timetable. In his opening speech, my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Transport provided irrefutable proof of that proposition.

Even when Ministers have referred to minimum service requirements, which I am bound to say has not been very often, not once have they said—again, this is a matter of record—that the minimum service requirements would be less than the existing timetable. If words mean anything—we are entitled to take them at face value—Ministers have led Parliament to understand that they were not envisaging any reduction in services. Now, however, we know that they are. However Ministers may duck and dive, the blunt truth is that the passenger service requirements represent the only level of services to which franchisees are contractually committed. If that is all that a franchisee wants to run, that is all that he will run and no amount of weasel words can disguise that simple fact. It might be said that we have heard enough such words during the long debate on rail privatisation.

The rabbit out of the hat—the deus ex machina—for the Secretary of State is the fact that the rail passenger has never had guaranteed services before. He said today that for the first time there would be an absolute guarantee of services. If we had a Government committed to a decent public transport system and prepared to invest in the railways at the same level as our European partners, we might not need a guarantee anyway.

We heard a great deal from Conservative Members about the benefits of privatisation, but they very often drew comparisons with the excellent services—and the speed with which new services could be introduced—in countries such as Italy and France, where railways are run on a nationalised basis. As Lord Marsh, who is no ally of the Labour party, told the Transport Select Committee, the railway industry was the one industry whose problems could be solved only by throwing money at it. That is a fact.

It is worth noting that the so-called guarantee will in the foreseeable future apply only to that small portion of the railway on which the franchises will operate. There are no guarantees of any description for the rest of the railway system, and certainly not for the branch lines about which we hear so frequently from the Secretary of State when he is trying to justify his policies on the radio.

Given that a disproportionate amount of subsidy will be dished out to the franchises to make them attractive to the private sector, the rest of the network is likely to remain a Cinderella for the indefinite future. There will be no fairy godmother to whisk the rest of British Rail off to the ball or to any golden high-speed future in the sky. While the Conservatives are in power, the prospects are grim indeed for passengers on most parts of the network.

What is the quality of the so-called guarantee that is on offer? There is a clear implication in everything that has been said that a guaranteed minimum means that a franchisee will not be able to run services below that level. But that is not so, and I will explain why.

On 15 December 1993, the Select Committee on Transport took evidence from the newly appointed franchising director, Mr. Roger Salmon. In the course of the interview, I asked him what would happen if the Treasury decided to cut the subsidy to the franchised railway. It had happened plenty of times to British Rail, so why not to the franchisees? Interestingly, the franchising director did not dismiss the possibility out of hand. On the contrary, he answered my question with admirable candour and I will quote his reply in extenso. It is reported on page 11 of the Committee's minutes of evidence, entitled "Arrangements for Railway Privatisation", printed on 15 December 1993. About the Government, Mr. Salmon said:

> "It will have ability to change those subsidies under certain circumstances . . . If there is a shortage of money, one of the ways British Rail tends to react, at the moment, is by cutting investment or putting up fares. The Franchising Director, by and large, will have similar options regarding existing franchises that have been let. He will be able to change minimum specifications. He will be able to change fare levels and thereby ask the franchisee to save money and pass those savings . . . back to the Exchequer."

In the words of the franchising director, speaking of his own powers in relation to minimum service guarantees,

> "He will be able to change minimum specifications."

There is no guaranteed minimum. It can always be lowered—we have it from the mouth of the man who can do it.

Members of Parliament and the public have allowed themselves to be led up the garden path for too long in the belief that there would be no reduction in service levels under privatisation. One thing is entirely clear: we should be under no illusions that there are any guarantees about minimum levels of service.

9.5 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I shall have no hesitation in voting against the Labour party's motion and voting in favour of my right hon. Friend's amendment, which is entirely sensible and practical.

I allow myself a little chuckle as we debate a very serious issue when I think of the year that I spent very happily as Minister for Roads and Traffic. I became almost exclusively associated with roads and motor cars, which was to me a great irony, as I shall explain. My loss is the gain of my hon. Friend the Minister, and I wish him well. I suspect that he will find life easier being Minister for Railways and Roads than I ever did as Minister responsible for roads alone.

I have a confession to make: I love trains. I started early with my Hornby 00 gauge and continued by building up my son's collection of rather splendid electric trains. While some hon. Members may have catalogued their visits to New York and Tokyo according to sights, mine were catalogued by visits to train shops.

However, my experience of real-world trains, and passenger services on them throughout my life, has been a little different. I grew up with the steam age on my local

[Mr. Robert Key]

railway line through Salisbury. I also had the excitement of family holidays to the west coast of Scotland, when I travelled, often overnight, from King's Cross to Mallaig or Kyle of Lochalsh on the sleeper trains and, occasionally on the Motorail. Indeed, this debate will have done a great service to such routes. The consultation process seems to be going rather well if tonight's debate is anything to go by. Mr. Salmon will have plenty of heavy reading to do, as well as thinking.

In the days of my trips to Scotland, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), when I first came across him, was the radical editor of the *West Highland Free Press*; an excellent document. I find it difficult to understand why the hon. Gentleman has become such a reactionary and I have become the radical.

My other memory was of the branch lines for passenger services throughout the south and west, the old push-me pull-you between Salisbury and Downton or Newton Abbot and Teigngrace. In Devon, I explored the old granite tramways from Haytor to the coast and Brunel's hydraulic railway along the coast from Starcross, where the pump house still stands. I have also extensively used trains in Germany, which, incidentally, are not all that they are cracked up to be, and I have worried my American friends by insisting on travelling by train rather than by air, for example when I undertook a 17-hour journey from Portland to San Francisco on the Starlight Express. I also saw the future on the bullet train from Osaka to Tokyo.

However, railway nostalgia alone simply will not do. I fear that the Opposition parties—I notice that not one Liberal Democrat is gracing the Opposition Benches—have given train spotters a bad name in this debate. The future is now with us in the superb Eurostar trains running through the channel tunnel and the journey has been transformed by facing up to the reality of railway infrastructure finance. I have been taught that railways adapt or die; they serve their passengers or they meet the Rev. Awdry in the happy, shunting yard upstairs.

The issue is not simply money. Successive Governments have spent on railways more than £1 billion for every year that I have been on this planet. And for what? For a decade and more my constituents have complained week in, week out about the service that they were receiving from British Rail.

Admittedly, there has been some good management at the top, but it has been impossible for those people to make an impact on the vast spongy bureaucracy and inertia that is British Rail. Sometimes there has been spasmodic investment. For example, we were promised some second-hand trains; they did not come. We were promised a painted station; that did happen. We were promised, and got, a loop line at Tisbury, and there has been talk of reopening stations at Wilton and Porton.

However, the timetable was always enormously inflexible. At weekends—the time when most people want to travel to London, for functions, for sport or for some other kind of leisure, and to come home again late at night—the timetable was reduced, because otherwise it would not have suited British Rail. The cry was always that that was the time when all the engineering was done.

When I was a Minister with responsibility for tourism, I visited Cornwall at the invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who has done more than anyone in Cornwall to champion the cause of railways. His constituents told me that BR simply would not listen to what they said about their needs, and about the patterns and cycles of holiday bookings in the south-west.

Then the Government made a commitment to privatisation. All of a sudden, British Rail started to react. Suddenly, we had our new trains and a more flexible timetable. British Rail was starting to wake up, but it was too late. I became a late convert to the Government's policy of rail privatisation.

As the Secretary of State said, what the franchising director has produced is not a timetable but a consultation exercise—the first-ever consultation on our railways. I believe that there are issues more important than the timetable. None the less, when I compare my existing timetable with the South West Trains passenger service requirement, I realise why the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) totally failed to mention the main line from Waterloo through Salisbury to Exeter. If he had done the homework on that line that I have done, he would have discovered that the passenger requirement follows the present timetable closely, and that does not suit the Labour party's argument. The two are similar in terms of level of service, but for the first time there is a guaranteed minimum, and now there is every incentive for running additional, marginally costed revenue-raising passenger services.

The great old regional companies certainly served their purpose—sometimes there were regional monopolies; sometimes there was cut-throat competition—but we must move on from those days. The early privatisations of gas and telecommunications were a success, but of course both have had to be modified. I warmly support the present exciting concept of separating the capital investment in the infrastructure of the railways from the services that provide revenue flows. In the international context, that is the most important thing that has happened to investment in railway systems for half a century.

Until now, there has been little incentive for British Rail to listen to the passenger, but now the franchisees will have every incentive not only to run a timetable to match existing loading but to generate the new markets in rail travel that are there for the picking.

My last observation is that British Rail has had a people problem. When I get on a train from my constituency and travel from Salisbury to Waterloo the journey, on good railway rolling stock, is now a real pleasure. More often than not the train is on time, and not only the trains but the people are a pleasure. There is the friendly guard, or the senior conductor, as I should call him; even the people pushing the tea trolleys seem to be enjoying themselves—something that could rarely be said of staff under the old regime. It is a happy transformation that the people now running the railway services seem to be realising that it is in their interests, too, to do a good job of work and to welcome their passengers—or, as I rather regret that they now call us, their customers.

However, that does not always happen. In the light of other great privatisations and transitions, it is important for the new railway companies and franchisees to understand that the period of transition is a difficult one for their work force. In the case of British Airways, there was real resentment among its staff, and much the same applies in the ambulance services. The success of the Nothumbrian ambulance service when compared with the

London service shows that, however much capital equipment is put into a service, it will not work unless the people who are running the services are working with the system that is introduced.

Privatisation is not just about the timetable, nor is it even just about infrastructure investment. Passengers also need to feel that all railway staff from the top downwards are having a change of heart. British Airways, British Gas, British Steel, the power companies and the water companies are all now world-beating companies, and undoubtedly a better use has been made of the taxpayers' original investment. I am absolutely confident that the same can be true of the railways.

9.14 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): In denigrating British Rail, the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) asked whether it was conceivable that one would be able to buy English water or wine on a French train. If the hon. Gentleman went to France, he might find that he was riding on a British-built train, as the new tram for Strasbourg was built in my constituency at ABB carriage works in York.

York is a railway town. Eighteen months ago, 4,700 people in York worked for the railways—one in 12 of the work force. In the past 18 months, that number has fallen to 3,500, a drop of 1,200. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) may talk of jolly tea trolley pushers on trains, but there are also thousands of people who have lost their jobs.

One might ask what effect those job losses will have on the passenger. Let me refer to two problems which we have in York. The first is that the 170 employees of Interlogic Control Engineering have been told that they will lose their jobs. The second is that 750 employees of ABB carriage works in York fear that they will be told soon that they will lose their jobs if, in the next seven or eight weeks, the company does not get a further order of the type of trains that it builds.

Signalling is the life-blood of the safety system for the railways, and if 170 signalling engineers are sacked, one builds up problems for the railways. The lack of new rolling stock is something that I do not need to explain, as other Members on both sides of the House have called for investment in new rolling stock.

Since this is a short debate, I must confine myself to two examples. The cause of most—not all—of the fatal railway accidents that have occurred recently is found to be in a signalling fault. One thinks of Clapham, and also—although the reports are not yet out—of the Cowden crash. Last week's crash on the Carlisle to Settle line was another example. In each case, it appears as though a signalling fault or a failure to provide an adequate signalling system was responsible.

Following the Clapham crash, the British Railways Board commissioned the Hesketh report, which identified a huge backlog of investment in signalling. That led to the creation of the British Rail signalling project group, and to the employment of some 1,500 additional skilled signalling engineers. As part of the preparation for privatisation, the signalling project group split into two separate companies—Interlogic Control Engineering and Signal Control UK. As I have mentioned, Interlogic has decided to close its York office with the loss of all 170 of its employees.

The decision was taken—I am told—to make the company viable for sale to the private sector. The managing director, Dr. Geoffrey Cowley, who himself is planning to lead a management buy-out took that decision. He is putting the redundancy costs on to British Rail to produce a company that will suit him when he puts in his management buy-out bid. I met Dr. Cowley last week, and he said that the job losses were inevitable because the company's business plan anticipated that the company would be designing schemes worth £180 million in the current year. It has won design work for schemes worth £105 million, because Railtrack has cut investment in signalling.

Such cuts have a direct effect on the public, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) said. The collapse of Haymarket interlocking, the signal box, has resulted in months and months of delays for travellers from Glasgow to London, and we heard this evening that those delays continue.

In a Wednesday morning debate two weeks ago, we had the opportunity to debate the job losses at ABB carriage works in York, so I shall not go over that ground again. I simply say that new carriages are badly needed by passengers on the Kent coast services. They are needed to improve the service's reliability, comfort and safety. Despite the fact that those carriages have been promised for five years, in statement after statement from British Rail managers and Transport Ministers, the carriages will not be ordered in the foreseeable future because British Rail says that it will delay replacement until 1999.

I learnt at the end of last year that British Rail was keen to provide a service to customers by ordering those new carriages, but it cannot do so for financial reasons. Sir Bob Reid wrote to me on 21 November last year and said:

> "At present, we have no plans to place orders for new trains, nor do the newly formed rolling stock leasing companies.
>
> The financial position this year is extremely difficult . . . There is insufficient headroom to take on any additional commitments this year, and next year is also likely to be tight."

The cause of the problems at both Interlogic and ABB, and for passengers, is lack of investment. I asked the House of Commons Library to dig out the investment figures for me. Those show that in 1992-93, £1,556 million was invested in the railways. The following year, the figure fell to £1,263 million. The Department of Transport's press release on Budget day last November said that the Government intended to put only £750 million of taxpayers' money into the railways next year.

Unlike many hon. Members on both sides of the House, I have set up and run a business, so I know that if one invests, one improves the product and gains a market share whereas if one does not invest, the business goes into a spiral of decline.

Will the Minister now give me an answer to my written question on signalling? Will he place in the Library a copy of the Hesketh report so that we can see what was recommended? What future does he hold out for the 170 signalling engineers in my constituency who have been told that they will be made redundant? What prospect is there that the British Railways Board will decide to place a follow-on order with ABB carriage works within the next seven weeks, ahead of its threat of closing the York carriage works?

9.23 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Even in the remaining few moments of the debate, I do not believe that it can take place without reference to our late colleague, Robert Adley. He certainly would have been in his place tonight and producing some trenchant thoughts. In all probability they would not have been entirely in support of the Government, as they seldom were. I am sorry that he is not here.

Like Robert Adley, I have been entirely in favour of the denationalisation of British Rail; my only qualms relate to the Government's method and their approach. All the arguments from the Opposition have been met by the statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who has said that they are curable through the process of denationalisation. Soon may it come.

I believe in the infinite capacity of entrepreneurial activity to meet the requirements of any public user of a service. That is the case equally for the services of British Rail. My goodness, gracious me, such improvements to present services are needed in spades on Network SouthCentral, which travels down through my constituency, beginning with the Brighton line, on to Lewes, along to Eastbourne or down to the coast at Newhaven and Seaford. Passengers on that service have suffered from a diminishing service and a lessening of quality rolling stock for too long. They deserve better. For that reason I shall support the Government's amendment.

My one remaining qualm has to do with timing. The trouble with the plans as presented is that they will take a little time to execute. The trouble with that is that people who will benefit from improved services will not necessarily do so quickly enough to appreciate that the Government's plans are correct. *[Interruption.]* I hear cackles from the Opposition, but that just shows how little they care about improvements in service. They obviously consider that a worry about bringing those improvements in quickly enough is merely worthy of a cackle. I hope that the Minister will take note of my concern.

I hope that the Government will be able to introduce the improvements in services as a result of the denationalisation in time so that my constituents and others like them will benefit. The qualms that have been raised have been well identified in the final two lines of the Government's amendment, which

"condemns Her Majesty's Opposition for continuing to rely on scare tactics as a substitute for policy which would enhance passenger services."

Those scare tactics have begun to stick not only from the Front Benches but from the Liberal Democrat Benches. There is a hardly a Liberal Democrat local council which has not sent up flak about worsening British Rail services, but the Liberals have no plans to improve them.

I promise the Government my support in the Lobby. My continuing hope is that the Government's plan for denationalisation will work, but that it is carried out with urgency.

9.27 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Last week, the publication of the passenger service requirement by the franchising director was hailed by the Secretary of State for Transport as the first great advance for the passenger. He said:

"Satisfying the aspirations of train passengers should be the heart of any policy for the railways."

It is the PSR that is supposed to satisfy those aspirations with contractual obligations to provide in certain instances less than a third of the services currently provided; a cut of 70 per cent. in some peak morning services and contracts which will allow operators to miss out services to stations currently served and make other stations optional.

No sooner had the PSR been published than the Secretary of State attempted to distance himself from it, as he did again tonight. He said that the PSR did not represent a timetable and the actual services to be provided.

The Government cannot have it both ways; either the PSR is the answer to rail passengers' prayers or it is not. Either the services that are contained within it are those that will actually be offered, or they are not. If they are, they represent the most savage attack on Britain's rail services since Beeching; if they are not, how on earth can they be described as a great advance for the rail passenger?

As the impact on services becomes apparent, Ministers attempt to reassure with warm, cosy words about every rail passenger's benevolent uncles, the rail regulator and the franchising director. We are reminded that their obligation to protect the interests of rail passengers are enshrined in statute. Yet every time the Rail Regulator or the franchising director makes a pronouncement, such as on minimum service levels or through ticketing, it is suddenly matched by a mad rush from Ministers to tell us that our benevolent uncles are proposing what will never actually happen. Indeed, in the case of the public service requirement, the Secretary of State disowned the proposals in the same speech in which he welcomed them. He added:

"It is not for me, as Secretary of State, or even Roger Salmon, as the franchising director, to dictate the future timetable. That is for operators and Railtrack".

That is the bottom line of rail privatisation. Whatever assurances Ministers give, whatever safeguards they pledge to build into the system, the operators—or rather the market—will decide the level of service.

Despite what we have heard from the Conservative Benches about Labour scaremongering, I give Ministers the opportunity to put a stop to those scares once and for all. Will they guarantee that no rail service will be reduced to the limit outlined in the public service requirement? Will they guarantee that every station described as "optional" in the PSR document will continue to receive the level of service that it does currently? Above all, will they guarantee that the level of service provided nationally following privatisation will not be below that provided by the current timetable?

If Ministers cannot give those guarantees, rail passengers will continue to be scared by their privatisation proposals, and rightly so.

9.30 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): First, I associate myself with what my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said at the start of his speech about the very sad circumstances that lead to my being in this position tonight, and I know that the thoughts of all of us are with the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), who otherwise would have been here.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) is really too modest when he gives the Opposition all the credit for alerting people throughout the country to what is going on in the railways, and for the fact that millions of people—85 per cent. of the population, according to the latest opinion polls—do not wish their madcap scheme to be proceeded with. Of course the hon. Member for Lewes, 12 months or so ago, was one of those so-called Tory rebels who contributed greatly to that mood of awareness.

The tragedy is that the hon. Gentleman gave in. He did not obtain a single concession; the scheme that is going through now is as bad as, or worse than, what he opposed. Even the issue on which he supposedly took the Government to the line, the so-called "Peyton amendment" tabled in the House of Lords, which would give British Rail the right to compete to operate services—the minimum concession that the hon. Gentleman was prepared to vote for at the time—is now being denied by that creature, the franchising director, who has been created by the privatisation process.

The hon. Gentleman may have given in. He may now be starting to defend the proposals to his constituents, but he is too late, and I am delighted to say that to some extent his own handiwork has contributed to that.

Various hon. Members have spoken—those who read out Central Office briefs and those who read out their own important works of literature, such as the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway)—of all the wonderful successes of other privatisations. Most of that is nonsense. If we examined those claims in turn, they could be tested and found wanting.

However, Conservative Members do not understand or will not accept that, in one key respect, railway privatisation is different from every other industry that they have tried to privatise. The key respect is that the railways alone rely for their profitability on political decisions about the level of subsidy. If an industry is profitable, or capable of being made profitable, as all the others were, one might say that entrepreneurial flair can win the day, and we could argue about whether that has been true. However, the railways are different because, as in every other country, they depend on political decisions about subsidy.

That is why I believe that, ultimately, the whole enterprise is doomed to failure. The Government, in their last days, will be unable to give the assurances that any investor needs. That is why the process of debate is so important; it is to inform public opinion, to inform investor opinion and to make it absolutely clear that anyone who puts their money into the railways is putting it into a loser. That process is proceeding very satisfactorily.

What do we hear from Conservative Members tonight? They are right back where they started. The debate has passed them by. All they can do, with their little scripts, is stand up and denigrate British Rail. They did it when the White Paper came out; they did it on Second Reading; they did it in Committee; they have done it in every debate on the railways that has taken place when I have been in the House. Where does it leave them? It leaves them with 85 per cent. of public opinion opposed to railway privatisation. It leaves them with a better informed electorate, and a massive electoral millstone around their neck. Our message to the Government is: carry on. The Government will not manage to privatise the railways but, day after day, people learn what is happening to the railways and they attribute it not just to privatisation, but to the fragmentation of the rail system and the absurdities that have been created in the name of political dogma. The electorate will punish the Government accordingly.

I stood at the Dispatch Box once before and said the same thing about another piece of legislation: the poll tax. The late Robert Adley made that very good analogy. Ultimately, the Government will have to abandon their privatisation plans or pay the political price. That is the choice that they faced over the poll tax and they will face it with the railways as well.

There have been a number of cameos tonight. The hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) is not, I fear, a potential member of Mensa. He seemed to believe that a different ticket collector inspected his ticket each time and that ticket collectors leaped on to overstaffed trains at every station. The hon. Gentleman is not with us at this stage of the evening, but his hon. Friends who are present might suggest gently that it was the same ticket collector.

The hon. Member for South Hams was very concerned—as all Tories are in these Eurosceptical days—about the fact that French wine and French water are served on the trains which speed their way to South Hams. In contrast, he cares nothing about the fact that thousands of jobs will be sacrificed in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) or that another great British industry is being driven to the wall because, as a result of the Government's railway privatisation policy, we will soon lose the capacity to build trains in this country.

The Secretary of State for Transport has joined us and he shakes his head. Does he deny that 5,000 jobs were lost last year in the railway manufacturing industry as a result of the blight created by the Government's privatisation programme? He can argue with the captains of industry who manufacture trains and with ABB Transportation, which was brought into the country under false pretences. He can argue with the 5,000 workers who lost their jobs and with the 20,000 workers whose jobs are threatened. Despite all the warnings, the Government have not lifted a finger to ensure continuity of orders. That is why the railway manufacturing industry is on its knees.

The Tories care about French wine on British trains; we care about British jobs, British manufacturing and British potential to build trains. In future when the hon. Member for South Hams rides on trains which have been built in Korea or America instead of Britain I suppose that he will worry about the wine, but I hope that he will not be travelling on a Member of Parliament's rail warrant.

The real victims of the privatisation process include the 5,000 people who have lost their jobs in the manufacturing industry. They also include the many workers in York—that great centre of British manufacturing—who fear for their jobs because of the Government's policies and their privatisation programme.

To a large extent, we have talked about hypotheticals tonight; we have talked about what might or might not happen. Let us now talk about what has happened already. Perhaps the Minister who will reply to the debate will tell us about the abolition of the Motorail service. Although they pay lip service to environmental considerations, in 1995 the Government propose to abolish the motorail service.

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

Let us talk about the rail sleeper service—only two trains will be left out of the six which operate currently. Let us talk about the total loss of overnight passenger services. While Members of Parliament may travel south from Scotland in sleepers, tens of thousands of people pay a modest fare to travel in the passenger carriages at the back of the train. That service will be abolished; there is nothing hypothetical about that.

Let us address the realities and the question of consultation. Throughout the process, the Minister has talked about consultation as a precursor to service cuts. He has confirmed that that is correct, so I will move on to discuss consultation. The consultation takes the form of a press release from Mr. Salmon, stating that the services are to be withdrawn. He states:

"I do not intend to include sleeper services from London to Carlisle and Fort William. I do not intend to include the Plymouth to Glasgow and Edinburgh sleeper services. It is not intended to include Motorail in the passenger service requirement."

Where is the consultation? The subsidy is being withdrawn from the services in May 1995.

In the Secretary of State's absence we found out a little more. As an exercise in duplicity, it rates pretty high, even by the Government's standards. The Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) was that the services will be withdrawn in May because the subsidy has been taken away.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Mr. Wilson: Oh yes, that is what Mr. Salmon says. There is no subsidy. I wish that the Secretary of State would intervene and tell us they are not going to be withdrawn and, if so, why they are not going to be withdrawn in May. There is no point in sitting there smugly saying no if he cannot give us the information.

The intention is that the subsidies will be withdrawn in May, so the services will be withdrawn in May. However, the consultation process will be based on the minimum service specifications which will not be produced until after May. According to the correspondence quoted by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye, because the services have already been withdrawn, they will not form part of the specifications on which consultation will take place.

The services will not exist, therefore there will be no consultation on them. If that trick is being used to get rid of these rural services, it can be used to get rid of every rural service in Britain.

The message will go out from tonight's debate that that is the trick and the form of duplicity being entered into, and that if it can be used to destroy those services, it can be used on every other service.

I now understand why, in answer to questions tabled for reply today in which I asked Secretary of State in a very precise form of words

"if he will instruct the Director of Rail Franchising to consult with the rail users' consultative committees, prior to withdrawal of subsidy in respect of Motorail services.".

I asked the same question in respect of those sleeper services that are to be withdrawn. It was a straightforward question—will he or will he not do that? His reply was:

"I will answer these questions shortly."

Will he answer them now? Will there or will there not be consultation before the services are withdrawn? If there will not, every word that has been spoken about consultation is worthless and that message will go out to every rural area of Britain where the same tricks can be played.

I want to turn to the interesting reply given yesterday to hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye by the Secretary of State for Transport in regard to the sleeper service to Fort William. It is a specific question, but the principle is universal. He stated:

"I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the taxpayers' subsidy per person for a sleeper berth on the trip to Fort William, excluding the infrastructure cost, is £180."

I do not believe that for a moment. The figure is rigged and if I had time I could tell the House why. Then comes the really interesting bit:

"If one adds the cost of the infrastructure"—

that is the access charges to Railtrack—

"the subsidy becomes £540."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 12.]

According to even the Government's figures, everything else costs £180, but the access charges to Railtrack cost £360 per person.

There is no point in the Secretary of State shaking his head. If he is right tonight he was wrong yesterday. Those are the figures he gave. It is an interesting figure because the marginal cost of operating the services for Railtrack is virtually nil, yet they are imposing such a scale of charges upon those services as to make them ludicrously uneconomic. Again the message goes out and anyone who remembers the Beeching era will understand the message, that if figures can be rigged in this way for sleeper services, they will be rigged in future for every other service that they want rid of.

I challenge the Minister on another figure. If there are to be two sleeper services a night instead of six in each direction and at present the access charge for rail services is £17.5 million, one might imagine that the figure would be divided into three and that the access charges would be £5 million or £6 million. That is not so.

Can the Minister confirm that the access charges for two sleeper services as opposed to six will be £16.5 million? In other words, there is no saving to the operators. The access charges are to remain the same. The only difference is that those access charges will be spread over fewer trains and users so, as night follows day, in months or a couple of years from now, equally ludicrous figures will be produced in order to prove the impossibility of keeping such services going. Those are the tricks that are being played and the constituents of Conservative Members will know about it just as we do.

The ludicrous little booklet which contains a speech by the Secretary of State in which he tried to pre-empt public reaction on the passenger service requirement did not work because every journalist who looked at it saw through it and realised that nothing was being given but a great deal was being taken away.

How do we summarise the passenger service requirements? There will be 45 per cent. of the existing timetabled Gatwick express service but no early morning or late night services guaranteed. The current service of 46 trains from Swindon to London daily and 45 from London compares with a PSR of 36 trains to London and 30 from London. Who will speak for Swindon? The current

service of 55 trains from Reading to London and 58 from London compares with a PSR of 17 trains each way. Who will speak for Reading? The current service of six trains daily from Penzance to London compares with a PSR of four trains daily. Who will speak for Cornwall?

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose—*

Mr. Wilson: I am sorry, I cannot give way. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will speak for Cornwall. The Labour party will speak for Cornwall, but there is no Tory Member here tonight to speak for Cornwall or to defend its services against these cuts. The current service of five fast trains an hour in the peak period from Basingstoke to London and three fast trains an hour off peak compares with a PSR of two fast trains an hour to London. Who will speak for Basingstoke?

Basildon—where is the little man who usually jumps up when Basildon is mentioned? The current service of six trains an hour in the peak period from Basildon to London and four trains an hour off peak compares with a PSR of three trains an hour in the peak period and two trains off peak. Who will speak for Basildon? We will speak for Basildon and for every other community that is affected by these cuts.

Public opinion is against the policy. The natural majority in the House is against it. The more people understand it, the more they are opposed to it. It is a madcap scheme. According to the Government's own predictions, it allows from 1997-98 onwards a £600 million profit for the private sector. That goes to the question of what Labour would do. While support for the railway system drops consistently, £600 million is to be creamed off by private operators. The question is not whether we renationalise the railways but whether the country can afford a privatised railway service, and the answer is that it cannot.

9.47 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The House will have noted that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) did not answer the question whether the Labour party, if it were ever in Government, would wish to renationalise the railway system.

I am surprised and disappointed that, despite the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my own, Opposition Members have neither learnt their lessons well nor done their homework properly. Faced with the simple question, "What is a passenger service requirement?" they resort to the schoolboy's answer, "Not taught yet." Let me try again.

A passenger service requirement is not a timetable. It is based on the existing timetable, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), the former Minister for Public Transport, explained at the end of the Second Reading debate on the Railways Bill two years and five days ago. A PSR is a guaranteed level of service for rail passengers and a contractual obligation on a train operator to provide at least that level of service.

A PSR ensures that every route and every destination is covered. The greater the commercial viability of a service, the more likely the obligation will be specified to maximise the scope to respond to passengers' needs. The greater the social need for a service and the more it is dependent on subsidy, the more closely the specification will follow the levels of service in the current timetable.

The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) is simply wrong in his assertion that non-franchise services, those that are still waiting to be franchised at any time, will be starved of funds.

The principles that I have outlined are, of course, reflected in the first four PSRs announced by the franchising director last week. Opposition Members are transfixed by minima. The hon. Member for Streatham was a good example of that. They cannot believe that anyone in the private sector would choose to do more than the bare minimum that he or she is obliged to do. I understand their dilemma. It stems from their political philosophy. The Labour party is the party of the lowest common denominator. All that it understands is levelling down. The work-to-rule mentality of its trade union mentors permeates of its thinking.

My difficulty is that we do not yet have private sector operators of passenger train networks, although, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) was right to draw attention to the increasing role of charter operators. We do, of course, have evidence of the attitudes of the directors of the British Rail train operating units, who have adapted with great enthusiasm to the greater freedoms that restructuring has already provided. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) commented on that. As he said, railway nostalgia will not do. Those who are running the railways are looking forward, not backwards, and are developing services to meet the needs of their customers.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Watts: I have very little time, and there are many points that I wish to cover, so I am afraid that I cannot give way.

Each of the train operating units has negotiated track access rights to operate more services than those that are included even in the current timetable. My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley was absolutely right: British Airways does not need to be forced to run services or offer inter-available tickets. It does those things because it makes commercial sense. It is a way in which it can make money. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) cited other instances of privatisation bringing improved services. Why should privatisation of the railways have any different outcome?

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) referred to the position of Scottish sleeper services, as did the hon. Members for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe). They spoke as though there had been no consultation whatever. Yet if they have seen the letter from Mr. Salmon to the convener of Highland regional council, they will know—*[Interruption.]* I have a copy of it here. The letter explains:

"Following meetings in Scotland with local conveners, the rail users consultative committee for Scotland and the convention of Scottish local authorities, I decided that the best course of action was for OPRAF to be as open as possible about our policy intentions at the earliest opportunity. To delay an announcement until the consultation process for ScotRail was under way would have meant many months of further uncertainty."

Mr. Charles Kennedy: I thank the Minister for giving way and would like to give him an opportunity, which I gave earlier but which he did not take up, to clarify his thinking and that of the Secretary of State on the adverse

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

comments by the chairman of the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee. Does the Minister back the plea made to Mr. Salmon by the chairman of the RUCC?

Mr. Watts: The chairman of the RUCC is making his views known. That is part of the consultation process. The House established those consultative committees to fulfil that role.

It will be perfectly clear that the allegation that there has been no consultation is false. As I explained earlier, in an intervention—

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Watts: No. I cannot now. I have seven minutes left.

Mr. Wilson *rose—*

Mr. Watts: I am not giving way, Madam Speaker. *[Interruption.]* As I explained to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye, the publication of the PSR for ScotRail will provide an opportunity for consultation in the formal sense between the local authorities and all those other bodies. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, in winding up—

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall deal with this matter. Is the Minister giving way?

Mr. Watts: No, Madam Speaker.

The hon. Gentleman, when winding up, referred to services to Reading. I appreciate the difficulty that Opposition Members—and, indeed, some journalists—have in understanding the PSR for services to Reading. It is couched in terms similar to those of an 11-plus verbal reasoning test question—the sort in which John is younger than Margaret but wiser than Tony; hon. Members will know the sort of question that I mean.

The PSR specifies an hourly service with at least 17 trains daily and 10 arrivals at Paddington between 7.30 am and 9.15 am. Elementary arithmetic leads us to the conclusion that at least 25 trains will be needed to meet that minimum requirement. In fact, Great Western Trains is likely to maintain a much more substantial service, not for reasons of altruism but to make money—yes, to make a profit.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and others posed a question that has been posed many times before: why not make the current timetable the passenger service requirement? If he listened to what was said by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, he will now know the pattern of services and the way in which it is to be specified in the PSR.

PSRs for commuter services on London-Tilbury-Southend trains, and on south-west trains, do not allow services to be decimated, as has been alleged, but will oblige operators to run at least 90 per cent. of trains on the current timetable to meet the frequency requirements, as well as additional trains in peak periods to limit overcrowding. Those two elements provide a much better guarantee of a decent service than the fossilisation of the current timetable that "old Labour" wants.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned rumours of heavy cuts in services this May. They are rumours—just that—with no foundation in fact. Opposition Members should not believe everything they read in newspapers, especially stories that seek to gain credibility by claiming to be leaks of confidential documents. The directors of the four train operating units whose PSRs were announced last week have made it clear that they intend no reduction in services; on the contrary, they are looking for opportunities to expand services further.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) made an excellent speech, painting a graphic word picture of services in the west country. He does not want to preserve current services; his expectation, which I share, is that the private sector will improve services rather than impairing them. He was also able to claim some credit for scotching the evil rumour that the Penzance sleeper service was under attack.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) asked whether the benefits would come quickly enough. He will know that Network SouthCentral is likely to be included in the next tranche of franchises to be announced later this year, and I assure him that we shall try to ensure that the benefits of franchising are introduced as rapidly as possible.

I confessed earlier that I was unable to give an example of private operators running passenger train networks, but I can give another example of the benefits of transport privatisation. The National Express coach is a familiar sight on our motorways. National Express was a subsidiary of the National Bus Company created by a Labour Government in 1968; in March 1988 it was privatised by sale to its management. Since privatisation, it has expanded its network to 180 routes, serving 1,200 destinations and carrying 10.5 million passengers. It did not achieve that success by paring down its services or ignoring the needs of its passengers.

On 24 November last year I went to Liverpool to open a new purpose-built coach station. National Express had noticed that its business in Liverpool had declined since the closure of the old coach station. Some of its customers, including the Merseyside pensioners' association, had mounted a vigorous campaign for a new coach station. It was in response to customers' demands that the new coach station was planned and built, and I had the pleasure of opening it. I understand that passenger numbers increased, even in expectation that the station would be built.

Perhaps Opposition Members will now understand why I have confidence in the ability of the private sector to respond to passengers' needs, and why I believe that private rail operators will build their businesses by extending their services, not by cutting them.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 265, Noes 302.

Division No. 66] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ainger, Nick	Armstrong, Hilary
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Allen, Graham	Ashton, Joe
Alton, David	Austin-Walker, John
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*

Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, Hl)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair

Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sidney Chapman and Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 263.

Division No. 67] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'th S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann

Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Dr. Liam Fox.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'd, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wiltshire)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and Mr. Eric Clarke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Franchising Director's consultation document on Passenger Service Requirements which, for the first time, introduces guarantees of service for passengers; supports the

Government in its determination not to freeze the existing timetable but to create space for the private sector to develop new and additional services based on current timetables which are more attuned to the needs of passengers; supports the Government in its determination to halt the decline in railway use by both passengers and freight customers; and condemns Her Majesty's Opposition for continuing to rely on scare tactics as a substitute for a policy which would enhance passenger services.

HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION BILL
[*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Home Energy Conservation Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

JOINT COMMITTEE ON STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Peter Butler be discharged from the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and Lady Olga Maitland be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

PETITIONS

Croxteth Country Park Estate

10.26 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I beg leave to present a petition signed by 865 residents of the Croxteth country park estate in Liverpool. Once complete, that private residential housing estate will contain 5,000 homes. However, it lacks a primary school and many of the children must travel to one of 61 other primary schools for their education, 40 of them travelling four miles to a school outside Liverpool in the borough of Knowsley. The petition reads:

To the House of Commons.

The Petition of the Residents of the Croxteth Country Park Estate in Liverpool,

Declares that the rapid development of the Croxteth Country Park Estate to accommodate 2,660 new homes necessitates the provision of a new primary school.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons prevails upon the Secretary of State for Education to approve the provision of the Joint Christian Primary School proposed by the Liverpool Roman Catholic Archdiocese and the Church of England Diocese for which there is an undoubted need.

And the Petitioners remain.

To lie upon the Table.

Rate Support Grant Settlement for Wales

10.28 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of Mrs. Joan Henley of 2 The Woodlands, Bryn Celin, Holywell, signed by 2,000 friends of Ysgol Bro Carmel primary school in Holywell to express their concern over the rate support grant settlement for Wales, particularly its effect on education and the cuts that will result in my constituency and Clwyd. The petition reads:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of the friends of Ysgol Bro Carmel Sheweth that the petitioners feel that the 1995-96 rate support grant settlement for Wales is unsatisfactory.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House reject the 1995-96 settlement and the rate cap.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

I shall show my support for the aspirations of the petition in the Lobby tomorrow night.

To lie upon the Table.

Education Funding (Lancashire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The subject of the Adjournment is of great importance to my constituents and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall), who are also present.

It may seem strange that I have chosen the subject of education funding for tonight's debate when we have spent half the day discussing the 1995-96 financial settlement for schools. When I applied for the debate, I did not know how the business would be arranged, but the concern felt in Lancashire certainly warranted both that half-day debate and this short debate. The Minister should be aware that I have received angry letters about current education funding not only from my constituents, but from people in other parts of Lancashire—not only members of the public, but teachers, governors and others who did not necessarily vote for the Labour party in previous elections.

The 1995-96 settlements have grim implications for Lancashire's capital and revenue expenditure. I should correct some of the wrong impressions that have been given by Conservative Members who represent seats in Lancashire, who spoke in today's debate on funding for schools and in Wednesday's debate on the revenue support grant. The House will recall that a principal part of that debate revolved around educational funding.

On 27 October, a letter was sent to all hon. Members who represent Lancashire from the chief executive of Lancashire county council, Gordon Johnson, about the capital expenditure plans for 1995-96. Enclosed with that letter was a copy of the detailed bid that had been sent to the Department for Education on 13 October. That bid was in the format prescribed by the Department and went into great detail about basic requirements, cost-effective schemes, special needs schemes and all those other requirements that we believe should concern the Minister and warrant his support.

The bid for 1995-96 consisted of committed expenditure of £14,395,000 and planned expenditure of another £25,942,000, which made a total bid of £40,337,000. One of the schemes included within that bid was an aided one for St. Theodore's Roman Catholic school in my constituency for extensions and adaptions to satisfy curriculum needs. Applications for that type of scheme are repeated throughout the bid and come from throughout Lancashire. Such schemes are necessary to provide urgently needed adaptions to schools to meet national curriculum requirements. That schools should be unable to meet those requirements is wrong.

I visited St.Theodore's school and I received a letter on 9 January from its head, Mr. Meehan, in which he reiterated:

"we have made a bid for capital spending in order to improve our Science and Technology facilities and to provide a second sports/drama area with changing facilities."

I support that bid. Many other similar bids have been made from throughout the county.

On 6 January, the chief education officer of Lancashire county council, Andrew Collier, sent me a letter saying:

"We have received the Annual Capital Guideline for 1995/96 and the picture is indeed grim, as you say in your letter."

That is the letter that I sent to him.

"The ACG notified is £8.105 million. We understand that against a bid well in excess of £20 million for improvement replacement work, we have been allocated £384,000 for all improvement replacement work in Lancashire."

Therefore, about 20 per cent. of Lancashire's bid for capital has been allocated by the Department.

I am not saying that the Government have treated Lancashire any differently from any other education authority. I accept that Lancashire has received the average figure for education authorities throughout the country. However, I do say to the Minister that if it is insufficient in Lancashire, it is insufficient in every other education authority in the country and the Government must consider it.

I want to refer to the replacement and repair work needed in two primary schools. I shall quote first from the *Burnley Express and News* of 31 January 1995. It refers to Rosehill County junior school, a school which I have visited twice in the past couple of months. It says of the toilets in that school:

"Children are currently faced with pitch-black darkness and cold when they go to the toilet, as well as nasty smells from open drains and leaking roofs . . . Mr. Pilborough"—

who is the head—

"condemned them earlier this month during a visit to the school by chairman of governors Mr. Walter Cook"

and myself.

"Yesterday"—

that was the day before the newspaper article—

"he said: 'funding these days is effectively from Central Government. You cannot blame Lancashire County Council because there's not enough money' . . . Mr. Pilborough described the toilets as 'disgusting' and 'unhygienic'."

Before I was a Member of Parliament, I was a shop steward in a factory, and if those toilets had been in that factory the people would have refused to work. That standard of toilets is unacceptable for 1995

At the weekend, I received a letter from the Rev. Christopher Cheeseman, the chairman of governors of Lowerhouse junior school. He sent me a report that was published by the inspector on 30 January 1995. In the covering letter, he says:

"At present we have raining in two classrooms and many other roof leaks. The importance is being stressed by the Secretary of State of teaching standards, but no concern seems to be given to make sure authorities have the money for major structural repairs".

I shall quote a couple of paragraphs from the report by registered inspector Mr. P.D. Edwards, whose inspection took place on 5 to 9 December 1994, because that is a scheme that the Government have set up to inspect schools and consider all aspects of schools. The inspector says in the section referring to accommodation:

"The building is in an unsatisfactory state. Parts of it are damp, apparently due to a leaking roof and other structural defects. Every classroom has flaking plaster and peeling paint, and in many places the ceiling panels are warped and stained. The corridors are draughty and ill lit and, overall it is a depressing atmosphere in which to work . . . Two of the worst lavatories have recently been refurbished and these are pleasant. However, some others are malodorous despite regular cleaning, presumably because the surfaces have become porous."

The final part of that section, referring to pupils' welfare and guidance, said:

"Some parts of the school are unacceptably cold. Temperatures below 60 degrees Fahrenheit, and as low as 52 degrees Fahrenheit, were measured in a number of classrooms during the week of inspection, when the weather was not exceptionally inclement."

What an appalling position to be in.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My hon. Friend knows that the horrors that he has described in his constituency are commonplace in Pendle. I have the example of the Laneshaw Bridge primary school, and Eleanor Bleasdale, the headmistress, who has been in touch with me about the toilet block there. There is no way that the county council can afford to recondition that toilet block unless and until it is certified as a hazard to health. That is an appalling state of affairs, which is characteristic of schools throughout the north-west and in Lancashire.

Mr. Pike: I thank my hon. Friend. I fully accept, and he will appreciate, that I could not possibly read the list of all the schools where major or minor works are needed in Lancashire, because we would have needed a three-hour debate simply to discuss the problems of capital deficiencies for schools in Lancashire. However, I underline those problems.

I shall now deal with the question of standard spending assessments and revenue funding. I have received a letter from Lea county primary school, Preston. I want to refer to a number of letters which I have received from outside my constituency to show that I am not just arguing the case for Burnley. The letter, which is dated 7 February and is signed by the chair of governors, was faxed to me this morning. It says:

"Specifically, we are incensed that the government will not meet the full costs of the teachers' pay award. It is intolerable that whilst some teachers may receive a pay rise another may well be made redundant".

The Minister must respond to that point. I have also received a letter from All Saints Church of England school at Clayton-le-Moors—again, it is not in my constituency—which is signed by the Rev. Philip Dearden, who says:

"On behalf of the Governors at All Saints Church of England Primary School I wish to express our alarm at the savage cuts in funding for Education in the year ahead. In a typical One Form Entry Primary School of 240 children like ours this will mean a budget cut of approximately £15,000".

I have also received a letter dated 1 February from the Methodist church in the north Lancashire district. It says:

"In spite of the threatened cuts Lancashire County Council is anticipating spending 108 per cent. of the standard spending assessment".

I emphasise that point. It means that the council will spend more on a particular service than is required under the SSA. It intends to spend 108 per cent., yet Conservative Members have attacked the council for the way in which it has reduced the local management of schools budget. If Lancashire were not prepared to spend more than the SSA, it would have to cut funding even more in order to conform to the Government guideline. The letter continues:

"In addition we cannot accept that, because of the area cost adjustment, the children in Lancashire are worth less (£105 per primary and £145 per secondary child) than children in Hampshire, Essex and Kent".

I shall return to that important point later. The five main teaching unions in Lancashire are reported in the *Burnley Express* of 31 January as saying:

"the Government's funding policies for education will badly hit the quality of lessons".

That is of great concern to me and to Labour Members of Parliament who represent Lancashire.

I wish to correct some of the mistaken impressions created by Conservative Members in education debates. It has been claimed that Lancashire has one administrator for every 17 teachers. That allegation is absolute nonsense. The figure includes people dealing with university awards, the youth service, adult education and every other group within the education department. It has nothing to do with schools. The ratio of staff who provide direct services for schools to teachers is 1:74.7, and even if we include the administrations category the ratio is only 1:33.5. It is important that people quote the facts in the future.

Compared with total spending on education, education costs in Lancashire are among the lowest in the country. That is an important point to remember, and people should get their facts straight if they intend to attack Lancashire council's activities.

Great play has been made of the fact that Lancashire proposes to cut 5.5 per cent. from the school delegated budget. That will affect school expenditure on equipment and staffing. It will mean larger class sizes and the loss of teaching posts—perhaps as many as 600. The youth service, adult education and discretionary awards will be hit. Lancashire county council does not want to do that, but the responsibility for those cuts lies with the Minister and with the Government.

Some accusations have been made. The Department talks about surplus places, but it never talks about schools which have an excess of pupils. A number of schools in Lancashire have more pupils than they should. The Government should look at the net figures. We also need to consider the growing population and the increasing number of children. Surplus places now may not be so in a year's time and almost certainly will not be surplus in five years' time.

The Minister must recognise that, for parental choice to work, there have to be surplus places. Without them, it is impossible. The Minister must also recognise that Lancashire has met all previous Department of Education targets in cutting places.

Another wrongful claim is that balances held by schools under the local management of schools total £33 million. The figure was £33 million at the end of 1993-94; it is certainly not that now and nobody knows what it will be at the end of the financial year.

The biggest problem in Lancashire is caused by the area cost adjustment. Using all the other factors in the SSA, the figure for Essex is £2,540.42. The figure for Lancashire is £2,610.92. When the area cost adjustment for Essex of £215.43 is added on, the figure for Essex becomes £2,755.85. But for the area cost adjustment, Lancashire would have a SSA per secondary school £70 per pupil higher than Essex, but because of the area cost adjustment, the figure is actually £145 less.

We do not believe that the area cost adjustment has been correctly accounted and adjusted for education in Lancashire. We believe that the figure is wrong and is one of the crucial factors affecting the education in Lancashire.

[Mr. Pike]

The position is grim—the grimmest since 1983 when I became Member of Parliament for Burnley—for both capital and revenue. I hope that the Minister will think again and in his response to tonight's short debate give us some good news. However, although I have known him for many years and have a high regard for him, I think that he will disappoint us by adhering to the Tory right-wing Government who put cuts and financial constraints before everything else.

10.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Robin Squire): Perhaps I can begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on securing the debate and on being flanked on either side by the hon. Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) who, with the exception of one intervention, remained in noble but silent support of his speech.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the House discussed earlier today a number of the issues that he has quite properly raised. Due to both the absence of fury from the Opposition during that debate—indeed, the absence of Opposition Members for most of the debate—and the substance of the case put, it was not the best of days for an Opposition seeking to show that in some way the Government had behaved outrageously, but I shall return to that later.

I welcome the opportunity provided by tonight's short debate to examine one authority in detail. It is useful because Lancashire is a excellent example of an authority where the cry of cuts is largely artificial.

Lancashire has done slightly better than the national average with an increase in its education standard spending assessment of 1.4 per cent. and, despite the complaint that the Government are forcing the authority to cut budgets, its capping limit allows Lancashire to increase its overall spending next year. The hon. Gentlemen's constituents might reasonably ask why, with a rising education SSA and a rising budget limit, Lancashire county council claims that it is forced to slash £25 million from its schools budget. The answer, simply put in an admittedly complex area, is that the cuts are essentially fictitious.

Let me stress that the local education authority is not cutting what it is actually spending, but what it would ideally have liked to spend. It has taken its education budget for 1994-95 and inflated it by something like 5 per cent. The council proposes to cut that artificial budget, but when schools are told that they face budget reductions, they are given the impression that they will lose a slice of their existing income. Most of those cuts are an illusion. It is all done by mirrors, as someone once said. But, in fairness, it is an illusion that misleads and can alarm thousands of parents and pupils.

I have no doubt that when the hon. Gentleman spoke about the correspondence that he had received he was being truthful, but I am suggesting to him tonight that part of that, for reasons to which I have already alluded, is based on a false premise.

I should also say that Lancashire is not alone in creating that misunderstanding. Several other authorities have created publicity that is far more misleading than that created by Lancashire. To its credit, Lancashire has written to its schools explaining its calculations. But for all that, in Lancashire as elsewhere the cuts are not as they are being presented.

The hon. Gentleman next referred to capital issues. I say to him and to the hon. Member for Pendle that, perhaps unsurprisingly, I do not have with me today the detail on the schools to which both referred, but I undertake to write separately to them with a detailed comment on both the schools that they mentioned. I hope that they will take that in good faith, as it is meant that way.

As the hon. Member for Burnley may be aware, I met a deputation from Lancashire county council just before Christmas to discuss the capital bid. I told its members, as I repeat to the House today, that LEAs have responsibility in law for the condition of their school property and they rightly look to the Government for part, not all, of the means by which they may maintain, improve and ensure the proper state of the structure of those buildings.

Overall, the capital budget that we announced for 1995-96 shows an increase of about 3.5 per cent. although, interestingly, for the LEA schools the increase is 6.2 per cent. year on year, which is also on a base which, for 1994-95, has been somewhat reduced as a result of some schools becoming self-governing. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will see that, within that figure, there is no significant discrimination against LEA schools and that, secondly, a significant sum against the current financial background has been put to one side.

The hon. Gentleman understandably makes the case—I think that I expected it—that he would wish to see still greater sums provided for borrowing, and he will recognise that, if he were an Opposition spokesman, that additional commitment would require the approval of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). We both recognise that and I submit that the capital budget, within the context of the settlement and public expenditure generally, has been a good one.

I think that the hon. Gentleman knows, but I shall simply and briefly adumbrate the priorities drawn up some decade ago in conjunction with local authorities. Briefly, they consist of existing schemes and basic need. The hon. Gentleman mentioned basic need—that is tightly defined and it is essential that if an area faces the prospect of more pupils than it has likely available places, there is a mechanism by which that can be resolved. That is why it has a high priority within the capital allocations.

Following that is the removal of surplus places, and then essentially the balance is distributed by formula for improvement and replacement. On a comparable basis, we look at all the schemes appropriately. As the hon. Gentleman said, and there is no difference between us on it, it turned out that Lancashire had a total annual capital guideline—ACG as it is termed—roughly in line with the national average. That is, in a sense, because its bid roughly reflected the national priorities that I have just described.

Mr. Pike: How highly does the Minister rate the need to make alterations to schools to meet the requirements of the national curriculum?

Mr. Squire: I was going to say something about the national curriculum. It is a requirement of law that a

school delivers the national curriculum. The hon. Gentleman did not say as much, but he might have hinted at it, so I was going to say that the recent revision of the national curriculum did not add to the curriculum, but rather reduced it, so it should not of itself have created the need for greater expenditure. But if the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that a school cannot currently deliver it, that is a serious matter. Without wanting to be repetitious, I should say that responsibility lies with the LEA to ensure that schools can deliver the national curriculum.

I have set out briefly, I hope, the priorities within which capital moneys are allocated by the Government. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, there are other sources open to most councils most years: capital receipts, transfers from revenue and so on. If he wishes separately to pursue that point with me outside the House, I should be happy to go into further detail on it.

I do not wish to reiterate past debates, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, although the comparative figures quoted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment showed that Lancashire was one of the authorities in England with a relatively high proportion of staff per head. That is simply a question of looking at tables. We do not need to bandy figures across the Chamber. It is neither my responsibility nor, arguably, the hon. Gentleman's, but it is a matter which—if true—the local authority would wish to address when it looks at what is or what it deems to be essential reductions in front-line services.

I now deal with the revenue items that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. He made the point, understandably, that he would like the SSA for Lancashire to be higher. I suppose that it is true to say that every one of the 109 authorities would say the same about its own area cost adjustment. He highlighted what he considers to be unfair—that is, the operation of the ACA. There is no mystery about it. Every single local authority accepts the need for a means to reimburse councils—broadly speaking, they are in London and the south-east—for their inevitably higher costs, not just in teacher salaries, but in staff salaries across the board and a number of other attendant costs.

I would concede—again, it is no great secret—that although every LEA accepts that there is a higher cost, I do not suppose that any LEA, whether it is a recipient or not, would agree with the specific method of assessing ACA. The hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister of State indicated that they are looking further at that for the forthcoming year. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept from me that a central drawback of making comparisons between, if one likes, a non-ACA authority and an ACA authority is that one cannot end up saying that it is wrong that Essex should get more money per pupil than Lancashire simply because it gets ACA. It is a fact that the cost of running a school in Essex will be higher than in Lancashire. I concede also that there are other essential costs in running schools. As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, the SSA system seeks to reflect that as well within the overall system, and in some other areas, depending on what they are, Essex receives slightly less per pupil than Lancashire.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned surplus places. He said that we should look at areas where there are not only surplus places but deficiencies. As I have already said, basic need is an essential priority within capital. It remains so. I do not think, therefore, that it is a question of netting off. We expect authorities, in their interests and those of the children and parents, to look at where they can bring forward the removal of surplus place schemes, which are cost-effective. Despite what was said in the earlier debate, the overwhelming majority of those schemes do not result in a significant number of schools becoming grant-maintained or self-governing. They are considered on their merits, and a number of LEAs can confirm that those schemes have been put forward, assessed by the Secretary of State and subsequently approved.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman has done us a service by initiating this short debate tonight—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 8 February 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

British Coal Land

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

10.4 am

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the sale of British Coal's non-operational land. This is a timely debate because only last month British Coal announced the method and the timetable for the disposal of that land.

The issues are important for coalfield communities. British Coal is a large landowner; it is sometimes said that after the Church it is the largest landowner in the country. I do not know about that, but I know that the company intends to sell 150,000 acres of non-operational land over the next year or so.

British Coal's press announcement last month revealed that agricultural and housing land would be sold in regional packages, that announcements would soon be made about the means and the timetable for the disposal of other property and land, and that the land would be sold to the private sector for the best possible price. I understand that British Coal has a timetable in mind for disposing of all the property by March 1996.

The disposal of that land has enormous consequences for coalfield communities as well as for the taxpayer. Coalfield communities have lived with the dust, dirt and dereliction of coal mining for centuries. They aspire to something better. Coal miners have always wanted better for their sons, and now they want better for their communities. They want new job opportunities and improved social and recreational facilities, a brighter landscape and a cleaner environment.

However, there is a feeling that the process is being rushed and hurried so much that it may be botched. In coalfield communities there is a strong view that the Government want to see the back of British Coal, to bury it deep and to walk away from the landscape.

The proposed sale involves several problems, and I shall spell some of them out. The first question to ask is whether the process that British Coal has announced will achieve the best value for money for the taxpayer. The completion date that the company has in mind is March 1996, so in a real sense it is a forced seller. Perhaps under instruction from Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry, British Coal intends to complete the sale by March next year, and that means selling an enormous amount of land.

For example, the disposal of 110,000 acres of agricultural land will be the biggest sale of the century. Without doubt it will distort the market and diminish the proceeds. Some agricultural land has development potential, but the process of gaining that potential is not complete because the necessary planning permissions are not yet in place. The difference between agricultural value and, for example, retail value is enormous. The land may be sold with hope aspiration, with the real price becoming available only when the land is transferred into the private sector.

Members of Parliament from mining communities and the communities themselves will follow developments closely to see whether the best value for money is obtained. I expect that, as with previous sell-offs, there will be enormous press interest and that if a subsequent buyer makes a lot of cash from a sale there will be controversy.

The consequences of disposing of agricultural land in that way are already becoming apparent. Commitments were given that 600 tenant farmers would be treated reasonably; the Minister will remember that during the passage of the Coal Industry Act 1994 the issue of tenants was frequently raised. The indication was that their position would—as far as possible—be safeguarded. Recent events have unfortunately suggested that that is not to be. It is essential that realistic negotiations take place with tenants within an acceptable timetable so that they have time to get their financing arrangements into place.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I hope that my hon. Friend will excuse me for interrupting, but there is concurrent Scottish business and this may be my only chance to make the point that what he is saying is desperately important. In West Lothian, a constituent has built up a dog-handling business and works for the police, but all of his premises and facilities look like being sold by the coal board above his head. He has invested his life and work in that property, which is crucial to his business. I am sure that that situation applies in many other cases.

Mr. Tipping: My hon. Friend makes a very strong point, and one of the themes which I expect to emerge from this debate is that the coalfield communities want to benefit economically from the sale of land. They do not want third parties such as insurance companies or pension funds to benefit. They want to see the rewards from their own landscape, and tenant farmers want that too.

Tenant farmers want the opportunity to buy, and many of them have received a letter from British Coal which tells them that if they want to treat on this land, they must reply by 13 February. That is an indication of the speed of the process, and shows the potential for mishandling it.

Meaningful discussions must also take place about price, and those must take into account the cost of subsidence and the price of contamination, as a lot of the farmlands are badly affected. There is a strong feeling that British Coal's attitude to the sell-off is, "Take it quickly at our price, or leave it". I seek a commitment from the Minister today that he will return to the matter if difficulties arise between British Coal and the tenants. I hope that he will assure us that the commitment given to tenant farmers will be honoured.

The second problem of the process lies in the fact that although the 150,000 acres of land has value—I believe that it may be worth up to £200 million—it also has liabilities. It could well be that those liabilities approach £150 million, leaving a net gain of £50 million. The liabilities spring from a number of sources—unrestored tips, Moynihan agreements and the need to rehabilitate former opencast land for agriculture. Contaminated land needs clearing up, which will cost money.

[Mr. Tipping]

There may be a temptation for the Treasury to push the liabilities on to the private sector, but I shall point out to the Minister the dangers in doing that. If that were to happen, the private sector would either seek a discount on the price or demand a dowry in cash terms. I expect the price for the regional packages to be dropped during negotiations because of the liabilities, as that happened during the sale of the core business.

The priorities of the private sector may well be to exploit greenfield sites to avoid tackling the liabilities. There is a possibility that the private sector will seek to put the liabilities into separate companies which, because their asset base will be limited, could well go into receivership. We could be faced with a situation where the public sector pays twice—once by discounting the sale and once by being left with contamination to clear up later.

Let me put the issue into a Nottinghamshire context. In the Nottinghamshire coalfield, there are nine derelict collieries, associated spoil tips and a series of derelict railway lines connecting them. There is some very valuable British Coal land in Nottinghamshire in which the private sector will be interested; for example, the Babbington colliery site close to the M1, some valuable farming land, and a new golf course at Hucknall which is owned by British Coal.

Those assets will attract the private sector, but I am not sure that the private sector will be interested in derelict tips and collieries, although I believe that they have challenges and opportunities as well. Many of us in Nottinghamshire want to see Sherwood forest recreated, and there is a plan for a new community forest in the area. A swathe of tree-planting across north Nottinghamshire could create an attractive place in which to live and work. How will that happen? It will not be created by the private sector, but it may be done by transferring the derelict land to the ownership of the local authorities.

Local authorities have the professionalism, but not the resources, to do the job. I hope that the Minister will look closely at giving local authorities the opportunity to help the landscape in their area. I hope that any land sold to local authorities will not just be waste or derelict land. In Nottinghamshire, we need some good land for car parking and for access.

My third concern is about the process of getting key regeneration sites going as quickly as possible. I understand that there are about 200 sites which could be put on the market to create new job opportunities. What people in the coalfield communities want is new investment, new jobs and a new future as quickly as possible, but there are problems in regenerating the sites.

The private sector clearly will be attracted by greenfield sites first. The derelict former colliery sites will require costly infrastructure and the private sector will not be eligible for grants, for example European regional development fund grants or RECHAR grants. We must look closely at those sites where work has begun by British Coal and which have had the benefit of such grants. If those sites are transferred to the private sector, there is a real possibility that those grants will be repayable.

I want to ask the Minister directly about enterprise zones. He will remember that the President of the Board of Trade announced in 1993 that enterprise zones were to create new investment and new jobs in the coalfield communities, and that there was to be a flagship business park in north Nottinghamshire. Where is it? It appears to have sunk on Victoria street. After three years, we are still waiting for the first enterprise zone. Nothing has happened, and the coalfield communities have a right to know what the problems are. Perhaps the Minister will use this opportunity to tell us.

The lack of action is costing jobs. I know of many firms that want to relocate, but it is clearly to their advantage to go to an enterprise zone. Those firms are waiting for the zone to be created, and we are waiting for the new jobs.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): My hon. Friend will be aware that the Dearne valley—an area of absolutely desperate economic need—is also waiting for such an enterprise zone. My suspicion, which my hon. Friend might share, is that the delay is meant to assist the Government to ensure that outside interests obtain the land and reap the benefit from this so-called advantage, rather than the people who live in the area and who need it.

Mr. Tipping: I remember the promises to the coalfield communities that new jobs would come. The industry might close, but there would be new opportunities for our people. In the Dearne valley, in Nottinghamshire and across the country, those jobs are still sadly lacking.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the problem goes wider than just the coalfield communities? Nottinghamshire, which the hon. Gentleman and I represent, has more problems than just the closure of the coal industry. Military depots have closed, and there are other problems. The Minister has been incredibly helpful in the representations which I have made to him, and he has also made himself available to local councils which have, to varying degrees, made representations to see how best the land in their areas can be developed. I welcome the debate, and also the speech that my neighbour is making. I also feel that there are wider issues which affect more than just the coalfield communities.

Mr. Tipping: It is important to recognise that, contrary to the national average, unemployment in small pockets of the coalfield continues to go up rather than down. The gap between the affluent areas and the poor areas of dereliction is increasing. That is a recipe for social and economic disaster.

I have talked about the process of sale. I want to explain how I believe that it should be altered. The timetable of sell-off by March 1996 ought to be relaxed, particularly for agricultural land. An extension of the March 1996 deadline would allow better prices to be obtained and provide more time for consultation. We should consider using public bodies to manage the liabilities. They have the professionalism. They do not have the resources, but they are committed. They are attached to their local communities. They share the desire to get things done.

Perhaps most important, there should be a package of key regeneration sites. It should not be sold off into the private sector, but meaningful discussions should take place with bodies such as English Partnerships to create new jobs in the area. One of the potential partners is British Coal Enterprise. Perhaps the Minister will say a word or two today to give us some succour on the future of that organisation.

British Coal still owns 800 houses and tenants live in them. The Minister will remember the enormous outrage in the mid-1980s when British Coal houses were sold at auctions in hotels in London. That was not acceptable then [redacted] is not acceptable now. I seek a commitment that those [redacted] tenants, who up to now have not taken the [redacted] to buy their home from British Coal, will be given another chance to do so. I hope that if sales occur, efforts will be made to bring housing associations and social landlords into the sale process.

I should also like to mention allotments. It is perhaps a small point, but allotments are vital to local communities. If the Minister wants to cause outrage and provoke a real fight, he should pick on the allotment holders of England. They will be out with their pitchforks and dung to campaign for their case. He should give them a fair chance.

Will the Minister and British Coal consider closely the matter of waste disposal? At present, British Coal disposes of its own waste on its own colliery sites, to regenerate them and put them back into use. There is a shortage of sites for waste. There must be a real danger that if those sites are sold off into the private sector, it will seek to maximise its gain by extending the planning permission for the site so that it can bring all sorts of waste to the site. Coalfield communities want a better and brighter environment. They have had the pits. They have had the spoil heaps. Now they do not want rubbish dumps.

British Coal's announcement last month made no mention of the important recreational and social land that it owns. Not only Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation land is involved. Across the coalfields there are huts where brownies, scouts and branches of St. John Ambulance meet. They want to know their future. The press announcement said nothing about such facilities. The Minister and my hon. Friends will remember the promises that were made during the passage of the Coal Industry Bill. Ministers promised that such recreational facilities would be protected. My hon. Friends tabled amendments, but withdrew them on the strength of those assurances.

Some 215 sites are involved. There are 50 acres of sporting and recreational land just within my constituency. The coalfield communities want to know what is happening to that land. There is a rumour that most of it will go to CISWO on a long leasehold. The story is that some land will go to the National Playing Fields Association. Can the Minister confirm that? Can he confirm that those leases will be transferred at no cost? The facilities are public. Organisations such as CISWO and the National Playing Fields Association, which are publicly funded, ought to receive the leasehold for little.

To put the whole discussion into context, I want to give a case example. In my community, the former Newstead Colliery village is now called Newstead village. The colliery closed in 1987 and the community decided that it wanted a new future. It changed its name to Newstead village. When the colliery closed, 1,400 jobs were lost locally.

A partnership led by Gedling borough council has tried to change the social conditions in the area and build an economic base in Newstead village. Some £2 million has been invested, housing has been improved, open space has been reclaimed and a new water supply has been put in. The Robin Hood line has come to the village and a new railway station has been built. Much more has been done. British Coal owns a large parcel of land in the centre of the village. It has had planning permission for five years. New housing is needed to bring new life to Newstead.

We have talked to British Coal about selling the land in partnership with other landholders. I am astonished that British Coal now refuses to sell. It says that it would like to help in the regeneration of Newstead. In a letter to me British Coal said:

"the reality is that it would not be possible for us to achieve the objectives set by the Government unless we concentrate on the privatisation work."

The big sell-off and the big packages are causing delay on the ground. They are working against regeneration. The letter concludes:

"I am sorry I cannot be more helpful as I know that Gedling have been very positive in aiding the regeneration process in their district".

In May last year, His Royal Highness Prince Charles, as the president of Business in the Community, came to Newstead, liked what he saw and called for more partnership. Is it not a pity that because British Coal has a timetable driven by the desire to bury it and get it out of the way, it cannot create new housing and new jobs in Newstead village? Is it not a shame that the people who are unemployed there cannot build the houses under the training scheme that has already been set up?

The example of Newstead shows that people do not look to the past. People in coalfield communities want a new future; they want the land to be their land. They were born in this British Coal land that is to be sold; they grew up in it; they walked in it. In Nottinghamshire, it is the landscape of Lawrence. They have put up with dirt and dereliction and now they aspire to something better. Above everything else, they want the sell-off to ensure that they have new jobs, that their recreational facilities are safeguarded and that the environment in their area is lifted.

The coalfield communities have been betrayed. Promises were made to them. The sale of this land is an opportunity. Let us make sure that they are not betrayed again. This time, let them benefit from their land being sold.

10.28 am

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping), who represents a coal mining area, has probably forgotten more about coal mining than I shall ever know; I recognise that. Conservative Members also have great experience of the coal mining industry. The debate is important and touches on issues that range wider than the specific issue of coal mining. I am delighted to make a brief contribution about the proposed sale by British Coal of non-operational and former mining sites.

A point that needs to be made is that we are discussing a much underrated benefit of privatisation. Privatisation has received a bad press in the past few months—perhaps deservedly—because of massive pay awards to directors of newly privatised companies. We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that, as a concept, privatisation has been enormously successful in terms of its major thrust for efficiency savings, profit and economic regeneration. That is an underrated advantage of privatisation. We need to ask ourselves whether, if British Coal was remaining in Government hands, we would be debating today the

[Mr. Gary Streeter]

release of this important land which can help in economic regeneration. I suspect that, sadly, the answer is that we would not.

Before coming into the House, when I was doing a real job, I spent much of my time advising companies on the purchase of other companies. From time to time, we came across companies, perhaps poorly managed or perhaps in the hands of one family for far too long, that did not even know what they owned. At completion meetings, when one started to delve into the asset register, it was obvious that some organisations did not know what they owned and did not use it properly. I suspect that that may have been the case with some of our nationalised industries. They did not maximise their assets and, in some cases, they did not even know what assets they had. That is fine if one is in Canada or Russia where land is plentiful. However, we live in a small island.

It is, therefore, important to recognise that we have a responsibility to maximise the use of our land wherever it may be. I believe that the proposals that we are debating today will enable us to make maximum use, for economic regeneration and for the advantage of our citizens, of land that has been in the ownership of British Coal for many generations. We should not lose sight of the fact that this opportunity would not be happening without privatisation.

This spring, we shall see the marketing of a huge portfolio of land and buildings. As the hon. Member for Sherwood said, 150,000 acres is a substantial amount of land. It is not chicken feed; it is, as my son would say, big cheese. There is housing land, agricultural land, office and commercial land and investment land and property. Some is tenanted and some comes with vacant possession. The land is in many areas where coal mining has been important for many generations. As the hon. Member for Sherwood said, it is important that we give fair terms to those who are currently tenants of the properties. I am all for value for money and for cracking down on public spending, but it is important, where the Government have an involvement, to play fair with people who are already involved in those properties.

I represent an area where the release of former Ministry of Defence land is a huge issue. It is important that the region benefits from the release of that land into the private sector. I urge the Minister to go the extra mile, where possible, to ensure that local people benefit. It would be a great shame if people coming from London or elsewhere snapped up all the bargains. We must let local people have a fair crack of the whip.

I hope that the release of land by British Coal will be a model that nationalised industries, privatised industries, Government Departments and next steps agencies can follow. I think especially of British Rail, which is going down a similar route towards privatisation. We know that vast areas of land and buildings currently owned by British Rail could be released into the private sector for the economic benefit of the nation. I have had some dealings with British Rail lawyers. It was pretty obvious to me that they did not know what they owned or what use could be made of it. It is important to maximise the assets of Government Departments and nationalised industries.

British Coal proposes to sell three categories of property, of which the first is housing. We often hear cries for 100,000 houses to be built each year. I repeat the point that we are a small island. It behoves all of us to ensure, before we start building 100,000 houses a year—I reject the need for such numbers—to maximise the use of existing houses. Some of the houses that are to be released have tenants, which is an important point. I hope, however, that some of the houses that are currently vacant will be made available to local people to help to resolve the residential housing problems in the areas concerned.

The second category is agricultural land, some of which is tenanted. I make a plea to my hon. Friend the Minister. We must respect existing tenancies; that is a matter of law. However, we must also bend over backwards to help tenants who wish to acquire the freehold on advantageous terms. It is a happy coincidence that the release of the agricultural land is happening at the same time as the Government are introducing the Agricultural Tenancies Bill which will release enterprise in rural communities and allow far greater flexibility in the use of land. That will bring some of those regions to life.

There are sometimes hidden nuggets of gold. In the mining industry, one may tend to write off car parks and storage areas as unimportant. None the less, those areas can be released for important rural businesses, such as small factories, which fit nicely into the economic community and which create jobs. These areas are not exploited at the moment. Let the entrepreneurs come forward and make use of the Agricultural Tenancies Bill.

The third category is the 13,000 acres of land and buildings for commercial, office or investment use. Some 200 sites have a recognised development potential. That will be a great boost to the economy of the regions concerned and a great opportunity for inward investment. My part of the world is keen to have inward investment. One has, however, to make available land and buildings for inward investment. Here is an opportunity for former coal mining areas to attract inward investment which will create jobs for local people.

The timing is excellent because the economy is now going forward in a way that it has not done for a number of years. We had growth last year of 4 per cent., and we have low inflation, low interest rates, a competitive pound and falling unemployment. We have a great framework within which the land will be released to attract entrepreneurs, to attract inward investment and to create jobs for local people, especially for those who have been made redundant and who are looking for real jobs in which they can have a career.

After a few difficult years, enterprise is stirring again. People are thinking of setting up businesses again and more small businesses are being created. The release of British Coal land will help small businesses to get started. As the hon. Member for Sherwood said, it is important that small businesses are helped by the release of land because they are the life blood of any economic community. They have the answers to our unemployment problems in their hands. I encourage my hon. Friend the Minister to make available special measures for small businesses.

We have all been concerned about the decline of the coal industry. I represent an area in which there has never been coal mining, yet I speak in the debate without apology because coal mining is in the national psyche of the United Kingdom. It is in our blood, as is fishing. When we debated the future of the coal mining industry a few years ago, there was much concern in my part of the world, as there was in every other part of the country.

Coal mining is dear to our hearts. But at least there is a silver lining in that cloud because the release of British Coal land will be of economic benefit to those regions.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Sherwood about speed. I have had experience of other Departments releasing land into the private sector and I am bound to say that the Ministry of Defence in Plymouth is extremely slow in releasing sites. We have been calling for the release of south yard at Devonport dockyard for years, and it has still not been released.

British Coal is driving the matter forward and setting the pace, which is important if economic regeneration is to take place.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): It might occur to the hon. Gentleman that British Coal sold land throughout the 1970s and 1980s. When Ian MacGregor was chairman of the National Coal Board, he decided that all British Coal property would be sold off. He set an 18-month timetable, but nobody could keep up with it. Tenants could not raise the money to buy, so were excluded from the sales. The hon. Gentleman says that there should be a longer time scale. I doubt it, because British Coal is pushing this forward rather quickly.

Mr. Streeter: I am glad to hear that British Coal has been selling assets for the past 20 years, but the hon. Gentleman will recognise that this is a substantial package, the like of which we have not seen before. I simply meant that, if we have too long a time scale, nothing will happen. It is important that the matter is driven through.

I hope that the release of land by British Coal will be a model for other Departments and nationalised industries to follow. It is a hidden benefit of privatisation and is much underrated. I wish it well.

10.40 am

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I am extremely grateful to be called in this important debate. Unlike the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), I have had a number of pits and tenanted licensee farms in my constituency.

The first paragraph of a letter that I received from a constituent says:

"You will no doubt be aware of the controversy caused by the proposed sell off of British Coal's non-operational land. My family have been British Coal tenants and licensees for 50 years, and I would like to think that we have been good custodians of the land in the Dearne Valley, as have other tenants and licensees."

A problem arises because of certain assumptions that British Coal makes in terms of patches of land in the Dearne valley.

The British Coal chairman began with a large number of coal mines and employees. The industry has now been devastated, but the chairman continues to enjoy the salary that he had at that time. Will the Minister explain why?

Farmers are struggling to make a living, given all the problems associated with the agricultural world. British Coal is a publicly owned asset, so it is not for British Coal Enterprise to do as it pleases. The Minister must assume responsibility for ensuring that British Coal acts in a manner that befits the nation. I tabled a written question asking what action the President of the Board of Trade proposed to protect tenant farmers. The Minister replied:

"The sale of British Coal's property is a matter for the Corporation."

But it is not when it causes problems for people who have been tenants for many years. I hope that he will instruct British Coal, in its negotiations, not to assume that certain portions of land are up for development. A number of farms on my patch are in the unitary plan but have no purpose other than farming. There are no proposals whatever to allow other developments on them. It is wrong for British Coal to hold a gun at those farmers' heads. I hope that the Minister will assure us, when he replies to the debate, that he will instruct British Coal to sell the land to those farmers who have expressed an interest.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Has the hon. Gentleman encountered the same concerns as I have encountered in Scotland? Tenant farmers are worried that the agents appointed by the board to sell farms may have an interest, after the sale, in factoring for a new purchaser rather than selling to the sitting tenant. As a result, the factor or agent will make more profit in the long term, but it is not in the interests of good farming and certainly not in the interests of the loyal tenants who have been there for many years.

Mr. Redmond: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, but whether there is sleaze in Scotland, I do not know. I speak only for my patch.

Where we have good agricultural or coal land, it should be left. Many coal sites in south Yorkshire could be developed for housing or industry. One example, which the Minister is most welcome to visit, is the innovative Earth centre, which has been conceived on the old Cadeby pit site and is unique in Britain, and perhaps the world. Steps are now being taken to get it going. So there is potential in south Yorkshire for developments on derelict sites, and grants are available.

I hope that the Minister will assure us that tenants will be protected, because, under the unitary plan, their land continues to be designated for agriculture.

10.46 am

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): As the Minister is aware, the total land package to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) referred is estimated to be 150,000 acres. It comprises 110,000 acres of agricultural land; about 9,000 acres of land that will go for regeneration; and some 806 houses, 500 lock-up garages and 1,000 allotments valued, it is rumoured, at well over £100 million. Will the Minister clarify that when he replies?

During the passage of the Coal Industry Bill, we were given to understand that British Coal would pass residual land, together with all other liabilities, to the Coal Authority for administration. Clearly, that has not happened with the land. Why has it been decided that the land will not be administered by the Coal Authority but left to British Coal Properties to dispose of?

It is extremely important to mining communities that land available for potential industrial redevelopment should be developed in those areas. Had the land been passed to the Coal Authority, that body would have been in a much better position to consider passing the land on, in Scotland and Wales to the enterprise agencies, and in England to English Enterprise. The land could then have been developed with a view to creating jobs in mining

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

communities. That has not happened. Will the Minister consider whether some of the 9,000 acres of land of industrial development quality could be passed to agencies and perhaps also to local authorities, so that it could be developed to create jobs in mining communities?

Mr. Ilsley: Does my hon. Friend share my fear that some of the development companies to which Conservative Members have referred, which want to buy British Coal land, will quote for greenfield agricultural sites rather than try to redevelop the old colliery sites which my hon. Friend and I have known throughout our careers in mining?

Mr. Clapham: My hon. Friend has made an important point. If that happened it would be a tragedy because a great deal of land in the coalfield communities could be regenerated without having to resort to greenfield sites.

I recently wrote to the Minister for Energy and Industry about 20 acres of woodland in Woolley colliery village. That village, like many others where collieries have been closed, has tended to be forgotten. Shops have closed, as has the community centre, and there is nowhere for people to meet. If that woodland was handed to the community there would be a real possibility of developing it into a nature reserve with nature trails, which would attract schools. It could also be used by social services and the probation services. That could be a viable project to regenerate the village and it would probably attract shops back to it. I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will say whether he would support that project. Given that many old colliery villages outside Yorkshire are close to similar land, would he be prepared to consider community involvement, perhaps in partnership with private interests, to develop it for the community?

Three welfare issues cause great concern to hon. Members who represent mining communities. First, what will happen to land that has been leased from British Coal by miners' welfare organisations? When we scrutinised the Coal Industry Bill in Committee, we were given to understand that those welfare organisations would be given the opportunity to receive that land or that it would be handed to the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation. I hope that the Minister can clarify those arrangements and tell us whether he will ensure that land leased from British Coal by miners' welfare organisations is handed over to the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation.

I shall not dwell on the 806 houses to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood referred. However, I would expect the Minister to ensure that tenants are given the opportunity to buy those houses and, where they are unable to buy them, that housing associations and local authorities will step into the breach. I hope that he will encourage that, so that the effects of the earlier huge sell-offs by British Coal are not repeated.

I am also concerned about the future of allotments, but I shall leave that to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington), who has a great knowledge of them.

My final concern relates to the proceeds of the sales. I hope that some of the money will be used to clean up the mining communities, especially pollution caused by mine water. That money should be used for major regeneration projects in mining communities. I hope that the Minister will also be able to tell us that some of that money will be used to extend the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme, which the Government introduced in 1974, to make payments to men who have been awarded disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema. The Minister will be aware of the great discrimination between people who suffer from those two diseases, which are caused by the same dust. That discrimination is quite illogical and the money would help to alleviate the problem.

10.54 am

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): This has been a short debate and, in some respects, it has been a rerun of the one that we had in Standing Committee when we considered the Coal Industry Bill. The only difference is that this morning we have heard from a Conservative Member, whereas in Committee no Conservative sought to intervene. I do not think that today's proceedings were greatly enhanced by the speech of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), which betrayed his ignorance of the subject.

We are considering the disposal of a sizeable parcel of land—the biggest since the dissolution of the monasteries. I agree with the moving words of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) that many of British Coal's tenant farmers have fulfilled their responsibilities and are entitled to expect not only the right to buy, if appropriate, but the flexibility that will be required to obtain the money to purchase their properties.

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): My hon. Friend and I spent many hours in Committee considering the Coal Industry Bill. Does he agree that allotment holders, who have been referred to briefly, have also given great service to the industry, because they are invariably employees or former employees of the coal board? Is it not important that they are given the same security of tenure as tenant farmers because, in many cases, they are not only unemployed but impoverished and if they lost their allotments they would lose a great deal of the quality of their lives?

Mr. O'Neill: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. I had intended to speak about allotments and to give anecdotal evidence of their importance to our former colleague, Mick Welsh, who represented Doncaster, North for many years. He would spend the Easter recess at his allotment. He and I shared an office for 10 years and I used to get day-to-day reports on the condition of the various vegetables that he grew over 12 months.

I know that a great many miners, with great ingenuity, have devoted much of their leisure time to the development of their allotments. In some respects, they exemplified the old dictum of digging for victory. Many of those former miners are now quite old and those allotments are one of their last interests. It would be extremely unfortunate if they had to sacrifice their lives' work on the altar of commercialism.

A number of agricultural holdings are up for sale. I made representations to the Minister on behalf of Mr. Scobbie of Shannockhill farm in my constituency, and his

response was constructive. He should go a little further today and confirm that deals will not be subject to the current tight framework.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that British Coal has more tenant farmers in County Durham than anywhere else. On Monday night, 65 British Coal tenants of the county met and expressed their grave concerns about the sale prices and the means of sale employed by agents. The Minister for Energy and Industry and the chairman of British Coal have made it clear that tenants who have expressed serious interest in purchasing their freehold will be given first choice. Tenants in the county are anxious about what that means, because people who may have been unsure about the terms of sale and who held back from expressing an interest may be excluded. I hope that my hon. Friend will seek assurances from the Minister about those tenants.

Mr. O'Neill: My hon. Friend made the argument strongly. We all share that anxiety, because we have been approached by people who, in the main, are not wealthy and do not fit into any Euro-profile of agricultural fat cats. They are working tenant farmers, probably employing two or three people, perhaps only their family. They do not have considerable resources. They are taking one of the biggest financial steps in their lives. They wish to be reassured that they can do so in an orderly way, and they wish to be able to make proper financial provision. It would be foolhardy if, in pursuit of a fast buck, agricultural agents were to rush the process and farmers consequently took on financial commitments that they could not meet in the longer term.

Most hon. Members who represent mining constituencies have one overriding anxiety—unemployment and the under-use of resources locally. We are most disturbed lest a land bank is dispersed in a way that could be careless and open to mistiming, and we want several aspects to be taken into account.

British Coal Properties has nursed many parcels of land through the planning process, and has obtained money from Europe, from the European regional development fund and the like, through RECHAR, and so on. It has worked with local authorities. Those efforts could be blown to smithereens if the life-blood of public sector Euro-funding were to be cut off because land was transferred to the private sector. That is a worry.

We are anxious that we, as taxpayers, will not obtain a reasonable return for the money that has been spent on our behalf by the staff of British Coal Properties in nursing properties through the planning process. Properties might be at the stage immediately before the granting of planning permission, and therefore the land might not currently attract the proper value that it would as soon as planning permission was granted. We want an assurance from the Minister that clawback arrangements will be written into any contracts of sale, whereby we, as taxpayers, will be able to benefit from the improvements that we have already helped to fund, and so will provide us with a rich harvest in the future.

Our worry is that those parcels of land will be bought at an unrealistically low price because no planning permission has been granted, that permission will be quickly and easily obtained as a result of the work that has already been done and that money will go into the pockets of developers rather than of those who have undertaken long-term programmes.

Arguments have been made about housing. Most of the 800 units would not fall into an estate agent's definition of desirable residences because they have already been sold off or are too expensive. We should like local authorities or housing associations to be given priority in improving those houses.

Other land falls into the category of miscellaneous open spaces. Hon. Friends have already referred to the importance of the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation and the National Playing Fields Association being involved in sports and social clubs. Many representations were made from Nottingham, especially in Committee.

We have discussed allotments, but we need to consider other land that may not be attractive to commercial purchasers—unrestored tips and spoils that have not been properly dealt with but which should be given to people who know how to treat them. In the main, those are public sector authorities or local authorities. If they are to be given that land, they should be given proper financial help to enable them to meet their environmental responsibilities.

Some land is obviously contaminated and is being used for tipping and so on. Whoever assumes ownership of that land—I imagine that it would be attractive only to local authorities and the public sector in general—should be given proper resources to ensure that the monitoring of that polluted and contaminated land is conducted properly.

Some land will be dealt with according to the Moynihan guidelines. That undertaking was given by a previous Minister, and we want to ensure that the land will be properly accounted for.

This sale of land is one of the biggest sales that we have experienced in this country. It covers the agricultural sector, and working farmers who plan to continue their activities for some time need time to tackle their contractual problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) has identified another small group—elderly farmers who perhaps want only another four or five years on the land before they retire. British Coal Properties and the Government owe a responsibility to those men. They should be treated appropriately and should not be hounded into making a decision. They are a special case, and should be given an extension of the lease to allow them to finish their working lives, to contribute to the agricultural well-being of the country.

We also want to ensure that tenant farmers, on whose land opencast mining is taking place, are given proper protection and guarantees that the rehabilitation of that land will be carried through with the rigour that was characteristic of the former owner, British Coal. People tend to forget that many of the tenancies were granted on the basis that opencast mining would take place. Opencast mining is being carried out in several places at the moment, but people are worried that, when it is completed, there will not be proper provision to ensure that the rehabilitation is to the standards that British Coal used to set.

[Mr. O'Neill]

I mentioned industrial development, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) gave examples from his region. Throughout the United Kingdom, there are anxieties about profiteering and about lost opportunities for the public sector to carry on the work that would attract RECHAR and ERDF funding, which would not be open to the private sector.

We want guarantees about the miscellaneous open spaces that could be swept under the carpet, the sports and social facilities, the allotments and the land that no one wants but which will require care and treatment beyond the responsibilities that the Coal Authority will have when it assumes ownership—no doubt when British Coal Properties and British Coal have washed their hands of it.

We welcome the opportunity that we have had for a debate this morning. In some respects, such debates are ideally suited to this format, although I wish that there had been more constructive comments from both sides of the House on the issue.

We are discussing communities that have suffered as a consequence of the run-down of the coal industry—a run-down of which the Government are at the centre, and for which they are largely to blame. We want to ensure that the last stages of disposal of the land are carried out humanely, in a way that will result in the economic regeneration of those communities, which have been scarred by the way in which the Government have run away from their responsibilities to coalfield communities.

This is the Government's chance. This is the Minister's opportunity, and we wait with interest to hear what he has to say.

11.8 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Charles Wardle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on obtaining the debate. I agree that it is an important subject, as was obvious from the contributions to the debate. I share the feeling that there is much to discuss in such a short debate. I shall try to answer hon. Members' arguments in my general remarks, but if I do not answer all of them I shall write as soon as possible to hon. Members.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) for his thoughtful contribution. I am aware of the interest of my hon. Friends the Members for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) and for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) and of the interest of many Opposition Members, who have intervened or made contributions.

I shall begin by putting the issue of British Coal's remaining property portfolio in the more general context of the privatisation of the coal industry. For several years, it has been the Government's intention that the industry should return to the private sector—after expenditure of taxpayers' money of £20,000 million since 1979, either to cover losses or to help restructure the industry. We believe that in the private sector the industry will best be able to build on British Coal's substantial progress in productivity and efficiency in recent years and to secure its place in the competitive energy market.

As the House will know, the Government completed the sale of mining businesses last December. That represents a significant achievement in returning one of our major industries to the private sector. The sale of British Coal's mining assets has laid firm foundations for the industry's future, but a number of other activities remain in British Coal's ownership for the time being. The residual property portfolio is only one among a number of what one might call the ancillary undertakings of the corporation, and British Coal has been pursuing a policy of disposing of its subsidiary businesses and activities with some success. I could explain what they are, but I shall move on because time is pressing.

Privatisation—whether of the mining businesses by the Government or of its own undertakings by British Coal—is bringing to an end a period of nearly 50 years in which coal has been a nationalised industry. The history of coal in this country goes back, of course, much further than that. In the course of its long life, the coal industry has acquired property for a variety of purposes, in many different areas across the country.

The property portfolio is extremely diverse, and hon. Members may find it interesting to take a look at the background of British Coal's current holdings. Some land that the corporation still owns was acquired as the property of the existing colliery companies at the time of nationalisation. Many sites have been acquired by British Coal with a view to possible future operational use. Some of the land is affected by subsidence, contamination or dereliction. Offices and other buildings, farms, woodland and recreational land are just some of the other categories of property that the corporation has built up over the years.

The portfolio has not been static. Some land, closely associated with continuing mining operations, has already transferred to the successor mining companies as part of the sale. Some land, which is likely to be used for, or in connection with, coal mining operations has been transferred to the Coal Authority. The Coal Authority, of course, is the newly established public sector organisation which, in addition to handling certain historic liabilities such as subsidence, deals with the licensing of future coal mining operations, and it will be able to make its land available for that purpose.

In addition to those properties that have already been transferred elsewhere, British Coal Properties has, for a number of years and with a good deal of success, pursued commercial sales of land that the corporation has not needed for operational purposes. In each of the past three years, sales have amounted to £30 million. However, even after that exercise, there is a large and diverse portfolio for which British Coal remains responsible. Altogether 7,000 properties remain in British Coal's ownership—making, in total, holdings of almost 150,000 acres. Opposition Members have emphasised the importance of carefully assessing the options for the portfolio's future. That is precisely what British Coal and the Government are doing, in the light of the many factors at work—not least of which is the need to ensure that value for money is obtained when properties are sold.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Minister make it clear that the value of the land is the current value, not what it might be in future? If it is agricultural land, it must be sold at agricultural prices, not at prices based on the prospect of any possible development plans, and it must be clearly defined as green belt land.

Mr. Wardle: I hope to make that distinction because as soon as I have dealt with the background I want to turn

to agricultural land, housing and recreational land—many of the issues that the hon. Member for Sherwood and other Labour Members rightly raised.

The need for continuing responsible ownership and management is clearly crucial to existing tenants of British Coal Properties who will want to be assured that the change in British Coal's status does not threaten the performance of obligations and duties which they would rightly expect of their landlord. That is equally important where there are liabilities attached to certain categories of land that require continuing management or where restoration and rehabilitation is still in progress. It is also of great importance for local communities where the land in question has development potential. There are many sites with potential for development, and it is important—as a number of Opposition Members have emphasised—that they should be brought back into productive use in the private sector as soon as possible, thus boosting local communities and encouraging businesses in those areas. In addition, British Coal has many properties of recreational value to local communities, on which I should like to say a few words.

I am in no doubt about the importance that people in coalfield areas attach to land which, over the years, has been leased by British Coal for sport and recreation. We are looking at more than 200 sites in towns and villages throughout England, Scotland and Wales. The issue involves not only miners' welfare schemes—to which the hon. Members for Sherwood and for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) alluded—but a host of other organisations and uses. The uses range from football pitches, cricket pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens, to the scouts, the guides and—as has been mentioned more than once—allotments. That matter is being given careful consideration—the importance of allotments is certainly not lost on me, and it will not be lost on British Coal.

Mr. Etherington: All that we are asking is that the Minister use his good offices with the coal board to ensure that allotment holders are given first choice of purchase of the facilities and the chance to join together—perhaps with their local district councils—to obtain the land rather than having it sold over their heads to private enterprise, which has, unfortunately, happened in the past.

Mr. Wardle: I recognise the importance of allotments. We are actively pursuing with British Coal options for the future of allotments. I shall ensure that the remarks made in today's debate are conveyed to the relevant parties—they will already have been noted by British Coal. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about that issue.

We are committed to preserving the nation's stock of recreational facilities wherever possible and ensuring that they are used. Hon. Members have mentioned the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation and the National Playing Fields Association—conversations continue with both organisations.

We have made it clear from the outset that we want to deal as sensitively as we can with recreational facilities that are now in the corporation's ownership. It is therefore our objective that land that is currently in active use for sport or recreation in its broadest sense should be retained for those purposes. We are continuing to discuss with British Coal how best to achieve that objective. Those detailed discussions on the possible mechanisms for achieving our overall objective have yet to be concluded, but I hope that what I have said clarifies our position on that subject.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister said that we are talking about Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation land, as well as other land, and that consultations were still taking place. He mentioned the land, but I did not hear him say all the land. We would like the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation to remain intact—not just the land and the sports pitches, but all the other welfare facilities and those for the disabled that are administered by CISWO. Will the Minister ensure that he is consulted about all the facilities and organisational aspects of CISWO, not just part of it?

Mr. Wardle: I am absolutely certain that CISWO will make exactly the representations that the hon. Gentleman has made. I shall not predict the outcome of those discussions, but I have said that talks are continuing with CISWO and with the National Playing Fields Association.

A further category of property that does not form part of the current packages is that controlled by British Coal Enterprise. That includes managed workshops, light industrial units and office space throughout the coalfield areas. I recognise that those have played an important part in the regeneration of the coalfield districts, and British Coal Enterprise's job creation and regeneration activities have achieved much.

As the House will be aware, the long-term future of BCE is under review. We and British Coal are continuing to explore the options for the full range of services that it provides, and no final decisions have yet been taken. It is a matter that requires careful thought and deliberation. As Opposition Members have said, it is important to deliberate carefully, and not rush the decisions.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Wardle: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, with one eye on the time.

Mr. Tipping: British Coal Enterprise works in partnership with others. When seeking a partner, one looks for a long-term relationship, and early decisions about the future of British Coal Enterprise must focus on coalfield regeneration.

Mr. Wardle: It is important to have discussions early in the process. They are taking place now and I believe that sensible decisions will flow from them. I will pick up the pace slightly in view of the time and turn to housing.

In the light of its new functions, British Coal must make early progress with plans for the disposal of its holdings. Hon. Members will be aware of British Coal's press release of 11 January, which sets out its broad plans, but it might be helpful if I highlight the main points of the corporation's proposals.

British Coal is to dispose of its residual non-mining properties under three separate portfolios, which I would like to discuss briefly in turn. I hope that it will allow me to address the points that a number of hon. Members have raised this morning.

Those portfolios consist of housing, agricultural land and what British Coal has termed the commercial and development portfolio, which includes the vast majority of the rest of the corporation's properties. British Coal has announced its intention to sell the agricultural and housing

[Mr. Wardle]

portfolios in broadly regional packages. No decisions have yet been taken about the packaging and disposal of the commercial and development land.

In the past, British Coal has owned huge numbers of houses. Many hon. Members will recall what were virtually "coal board villages". Over a number of years, some 80,000 of them have been sold, in large part as a result of British Coal's policy of selling to sitting tenants. I understand that, in the past, houses where there were full statutory tenants were offered for sale to those tenants, and that only a tiny number of expressions of interest—fewer than 10—remain outstanding. They are being attended to.

However, significant numbers of houses—up to 800—remain in British Coal's possession. Some of them are in vacant possession, but many are tenanted by miners, ex-miners and their dependants. British Coal intends to offer those houses to the market this spring in a number of regional packages, with a view to completing all the sales within a year.

It is important that those tenants continue to have the protection of responsible landlords as British Coal approaches the end of its life. I believe that the corporation's proposals to sell off the houses in broadly regional blocks will offer the best guarantee of early transfer to continued responsible management.

In that context, I welcome the assurances that the corporation has given me that, in assessing bids, it will take every step to satisfy itself that purchasers meet appropriate tests on viability and commitment to the future of the property which they are purchasing. In addition, it will consider carefully the approach adopted by those purchasers in the context of the interest that tenants may have in acquiring their freehold in future.

Agricultural land has been the subject of many hon. Members' remarks this morning. British Coal has a total of 110,000 acres of agricultural land, 85,000 of which is farmland, including farm buildings. That represents a substantial holding across the nation as a whole, not just in England, and the disposal of such a large portfolio is naturally of great interest to many people throughout the country. Some land is in British Coal's vacant possession, but much of it is occupied by sitting tenants.

As with its housing portfolio, it is British Coal's intention to offer that portfolio to the market in broadly regional packages. The precise composition of the packages is subject to finalisation in the light of advice from specialist property and agricultural advisers, but I understand that the corporation hopes to offer the first packages for sale this spring and to conclude all sales by the spring of 1996.

Mr. Hardy: Is the Minister ruling out the right of the tenant farmer to purchase land? If so, will he consider those cases where the tenant farmer may have been given a promise or a half promise that he could purchase land?

Mr. Wardle: I am coming to precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

I am aware of the concerns that were raised in many quarters while the corporation was considering the options for the future of that land. It is natural that many existing farming tenants will feel anxious about their position, but I hope that the announcements that have been made will largely remove that anxiety.

It is worth noting the protection that existing tenants have under statute. Under agricultural holdings legislation, full agricultural tenants have security of tenure, subject to the provisions of that legislation. In some cases, succession provisions apply that allow two further generations to succeed to the tenancy. There is no question of their legal rights under legislation being diminished in any way in the course of the disposal process through a change of landlord.

I can equally assure hon. Members that the Agricultural Tenancies Bill, which is before the House, does not affect the rights of existing tenants as it will apply only to new tenancies granted after its commencement.

Nevertheless, as the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) said, there is an understandable desire among some tenants to achieve additional security and independence by purchasing their own freeholds. As one would expect, the Government have sympathy with that view, but it is important to bear in mind the needs of tenants who do not wish to do so, and for whom the overriding priority must be to continue to have responsible landlords who have a long-term interest in the properties they own and who are responsive to the needs of their sitting tenants. I believe that the policy that British Coal is pursuing strikes a satisfactory balance in responding to the needs and wishes of all its existing tenants.

As hon. Members know, those tenants who have already expressed an interest in purchasing their properties are being offered the opportunity to do so by British Coal. The hon. Members for Sherwood and for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) referred to that point. I know that British Coal has now written to all of those who expressed an interest in purchasing properties seeking confirmation of their position. When tenants confirm that they wish to proceed with the purchase of their property, in the majority of cases British Coal will take forward the process of sale. Of course, management of that process is a matter for British Coal, but I am aware that the corporation is anxious to make progress with the sales, and it is clearly in tenants' interests to assist it wherever possible.

The corporation's commercial and development portfolio includes a great variety of properties of various types, including sites with potential for early industrial or residential development, freehold offices, leisure properties, non-coal mineral extraction, waste disposal sites and others.

Some of those properties are still in the process of restoration or rehabilitation and others carry liabilities that may require on-going management. Ensuring that the treatment of those liabilities is not hindered in any way by the disposal process is clearly a key consideration, and one which is borne very much in mind.

I know that the corporation will have detailed negotiations with prospective purchasers about the sale of those properties. As part of its assessment of the bidders, it will take account of their suitability and it will want to be satisfied that the bidders have sufficient resources to meet the requirements. Local authorities and other bodies have wide-ranging powers to deal with any failure to comply with statutory requirements relating to liabilities, by which any purchasers will of course be bound.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I am sorry that I have not been able to attend for the whole debate. Kiveton

colliery in my constituency closed just before Christmas. Will British Coal lay down conditions about the development of that site—whether it be by the public or private sector—so that regeneration will be firmly fixed and, on that basis, there will be a clear price for the disposal of the land?

Mr. Wardle: The appropriate safeguards relating to identified development potential will be part of British Coal's consideration.

At this stage it is not possible to be more concrete about the proposals for the future of the property in the commercial and development portfolio, but I hope that I have been able to give some clarification about the nature of the corporation's plan on a broad level, and to explain some of the factors which we are currently considering where decisions have not yet been taken.

Mr. O'Neill: We suggested clawback arrangements because almost excessive profits would be achieved in relation to the original price. Will the Minister give an assurance that the contracts will take proper account of that?

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point and I can assure him and the House that the need for clawback arrangements will be considered carefully in all cases.

In the time available I have not been able to respond to every question. I repeat my assurance that I shall write to hon. Members when I have read the debate and seen which points need specific answers. I carefully noted the views that were expressed and the House has had the opportunity of hearing a careful deliberation about a most important subject.

Urban Road Congestion

11.29 am

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I am pleased to have the opportunity to come to the House today and open a debate on such an important subject as the medical effects of traffic congestion, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. I understand that, only this morning, my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London has been giving evidence to the Environment Select Committee on volatile organic compounds, so the debate has an element of topicality, apart from its long-term importance.

Equally, we all have constituents—I mean constituents rather than professional lobbying bodies such as Friends of the Earth—who are greatly concerned about the potential effects of car pollutants, vehicle pollutants and urban congestion. Whether that concern comes from a mother who pushes her child in a pram at ground level and worries about the effect of exhaust fumes on her child, whether it is a commuter driving his car at 6 mph and imbibing all the fumes, or whether it is a cyclist or a pedestrian, it is matter of great importance for everyone in Britain.

There has been a step change in people's priorities in this matter. I understand that in the 1940s and 1950s the principal concerns were hydrocarbons, sulphur and particulates from coal burning, which were mainly the result of industrial processes. The Clean Air Act 1956 substantially improved matters and they have continued to improve.

The Clean Air Act, however, led to a certain complacency about the effects of urban congestion. In 1979, the Department of Transport wrote to the Clean Air Council as follows:

"The effects of pollution by motor vehicles can be summarised; there is no evidence that this type of pollution has any adverse effects on health."

Sixteen years on, we look slightly askance at that proposition, although it is difficult to establish direct causal relationships between urban congestion and pollution, and health effects.

Generally, the health effects are multi-faceted, as a variety of different atmospheric and allergic conditions have to be taken into account. Although one would not want to say that research is tentative, nevertheless it must always be regarded with caution. However, there is no doubt that for certain groups of the population—people with atopic illnesses such as asthma, eczema and hay fever, smokers, elderly people, children and people with respiratory problems—there is a significant causal relationship between certain pollutants and those conditions.

I am delighted that the Government have acknowledged that. For instance, the Minister of State, Department of Environment, who has been giving evidence to the Environment Select Committee today, mentioned

"the growing links between air pollution and health".—[*Official Report*, 3 May 1994; Vol. 242, c. *432*.]

On 14 February 1994, the Under-Secretary of State for Health spoke about the Medical Research Council institute for environment and health and the fact that it regarded as a first priority the health effects of air pollution, particularly air pollution by motor vehicles.

It is not surprising that that has spawned a variety of expert groups on air pollution and health. I am grateful to the Ashden trust, which last year held a conference and

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managed to bring together many of the documents recently produced on that important subject, which are often difficult to obtain.

Let me give the House an idea of who is involved. The Advisory Group on the Medical Aspects of Air Pollution Episodes and the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants report to the Department of Health. The Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards and the Quality of Urban Air Review Group advise the Department of the Environment. The Photochemical Oxidants Review Group also advises the Department of the Environment.

Other bodies are involved, such as the Office of Science and Technology, which produced a report entitled "Breathing in our Cities—Urban Air Pollution and Respiratory Health". In 1991, the Royal Commission on environmental pollution also examined the problem.

A great deal of private sector and university-oriented research is being carried out. The university of Bristol has done some valuable work, particularly on the effects of benzine on leukaemia and polonium 210 which was featured recently on a Channel 4 programme about radioactivity in children's teeth.

The university of Birmingham has done an enormous amount of work, especially on the levels of particulates, which are mainly from diesel fumes, and their correlation with the death rate, particularly in asthmatics and elderly people.

It is small wonder that such eminent groups have produced a massive array of evidence—some of it contradictory. Let me give the House a flavour. "Urban Air Quality in the United Kingdom" was produced in 1993 by the Department of the Environment, which also produced "Air Quality—Meeting the Challenge" last month. "Improving Air Quality" is another such document.

The Select Committee on Transport examined transport-related air pollution in London only last year, as did the Royal Commission in 1991. There is a plethora of reports. Ploughing through *The Lancet* and other academic and high-minded reports gives one an idea of the complexity of the problem.

First, it might be helpful if I mentioned the evidence on congestion. There is no doubt that congestion in Britain is growing. Between 1972 and 1992, the numbers of cars and light vans doubled and the numbers of heavy goods vehicles on our roads rose by half, totalling between 22 million and 23 million vehicles. By the year 2025—the problem will not go away—it is estimated that car use and car numbers may well double again.

In addition, people not only have more cars, but, on average, they travel further. In 1986, the average mileage per vehicle was about 5,320 miles a year, and by 1991 it was 6,475 miles a year. Of course, that has produced congestion.

In London, although there is some evidence that congestion may be improving a little faster, as the Secretary of State said last week in his evidence to the Select Committee on Transport, Department of Transport statistics show that in 1977-79, the average speed in the central area at peak time was 12.3 mph. By 1990-94 it was down to 10.2 mph. When one compares that to the speed achieved by a motorised postal van in 1912 of only 7 mph, one wonders how much progress there has been in road transport in our urban areas—not just in London but in Birmingham and other areas, such as Kidderminster in my constituency.

There are flows of 21,000 vehicles a day on the Wolverhampton and Birmingham road. If traffic speed is reduced from 12 mph to 6 mph, fuel consumption increases 50 per cent. There is an exponential growth, the lower the speed. The amount of road works and cabling that one sees in London and major cities shows that such congestion will not lessen. The Government document "Air Quality—Meeting the Challenge" stated:

"In urban areas, road transport is the principal source of pollution."

I do not want to inundate the House with statistics, but between 1980 and 1990, 51 per cent. of nitrogen oxides were caused by transport, and they had increased by 72 per cent. Vehicles accounted for 47 per cent. of black smoke, which had increased by 75 per cent. Ninety per cent. of carbon monoxide emissions were caused by transport and they rose by 46 per cent. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is well briefed on volatile organic compounds. Thirty seven per cent. came from vehicles and they rose by 12 per cent. during the same 10-year period. There is evidence of some improvement since 1990, but from relatively high levels. Faced with the expected huge increase in car and heavy goods vehicle ownership over the next 15 years, that remains a matter of concern.

There is a significant problem not only in determining causality but in accumulating evidence of links between any particular pollutant and health risk. Monitoring is one difficulty. As the Select Committee on Transport reported two years ago, there seems little continuity between central and local authority monitoring. Smoke and sulphur dioxide monitoring is done at 250 sites by 151 authorities, and nitrogen dioxides are monitored by 300 local authorities. Although there is a consultation paper on air quality monitoring networks, enormous work must be done adequately to integrate monitoring in the UK.

Improvements in vehicle emissions in one respect may worsen them in another. Unleaded petrol was seen as a way of significantly reducing a poison—lead—in the air, and has been successful in cutting the volume of lead from 8,000 tonnes to 2,000 tonnes a year. Unfortunately, greater use of converters has increased benzene emissions, which are themselves a recognised carcinogenic that may lead to leukaemia. Diesel was also regarded as a good way of improving the environment. In 1993, the number of diesel-engined cars in the UK increased from 5 to 20 per cent. That has reduced carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon emissions, but those of carbon particulates—such as PM_{10}, which can enter the lungs—are considerably worse.

Arguments within the scientific community soon become evident. In 1992, Professor Hallgate, chairman of the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, did not believe that diesel particulates posed a danger to health. By 1994, he was saying:

"There is convincing evidence of a link between mortality and PM_{10}."

That is a volte face if ever I saw one, and shows the problems. It is difficult to isolate cause and effect, particularly under different environmental conditions and given varying individual medical conditions.

The problem is exacerbated by inconsistency in pollutant measurement. There are variations between acceptable levels of ozones, nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide as between the UK, World Health Organisation and European Union. We should consider how standards should be made both more comprehensive and consistent.

I said that, subject to certain caveats, I would describe the effects on health of 10 principal pollutants emitted by cars and heavy goods vehicles. These conclusions came from a symposium by the Ashden trust last year. Nitrogen dioxide may exacerbate asthma and possibly increase susceptibility to infection. The particulate PM_{10} is directly related to city mortality rates and is associated with a wide range of respiratory symptoms. Long-term exposure can be associated with increased risk of death from heart or lung disease.

We all know that carbon monoxide is lethal at high doses, and even at low levels can impair concentration and neuro-behavioural functions. Ozone has been widely publicised. Although it is a secondary pollutant created by the interaction of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds, it irritates the eyes and air passages, and it can significantly sensitise people with allergenic and atopic problems. That is one reason why, in recent years, we have seen a huge increase in the number of asthma referrals by general practitioners.

Pollution has severe consequences. It is estimated that particulates can cause 10,000 premature deaths a year. The incidence of childhood asthma has doubled since the 1970s. Around 155 children suffering from asthma are taken to hospital every day, and there are 3 million asthma sufferers in the UK. The carcinogenic effects of benzene and lead have been well known for some time but are impossible to quantify accurately.

It would be wrong to ignore the fact that much progress has been made. Since 1990, pollution caused by cars and traffic congestion has fallen. The introduction of the catalytic converter after 1993—partly due to European Community directive 91/441—has led to an estimated 70 per cent. reduction in hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide. It is slightly disappointing that only 3 million of the UK's 18.9 million cars have catalytic converters fitted. It will be 2010 before the whole fleet is similarly equipped.

In March 1994, the European Union agreed to improve significantly control of diesel particulates from 1996. That should mean a reduction of about 55 per cent., and a 95 per cent. reduction from 1970 levels when the measures are implemented. It is anticipated that there will be further reductions by the year 2000.

I have already mentioned the progress made with unleaded petrol which in urban areas has led to a significant reduction in the amount of lead—a deadly poison—in the air. Nevertheless, about 2,000 tonnes a year are still emitted. Some progress has been made and we hope that it will continue.

I shall conclude by making one or two suggestions about particular courses of action that the Government could be taking to improve the position on car pollutants and thereby, on the best possible evidence, reduce the ill effects on our health caused by congestion. I do not claim to be comprehensive because this is a wide-ranging topic involving traffic management and planning policy but I shall nevertheless put forward one or two ideas.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport last year had a blitz on what he called the "gross polluters". I am not sure that the figures are entirely accurate but the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said that about 85 per cent. of the most noxious pollutants come from those gross polluters. In other words, a very small proportion of vehicles cause the vast majority of the damage. It is therefore worrying that Britain apparently has the second oldest truck fleet in Europe, second only to that of Greece.

It is also worrying that so much of the pollution, especially in London, is caused by local transport vehicles. Although discussions are taking place with the Department of Transport, it was announced last year that the new Iveco diesel engines in the revamped buses did not meet even the latest European regulations. There was a six-week campaign late last year but I believe that such a campaign should be made permanent.

We need better co-ordination between the Department of Transport, the Vehicle Inspectorate and local authorities which, through environmental legislation, have increasing responsibility for monitoring and control of pollution. They should be given even more power, not only in London but outside, to stop vehicles that are patently polluting the atmosphere and to remove them from the road. That would have a very great impact, and very quickly, on the gross polluters.

Urgent consideration, with tax breaks if necessary, should be given to the retro-fitting of exhaust control equipment on the older diesel buses in urban areas. If the diesel engines in buses are causing pollution, especially through particulates and volatile organic compounds, that particular problem needs to be solved urgently.

Clearly, the Government could be considering a variety of other suggestions and we could be moving a little faster on them. Reformulated gasoline now has about a third of the American market and it is estimated to reduce emissions of benzene—a carcinogenic—by between 15 and 20 per cent., together with emissions of other hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide. Reformulated gasoline is a little more expensive than normal petrol but perhaps the duty on it could be reduced to make it more attractive to the consumer. As has been proved in America, it would have a significant effect on our pollution problem.

Some relevant work has been carried out by Johnson Matthey which, when it heard that I had secured this debate, wrote to me—perhaps for not wholly disinterested motives. It mentioned its "continuously regenerating trap" which, it states, can reduce carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and particulates emitted by large diesel vehicles. The company provided me with information about Sweden where there seem to have been significant improvements as a result of its product. The company recently carried out tests on 10 CRT units in Gothenburg. The technical director of Swebus, Leif Magnusson, said that tests had shown massive reductions in emissions: a 98 per cent. reduction in carbon monoxide emissions, a 96 per cent. reduction in the emission of hydrocarbons, and a 92 per cent. reduction in particulates. I urge the Minister to work on that possibility, which could be used to reduce the emissions of the grossest polluters.

Congestion is a very serious problem. I know that, in his evidence to the Select Committee on Transport last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was a little cagey—understandably—about a forthcoming report

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on road pricing and its implications. The implications may be the opposite to what one expects but the idea needs to be followed up, and planning policy guidance 13 issued by the Department of the Environment on the interrelationship between planning and transport is a good step forward.

From the evidence that I have, it seems that the advice that the Government are getting through the Departments of Transport, of Health and of the Environment and the Office of Science and Technology should be better co-ordinated. There is a plethora of such evidence coming from all directions. Some of it is contradictory but it still needs to be better co-ordinated. Whether the Environmental Protection Agency would be the ideal body to do that is a matter for debate. However, the Environmental Protection Agency should have a role in ensuring consistency of measuring which, as I said, is not evident among the EU, the World Health Organisation and the United Kingdom.

Finally, our targets should also be extended. I understand that, at the moment, there are national standards for only about four of the 10 main vehicle pollutants. There are advisory standards but they should be put on a mandatory basis as far as possible, thus showing that the Government are giving a lead, which I am sure that they are in many other respects.

I have spoken for 25 minutes, which is quite long enough. I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. This is a very important topic to every man, woman and child, especially in urban areas. It will not go away and will not necessarily get better so I urge the Government, as a matter of urgency, to consider some of my recommendations.

11.57 am

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): The House is grateful to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) for affording us the opportunity to debate, albeit briefly, this important topic and doubly grateful for the riveting half-hour to which he has just treated us.

There is no doubt that this subject quite properly exercises the minds of those of us interested in transport matters. I fear that the hon. Gentleman was not quite as critical as he might have been of Government policy because, whatever the Government say about their green credentials—no one could accuse the Secretary of State of being green—they do not show much sign of them when it comes to legislation.

Over the past 15 years, the Government have been content to increase the permitted size of heavy goods vehicles three times and to increase the maximum speed at which they are permitted to travel once. That has clearly helped to increase the total number of heavy goods vehicles on our roads. We assume that the latest European Community proposals will be accepted. We usually fight a rearguard action but there are now 44-tonne lorries on our roads. If the latest EC proposals are accepted, the millions of pounds of public money being spent on strengthening bridges will have to be justified by a further increase in heavy goods vehicles, especially the heaviest travelling the greatest distances, which will again help to undermine rail freight and transfer even more from rail to roads.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest pointed out that much urban pollution is caused by public transport, and rightly drew attention to the pollution caused in this city and others by local bus services. Before the Prime Minister denounces me again, let me declare my interest as a non-executive director of West Midlands Travel, which I believe is currently Britain's third largest bus company.

I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman, but I must add—especially as the Minister for Transport in London is to reply—that the position is hardly surprising, given the effects of deregulation in major towns and cities. Some of the oldest and most clapped-out vehicles in western Europe are running around for 12 hours a day, bleeding passengers from the more profitable routes and undermining the network services provided by West Midlands Travel and other companies. Obviously that will add to urban pollution.

What one of the Minister's predecessors described as the benefits of deregulation have yet to spread to London. I am not surprised, but I hope that the Minister will use his undoubted power and influence as a senior member of Her Majesty's Government to try to improve the position in many towns and cities. For instance, he could consider Government assistance for companies such as the one with which I am associated, which would like to introduce buses powered by natural gas. It is not fair to expect reputable companies to tackle urban pollution problems if at the same time they must compete with fly-by-night operators which have been attracted to the business since the enactment of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act last year.

The Government claim to be more concerned about pollution and the environment nowadays. They say that they have urged local authorities—particularly in the west midlands—to adopt a "package" approach in their annual transport supplementary grant applications, including some public transport schemes. That would undoubtedly help to tackle the problem. In the west midlands, we have made a bid for funds for the Midland Metro—the light rail system, one of whose lines will run through my constituency—the first priority in our annual TSG application. Year after year, having encouraged local authorities to adopt a "package" approach, the Department of Transport has cherry-picked the road schemes of which it approves and provided the full amount needed for their funding; meanwhile, the Midland Metro remains in abeyance for want of public money.

That does not illustrate any great desire on the part of the Department of Transport to tackle urban pollution. Following the latest bid for funds, the Secretary of State has said that it is up to local authorities to find the cost of the Midland Metro—some £30 million. That is unfair, because local authorities, especially in the west midlands, have managed to find a considerable amount from their own resources to finance schemes that will help to alleviate the problems to which the hon. Member for Wyre Forest referred. They have, for example, spent £28.5 million on the new Jewellery line through Birmingham's jewellery quarter, thus providing a third cross-city railway line with little assistance from the Department of Transport. Yet they are continually denied adequate resources for the Midland Metro and other public transport schemes that would do so much to lessen pollution and congestion in the west midlands.

Let me now turn to a more parochial topic, and appeal to the Minister to note what is happening on the ground—regardless of what he or his Back Benchers may say about their desire to alleviate the problem of pollution and congestion in urban areas. I have mentioned our failure to secure cash for the Midland Metro; one organisation in the west midlands, however, need not worry about cash. I refer to the Black Country development corporation. If road builders are appointed to a quasi-public body and millions of pounds of public money are chucked at them, obviously they will build roads—and that is what the Black Country development corporation has done and is doing, like other development corporations throughout the country. The building of roads, of course, helps to create the very congestion and pollution of which the hon. Member for Wyre Forest complains, and which the Minister will presumably deplore in a sympathetic manner very shortly.

In my constituency—thanks to public money—the Black Country development corporation, despite obvious public transport needs, is currently building the black country route and spine road. The road runs through West Bromwich, and will cause enormous pollution and congestion there. It will also virtually split the town in half because of the road works and the congestion that will unquestionably result once the route has been completed. It will join junction 1 of the M5 with junction 10 of the M6. No one needs to be a great map reader to work out that the best way to avoid all the congestion currently afflicting the junction of the M5 and M6 is to take the alternative route—the spine road and the black country route. West Bromwich will suffer from massive congestion and pollution. Concern has already been expressed to the local authority and to me, but the development corporation, predictably, has ignored it.

There are schools along the route, including Cronehills primary school in my constituency. The headmistress has already told me of her fears about existing lead levels in the bodies of pupils; already—especially on Friday afternoons and during the evening rush hour—there is considerable congestion outside the school. Heaven knows what it will be like when the route is completed, but we can make a guess when we see the congestion on the midland links with the M5 and M6.

The Government could take steps to tackle the problem, if only they were serious; but of course they are not. Whatever lip service they pay to the problems of congestion and pollution, they adopt policies year after year—whether inadvertently or not—which add to those problems. This country almost worships the heavy goods vehicle, for example: there are very few restrictions on their use.

Our planning policies appear to be designed to encourage major companies such as John Lewis and McDonalds—I take those two at random—to deal with as many lorry deliveries as possible every day. They regard keeping stock on their premises as uneconomic, and the community must pay for their attitude. Day after day, heavy goods vehicles can be seen on the high streets with their indicator lights flashing, making deliveries to stores such as those that I have mentioned. They are by no means the only guilty parties, however. We must tackle the over-use of HGVs: we must apply restrictions, especially in our towns and cities.

I hope that the Minister will give us some hope, particularly in regard to the development of pollution-free public transport vehicles. There is no doubt that over-reliance on motor vehicles in general and HGVs in particular is the cause of many of the problems that we are debating, and—unless there is a dramatic change in Government policy—will be the cause of exactly the same problems, and debates on them, for many years.

12.8 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): There is undoubtedly great and growing concern about the impact on health of pollution from road vehicles. I am particularly aware of that, as I represent an urban constituency in the London area. Although my constituency is in an outer London borough, it is noticeable that the increase in traffic, and the perception of pollution, have been even greater in outer London than in inner London.

Last summer and the summer before, there was published evidence of sudden episodes of high pollution levels, and especially of ozone in the atmosphere in the Bromley area. There followed a good deal of public concern about the impact on asthma, particularly in children. So I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on bringing the debate to the House. I also congratulate the Government on the action that they have already taken, although the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) gave it limited acknowledgement. In fact, only on 19 January, the Department of Transport announced a series of measures to improve considerably the monitoring of pollutants and to take practical and reasonable steps to deal with the problem that they create. I also pay tribute to the London borough of Bromley, which has taken a lead in setting up monitoring facilities and working with other London boroughs to draw attention to pollutants and keep more accurate statistics.

We are debating a complex subject and I shall refer briefly to four areas which are of particular importance. It is important that research is conducted to obtain accurate data on which to make decisions. One has to separate myth from reality, since it is easy to panic or pursue unproductive methods of research, perhaps because one perceives problems where there is none or one fails to see problems where they are severe.

I emphasise the need to improve collection of data on all pollutants. The Government initiative announced a couple of weeks ago makes great strides in that direction, although it is a little late. It is a pity that the figures were not collected earlier.

Bromley has played an important part in setting up the London Air Quality Network. Indeed, a monitoring station just outside my constituency permanently monitors the level of nitrogen oxides, ozone and carbon dioxide and feeds the statistics into an overall databank, and one of five passive diffusion tubes, which are especially effective in collecting information about benzene, a particular risk to health, is at Royston school in my constituency.

There are plans to extend that monitoring further, but the process is already yielding valuable results. On 6 June 1993, for example, the ozone level in Bromley reached the Department of the Environment's "poor" level of 110 parts per billion, to which the sixth report of the Select Committee on Transport, entitled "Transport-Related Air Pollution in London" referred. That information was not

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previously known and forms a good basis on which to assess where action needs to be taken to improve or do away with the problem.

More research is also needed on the health implications. At present, much research is uncertain and based on supposition about a correlation between figures which may appear to match but do not provide direct evidence of links. Much research is needed to establish whether there are clear links or chance correlations of statistics. The data available on carcinogens are far more clear, as they have been researched a great deal more, but limited research has so far been conducted into the impact of other by-products of urban congestion. Indeed, some by-products have not been fully charted. It is noticeable that in science, especially in chemistry, a solution may appear to have been found and is discovered later to produce an equally bad by-product that was not anticipated, as I shall illustrate.

The most fundamental and important area of research is technical innovation. The means by which engines may run more cleanly and alternative means of propulsion may be introduced must, ultimately, be the key; the answer to which the statistics on health and pollution draw attention. Oxygenates are added to fuel to prevent knocking. Lead was the most famous oxygenate but is rightly out of favour because of the risk that it poses to health.

The next chemical which was added to petrol in greater amounts, although it was always present, was benzene. However, benzene is a well-established carcinogen, for which there is no safe level. Yet, super-premium unleaded petrol is estimated to contain 16 per cent. more aromatics than ordinary four-star petrol. Action should be taken to ban the use of super-premium unleaded petrol as it clearly poses a potentially severe health risk. An upper aromatic level should be imposed on all forms of fuel and a greater emphasis placed on the use of catalytic converters capable of removing some of the most dangerous pollutants from combustion products.

Other additives such as ethanol—alcohol—are used almost entirely to fuel cars, and, no doubt, for other purposes, in Brazil. That was once thought to be a clean fuel, but it has since been demonstrated that it produces dangerous by-products, so more work needs to be done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest and the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East have already referred to diesel fuel. Diesel was once thought to be clean, but that too has unfortunate by-products, especially particulates. One has only to go near the long line of taxis queueing at Victoria station, their engines running even though they are stationary, pumping out vast quantities of black exhaust fumes, to feel the pollutant effect. At the least it is highly discomfiting; at the worst it must pose considerable risks, especially to people who suffer from asthmatic or bronchial-related diseases, which are more noticeable in the summer.

Action should be taken to cut unnecessary queueing by diesel vehicles—buses as well as taxis—as is clearly the case at Victoria, and to encourage engines to be turned off when the vehicle is stationary. There is no reason why there should not be a limit on the number of taxis queueing at Victoria station and why engines should not be allowed to run when taxis are stationary. The problem at Victoria is severe, but an example only of the problem present elsewhere.

There is no point in monitoring or establishing standards unless they are adequately enforced. Enforcement should be checked and action taken if checks reveal that pollution is above the acceptable level. Stricter MOT tests, higher standards and better indicators should be introduced. I favour, for example, the use of constant monitoring devices in vehicles so that the driver would be aware if something were to go wrong with the anti-pollution controls. I favour the use of pre-heated catalytic converters which overcome emissions from cold engines. Specifically, I would like greater random roadside monitoring and would be keen to give local authorities new powers of enforcement via a fixed-penalty system. It would be self-financing, give extra authority to local councils and enable them to concentrate on the greatest problems.

It is important that we approach the problem from a scientific point of view. Despite all the concerns, we should not act purely on an understandable emotive reaction, but in a measured manner to tackle effectively the problems identified by scientific evidence. We need realistic, practical and sensible solutions. The Government are on course, but I encourage them to continue taking action so that we may deliver to people, especially the long-suffering dwellers of our urban areas, the clean air that is rightfully theirs.

12.18 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I agree with almost every word that the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) said, which perhaps should worry both of us—but on a subject such as this there is much cross-party agreement. I hope that when the Minister replies to the debate he will respond to some of the questions that the hon. Gentleman asked.

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that the air quality in London is disgusting. Some people believe that it is best to chew the air in this capital city before breathing it. I am fortunate enough to travel to many other European cities, so I can make comparisons. I know that that is anecdotal evidence, but the witnesses are my own lungs and if they tell me that I can breathe more easily in Paris or in New York I must believe them: it is a fact. I know that there are cities such as Tokyo and Manila in which the air quality is even more disgusting, but surely we are trying to measure ourselves not against the worst cases in the world but against some of the better examples.

To continue my odyssey for a moment, I have just returned from a visit to Antarctica, where the air quality was magic—absolutely wonderful. It throws the issues into stark contrast when one can make such comparisons. It seems funny that down in the Antarctic people are worried about the hole in the ozone layer whereas in London we are worried about the ozone at ground level. It is a pity that we cannot get the ozone to go up where it belongs and where it will be useful, instead of damaging us on the ground.

One can feel the pollution in London. I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am an exceedingly clean person. [*Laughter.*] It is true; you could eat your food off my body, Mr. Deputy Speaker—although I hasten to add that that is not an invitation. Judging by the look on your face, it would not be an invitation that you would take up were I to extend it to you. When one takes off one's shirt at night, knowing that one has bathed and showered and

everything, yet the dirt is still ingrained on the collar, one can see what the quality of the air is like in London. When we lick our lips and can feel how dirty they are—and when we have to get the dirt off our faces when we take our make-up off at night—we realise how bad the air is here.

Pollution in London has changed over the years. I am old enough to remember the pea-souper fogs of the 1950s, and so is my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). I remember those fogs well, and I must remember to ask the Prime Minister about those days, because we are both Brixton boys, although my behaviour in Brixton was somewhat more exemplary than his. We used to wait until the road was dug up, take out the tarry blocks and put them in the grate to burn. The amount of filth coming out of the chimneys made the smogs unbelievable; the 1952 smog was responsible for killing about 4,000 people.

Then Parliament took action and passed the Clean Air Act 1956. Authorities such as the London county council could take a strategic overview, test air quality and enforce the regulations, and the air quality in London improved dramatically.

Now there is a new threat, which hon. Members have already identified—the photochemical smog created by vehicle emissions. There has been an enormous increase in the incidence of asthma. At my advice surgery in Newham many parents tell me about their asthmatic kids. That may be anecdotal evidence, but it is none the less powerful. We know what is happening, and it is estimated that about 1 million Londoners are at risk of suffering from asthma. Something must be done.

In my area of the east end we live between main roads. Newham occupies three strips of land along the A11 and the A13, and the air quality there is appalling. When people go from there into the centre of London, where the air quality is equally bad, they realise how much of their time they are spending in a potentially lethal atmosphere.

I do not believe that the Government are doing enough. There is not enough co-ordination between the Department of Health, the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment in monitoring the health effects of poor air quality and in taking the necessary action to reduce emissions.

Clearly congestion and the growth of motor traffic have created many of the problems. In other cities I have also noticed that in places such as New York there are air quality reports every day. We are not given that information in London. Why not? The Minister looks as if he does not agree with me, and it is true that we are told occasionally, but only occasionally. I believe that the Minister himself suggested on the radio that we all stay at home on one particular day, because the air quality in central London was so bad.

I get the feeling that we are not being told either because not enough is known about the air quality, or because the Government know how bad it is but do not want to tell Londoners in case they are panicked into thinking that if they go out on the streets they will all drop dead. Perhaps the Minister will check on the availability of the information, but we certainly do not have the regular checks that we hear on local radio stations in the United States and other countries.

Hon. Members have already mentioned what happened at certain times in 1992, 1993 and 1994, when there were great upsurges of emergency referrals to hospitals of people with asthmatic, bronchitic and other respiratory problems caused by poor air quality. We know all about that. One has only to go out into Parliament square, especially in summer when the build-up of photochemical smog is combined with a total lack of air movement, to know how bad the atmosphere is. Visitors to London continually complain about that, and we cannot continue to ignore it.

Because the local authorities in London did not feel that the Government were doing enough, the Association of London Authorities, the London Boroughs Association and the South East Institute of Public Health formed the London Air Quality Network. That was good to see, and as a result we are now getting a far better picture of the overall quality of the air. The monitoring stations that the Government maintain are not enough, and they are also in the wrong places. Now, because of the initiative of London local authorities, both Conservative and Labour, we are getting a better picture of air quality—and it worries us. What co-operation do the Department of Transport and other Departments extend to the London Air Quality Network, which is doing such excellent work?

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East has already said what causes some of the problems. There are the clapped-out buses and the filthy taxis, for a start. There is simply not enough investment in new London buses, and we can all see the filthy buses driving around. In my day at the Greater London council when it was responsible for transport we would not have allowed buses to go around polluting the atmosphere of London. We had much higher levels of engine maintenance, and clearly those are required now, yet they are not being practised.

We need a coherent strategy for transport in London. In the United Kingdom we have one of the highest mileages per car and one of the lowest levels of rail freight. That is the problem. There are too many vehicles on the roads, especially heavy vehicles carrying goods around London.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): When my hon. Friend talks about congestion on the roads causing health problems, is he aware of the number of heavy goods vehicles that come in from the continent with a tremendous number of defects? Roughly 20 per cent. of those vehicles come from the continent with defects that are hazardous to health. Because of the congestion, is that not likely to result in more pollution-related deaths?

Mr. Banks: Yes. A test carried out in London last September or October showed that up to 20 per cent. of vehicles could not satisfy the MOT test emissions standard. There are already too many heavy vehicles on our roads because of the lack of a coherent policy for getting freight off the roads and on to the railways. All those heavy vehicles should be stopped at the port of entry and tested before they are allowed on our roads. When the Minister replies, will he tell us whether that already happens?

The hon. Member for Beckenham talked about local authorities having more power. There is a Bill now before the House of Lords which would enable local authority officers to test vehicles and, if they did not satisfy the MOT test standard for emissions, to refuse to allow them to continue their journey. Some people say that that would cause a civil liberties problem, but I do not agree. I am more concerned about my liberty to breathe decent clean

[Mr. Banks]

air. If a vehicle were not up to standard I would not simply say, "Don't drive it." I would take it down to the crusher and give it back to the driver in a small neat cube. That is one way of dealing with the problem, although I doubt that it will appeal either to the Opposition Front Bench or to the Government. I hope that the Minister does not give us his usual highly competent emollient. One knows that he is the most proficient bullshitter that the Government have, but on this occasion we want action.

12.29 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on choosing an important subject for debate. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, and I remember going to see the society about seven years ago to urge it to take a stance on lead-free petrol. I was told that it thought that the scientific evidence was such that it was not necessary to do anything about increasing the use of lead-free petrol. We must think of the sea-change that has occurred since then, and we need to ensure also a sea-change in how we deal with health problems in urban areas.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest said that this is a complex subject. It is no coincidence that, as we speak, a symposium is taking place, organised by the Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene, on the sustainability of a healthy environment. We cannot have enough debate about the health implications of traffic and all the many problems that have been debated this morning. We need a debate in the media and at the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. We must heighten public awareness, and have debates among academics and scientists.

We must make sure that research is carried out, not just on pollutants but on the long-term effects of that cocktail of pollutants. We must find out what we shall be leaving for future generations. We need to have a debate with community and environmental health practitioners, and at local council level, community level and—above all—Government level. We do not just need the Government to debate—we need Government action.

We need a common agenda, and we heard a hint of that in the speeches from hon. Members this morning. We must be able to look at what goes on in the Transport, Environment and Health Departments, and also the Treasury. We must discover how to deal with the environmental problems which many of us are increasingly concerned about.

We have heard about smog, but the growing realisation of the problem is similar to that which occurred with regard to water in the last century, when it was realised that the health problems could not just be ignored and that something had to be done about them. We cannot get away from the fact that the air that we breathe in urban and congested areas—unlike the air in Antarctica—is harming us. It is not just mothers fearful for their children who are concerned, and we should not just be worried about the increasing incidence of asthma.

Simple as it may sound, we do not have a choice about the air we breathe, either in London or in other congested parts of the country. The air is polluted, but we might not know that it is polluted. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, we have neither the right to know nor the access to the information. We cannot escape the ill-effects of our air.

Those of us who are not affected by asthma or other respiratory problems may think that we have escaped the most damaging effects of pollution, a significant amount of which comes from transport. If we are not affected by it, our families are. We have heard about the rising incidence of asthma, and there is also a rising incidence of physical injury from a disproportionate number of serious accidents in towns arising from urban congestion. There are psychological problems caused by the way in which main roads have split communities and made people afraid to walk the streets freely.

The long-term damage is catching up with us, and with our children. That is why the Rio conference and all the reports which have come out since—the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, a similar report on transport and others—have been crucial. The Rio conference defined sustainable development as the ability to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. We must concentrate on that definition.

In the short time that the Minister has to reply to the debate, I hope that he will tell us what the Department is doing in respect of agenda 21, and what progress is being made towards the notion of a common agenda. Will he comment on the fact that health and environmental issues are still the concerns of separate agencies?

The Opposition and the Government differ on the Government's document on air quality, "Meeting the Challenge". We have heard congratulations from Conservative Members on the progress that the Government are making, but we do not feel that the document goes far enough. It certainly sets out policies for air quality management, but it still does not have transport policies integrated into environmental, health and Treasury strategies. That is a challenge that we all face.

Let us look briefly at the Government's record on transport. It is accepted that the Government's transport policy must go hand in hand with the roads programme. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) described the way in which development corporations are building roads, and how the extra traffic generated by those roads overflows on to local roads. It then becomes impossible to curb the growth in traffic. We must deal in the long term with the growth in traffic, as forecasts suggest that it is set to double by 2020. We must look at the effect of that on local roads.

We have heard a lot this morning about catalytic convertors, and they give us breathing space by helping in the short term. But if the current rate of traffic growth continues, we will not get the advantage from catalytic convertors in terms of air quality because they will simply be unable to keep pace.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) spoke about the enforcement of vehicle emission regulations and about cleaner cars. That may help in the short term, and we have heard about similar controls on buses and HGVs. New technology in that area has been developed by Johnson Matthey. We support that new technology, but it must be allowed to develop. Each of the improvements to air quality mentioned will not keep pace with the increase in traffic. Voluntary action and guidance—which the Government promised in a

statement released last month—is simply not enough. We need researchers, planners and transport operators to devise ways of reducing the need to travel.

It would be helpful if the Minister could tell us—we know of his Department's close collaboration with the Department of the Environment—what specific advice he is giving in respect of the planning policy guidance note 13, which will be crucial in respect of air quality management. We must find alternatives to the many short journeys that are made in urban areas.

Children and the elderly in our urban streets fall into high-risk categories, whether from respiratory illness or from injury from accidents. Statistics might show that our motorways are relatively safe, but we need drastic speed restrictions in urban areas, traffic calming and a transport supplementary grant which would give more than voluntary guidance.

There are many concerns—there is not enough time for me to go into them now—about the impact of traffic on urban areas. I shall just summarise them. We must look at the way in which children go to school. In 1970, about 80 per cent. of seven and eight-year-olds travelled to school on their own. By 1990, that figure had fallen to 9 per cent. What can we do to make our streets safer, so that children can walk to school without feeling threatened by pollution, accidents or other dangers?

Then there is the issue of cycling. I am sure that the Minister will tell us what is being done in London to improve facilities for cycling. We need traffic calming and traffic restraint measures. We cannot have just the occasional speed hump. Traffic calming must be similar to that which exists on the continent, where in some areas 90 per cent. of urban streets are properly calmed. We must examine the matter in the long term and draw up a programme to concentrate on these issues.

We certainly need tighter enforcement of emission regulations. I remind the hon. Member for Wyre Forest that, whatever the Minister might say in his reply today, there is concern about the 20 per cent. cuts in the enforcement budget. The hon. Gentleman talked about pollutants. He did not say that the Government had been remiss in failing to ensure that adequate research was carried out. Average exhaust emissions contain up to 400 different chemicals. We do not know the effects of the cocktail or what effect those pollutants will have in the long term.

We have heard concern expressed about the high levels of air pollution in London. They were graphically described by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West. It is thanks to the London Boroughs Association and the Association of London Authorities that air pollution has been highlighted so effectively. The Government say that they are serious in their intentions to tackle air quality. Does that mean categorically that when the Lords consider the Environment Bill tomorrow the Government will support the amendments to require the development of an air quality strategy to set United Kingdom standards? Will the Government welcome that legislative opportunity, for which they say that they have been waiting, to do what they said that they would do in their recent environment and transport White Paper "Meeting the Challenge"?

Unless the Government enact legislation to set clear national and local targets to improve air quality and recognise the need to provide resources to meet those targets in local authorities' standard spending assessments, how else can the work be done? Local authorities must be given a statutory duty to manage air quality.

There are many other detailed issues which I do not have time to go into. They included mass transit vehicles, to which my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East referred. All those issues must be dealt with urgently. Time is running out not only in today's debate but in tackling the health implications of environmental policy. I urge the Minister to give due regard to the important points that have been made during the debate.

12.41 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs). He not only initiated an important debate but did so extraordinarily well and made some telling points. He had an advantage over several Opposition Members who spoke in that he knew what the subject of the debate was, having devised it and spoken about it. I hope that I will not break the habit of a lifetime by attempting to answer the debate and ignoring some of the more peripheral points made by Opposition Members.

My hon. Friend referred to the proliferation of bodies involved in air quality. I understand his anxiety, which was shared by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). It is inevitable that such an issue is of interest to a great many Government Departments, local authorities, intergovernmental bodies and others. I see a virtue in that. I see no virtue in duplication or unnecessary fragmentation, but I see great virtue in many Government Departments feeling a sense of ownership of the issue of health and air quality and the elimination of unnecessary transport and offensive practices in industry or transport. That is one advantage of such an issue, which, as my hon. Friend suggested, spans many departmental interests.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) for the consistent high quality of his speech. I have had the pleasure of listening to my hon. Friend on several occasions in the House. He does a superb job on behalf of his constituents in Bromley, not least on this occasion. He touched on all the relevant issues, to which I hope to be able to respond in the time available to me.

I cannot reply to my hon. Friends' points before I mention the speeches of the two hon. Gentlemen seated comfortably and smilingly together on the Back Bench opposite. They are a veritable Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Their humour will ever mask an absence of content. Their sceptical approach to argument is such as to amuse, if not greatly to inform. The expertise of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) needs no endorsement from me. He knows that I have a bus working group examining the improvement of quality bus services, particularly in urban areas. He makes a valuable point. I want to see that work proceed.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East gave the House a misleading impression about the status of Midland Metro. He knows, as I do, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the other day that he was prepared to advance to the west midlands between £95 million and £105 million of taxpayers' money. That means that this year the west midlands, far from being starved or any of the other words that the hon. Gentleman used, will be the recipient of more taxpayers' money in its local settlement than any other region. The local health

[Mr. Steve Norris]

authority will have to find some money. The entire assembled local authorities of the west midlands will have to find £30 million over four years. If they cannot do that, I wonder how seriously they want the project. That is the challenge that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State advanced to them. I hope that they will take it on board.

Mr. Snape: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Norris: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) left me very few minutes to deal with the debate. I am astonished that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North, who purports to speak from the Front Bench on transport issues, condemned the work of the Black Country development corporation. They dismissed with a sweep of their hand its work in improving the infrastructure of the black country. To them it is all about simply creating pollution and congestion. That is an extraordinary proposition. I wonder whether they have discussed the matter with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) or—which is perhaps more relevant—with all their hon. Friends who beat a regular path to my door and that of my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads, asking for road schemes in their constituencies.

There is a great law in politics. We are all against road building in general and in favour of the road scheme in our constituency. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East should talk to his hon. Friends who represent St. Helens, Barnsley, Rotherham and Sheffield, all of whom have talked to me in recent days on precisely that theme. It is extraordinary that a party that represents itself as responsible and even—however fantastic it may sound—as an alternative Government, has such a primitive attitude towards industry and industrial development as that displayed by those two Opposition Members today.

I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. I have no interest in his personal body habits. I will say no more on that subject. I envy him his Antarctic trip. I am sorry that I was not able to join him. He must not follow the advice of Nye Bevan, who said that he would never allow the facts to get in the way of a good argument. The hon. Gentleman spoke about air quality in London. Let me make it clear that London has available twice daily on Ceefax, and has had since October 1990, and on a free telephone number—0800 556677—a forecast for the next 24 hours on oxides of nitrogen, sulphur dioxide, ozone and benzene.

We are proud of our air quality bulletin system. We are the only country in Europe to provide information on the latter two pollutants on an hourly basis. They are both carcinogenic volatile organic compounds. So let us hear none of the nonsense that suggests that we have a deficit in our willingness to publish information. It is precisely because we are so open in our publication of information that we have stimulated such a helpful and constructive debate, in which my hon. Friends distinguished themselves.

I shall deal now with the standard setting for the pollutants that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest mentioned. In the air quality statement on 19 January, the Secretary of State for the Environment announced the national strategic plan to be established for the maintenance and improvement of air quality. Within that, there will be improvement targets for the nine main atmospheric pollutants, selected on the criteria of prevalence and harm. For each, the Government will identify a base standard to which it will be the aim of policy progressively to move and on the basis of which policy targets will be set. There will also be an alarm threshold which, if reached, will stimulate immediate remedial action. It will be the Government's objective that the targets that they are minded to adopt are achieved everywhere in the United Kingdom by 2005. The Government's programme for setting standards and targets will be speeded up, with the advisory work of the Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards—EPAQS—targeted for completion by summer 1996.

I shall now deal with the specific questions about health and urban road congestion. The forms of air pollution that are of most concern here are short-term episodes in which there is a high concentration of pollutants and prolonged exposure to raised levels of pollutants. Clearly, traffic is immensely important in all this, as I think we understand. The Department of Health has two expert committees on the subject: the Advisory Group on the Medical Aspects of Air Pollution Episodes and the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants—COMEAP—which was set up in 1992 to advise the Government on the effects on health of air pollutants in both outdoor and indoor air. There are two sub-groups of COMEAP, one dealing with asthma and air pollution, and the other dealing with particles.

In terms of illness groups, I shall deal first with cancer. Some individual air pollutants are either known or probable human carcinogens, as many speakers have pointed out. Diesel exhaust and petrol exhaust are probable human carcinogens. It is, however, important to remember that tobacco smoking is still the main cause of lung cancer as far as we can determine.

On average, levels of benzene may be slightly higher in unleaded petrol than in leaded. However, an EC directive limits benzene content in both to less than 5 per cent. The risks from either are, in medical terms, very small. Most benzene is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham said, a product of combustion rather than of the fuel itself. Virtually all the benzene in petrol is burnt in the engine. Only trace quantities occur in exhaust gases; catalytic converters remove three quarters of these trace quantities.

The views of the Department of Health committee on carcinogenicity and of COMEAP were taken into account in the recommendation of the joint Department of the Environment and Department of Health Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards for an air quality standard for benzene. As benzene is a genotoxic carcinogen, the expert panel accepted that no absolutely safe level of exposure could be defined, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham said. However, at the concentrations occurring in ambient air, there is only an exceedingly small risk to health in the United Kingdom.

EPAQS recommended the establishment of a five parts per billion standard as a running annual mean with a reduction in due course to a target of one part per billion. The results of current monitoring show that mean benzene concentrations in outdoor air are generally at or below the 5 ppb level. Annual mean benzene concentrations at the kerbsides of busy roads can be higher, but kerbside levels provide only a small contribution to total annual exposure.

The projected decrease in benzene emissions from motor traffic by 2000 will, however, reduce substantially urban background concentrations of benzene. The overall effect of policies now in place or agreed means that by 2000, the possibility of occasions when the 5 ppb standard is exceeded should be virtually eliminated. We will monitor progress and look at what further measures may be necessary.

There is some evidence that exposure to very high concentrations of smoke from diesel engines may contribute to lung cancer in certain occupational groups, but it is unlikely that ordinary street exposure would have an effect as the concentrations are far lower. Diesel emissions account for many of the particles present in urban air. The Quality of Urban Air Review Group advised in late 1993 that diesel emissions are more damaging to health than petrol emissions, although in terms of fuel economy and emissions of other pollutants, such as carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons, diesels perform rather better than petrol engines.

The debate over petrol versus diesel as an environmentally friendly fuel is immensely complex. We still do not have absolutely conclusive evidence on this, so we neither recommend nor discourage the purchase and use of diesel cars. In the Budget, the rate of diesel fuel duty was brought into line with that of unleaded petrol. Nevertheless, the problem has been referred to the COMEAP sub-group looking at the effects of particles on health.

Particulates are particles suspended in the air, which may be inhaled as we breathe. It is the fine particles, defined as the PM_{10} particles—that is, particles with an aerodynamic diameter of less than 10 microns—that are important here. They are formed during the combustion process and they may be released in exhaust emissions. In urban areas, motor vehicles are the main source of particulates, with diesel vehicles being responsible for most of the particles measured as black smoke. The Department of Health has asked for definitive advice from COMEAP on the effects of particulates on health and we await its views.

Like the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, I saw the other day the demonstration of the continuously regenerating trap—CRT—device which was launched by Johnson Matthey. It is, indeed, an exciting development which offers the prospect of a fitment for about £3,000 to £4,000 of a device that has a spectacular effect in visible terms and, I am advised, in overall terms. Clearly, it opens up to us the prospect of even tighter standards for public service vehicles.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West, my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and I have a keen interest in London. I accept the point that it is often perceived to be buses and taxis that are the major cause of concern. It is also understood by those who are concerned about these matters that buses produce about 300 passenger miles per gallon whereas motor cars produce about 20 passenger miles per gallon. On the basis of pollution per passenger mile, buses are still an effective form of public transport and are environmentally very friendly. It is clear, however, that more can be done if the technical means are available. The CRT device offers that prospect. We also have in London the metered smoke test for taxis which, I hope, will bring about an improvement. We need to look at that matter, which gives rise to a great deal of public concern.

I shall now deal with the respiratory disease of asthma. It is certainly possible that increasing traffic emissions are a contributory factor in asthma, but there is little firm evidence to back up the idea that emissions are the cause of asthma. Diet, smoking in pregnancy, passive smoking, house dust mites and other indoor air pollutants are all known to have effects. I ask for some caution before people jump to too many conclusions on this issue.

The number of people with asthma does not appear to be any greater in urban areas than in rural parts. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West mentioned the problem of asthma. I too, not many miles away from him, see a similar problem in my constituency surgery. However, I believe that one would find that even hon. Members who represent very rural areas come across this phenomenon. Interestingly enough, asthma is also increasing in countries such as New Zealand, Sweden and even Fiji which have not had a significant rise in levels of pollution. I am told that there are definable increases in asthma where there are clearly not significant rises in levels of pollution. It may simply be that there is no single cause of asthma, but a combination of genetic and environmental causes, of which vehicle emissions are one.

In deciding whether asthmatics are especially sensitive to air pollution, it is important to distinguish between factors that may induce asthma in previously healthy people and those that may trigger an attack in a susceptible individual. Medical and scientific research in that subject is regularly reviewed and new evidence is referred to the expert committees of the Department of Health and, in particular, to the asthma and air pollution sub-group of COMEAP.

Sadly, there is not time to go into the other points made in the debate. It was, indeed, a good debate on a serious issue. I am happy either to talk to or to write to hon. Members on both sides who wish to pursue some of these complex issues with me at length.

An agreed principle of traffic management in our cities must be to seek a modal shift and reduce the most polluting form of individual transport, which is deemed to be the private car. I caution that, although the Royal Commission was long on the problem, the solutions that it proposed have found remarkably few committed adherents on either side of the House or from any party. If society is serious about the matter, it has some tough decisions to make, which will affect how individuals regulate their personal lives. Traffic calming, charging people to go into cities or banning private non-residential parking are all serious measures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is now time for the debate on the Foyle Fisheries Commission.

Foyle Fisheries Commission

1 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The House will be well aware that I am not an enthusiast of this new method of conducting the business of the House, as I have long believed that the procedures that have evolved over centuries probably have more to commend them than was generally recognised. As matters develop, we shall see that we were not wise to make this change. Nevertheless, it provides an extra opportunity for Back Benchers to raise matters of concern, and this matter has concerned me for a long time.

The House will be aware that over the past year or two, and with increasing frequency of late, we have heard much praise for the Foyle Fisheries Commission in relation to its role as a cross-border body with executive powers. The impression promoted is that the organisation is universally applauded as an example of willing co-operation created in an atmosphere of good will to improve the important salmon and sea trout fishery of the River Foyle catchment area and that it has been a wonderful success.

I regret that I sought only a half-hour debate on this matter. I further regret that I must begin it by giving a thumb-nail sketch of the history of the salmon fishery of the Foyle, as that will take up some of the time available.

There is clear evidence that the salmon fisheries of the Foyle and the Bann have always been viewed as valuable fisheries. Statements are on record to show that, even many centuries ago, salmon were traded far beyond the shores of Ireland.

The House will be aware that what is now County Londonderry was created by King James I of England and VI of Scotland when he was engaged in the plantation of Ulster in the 17th century. What is not so well known is that the new county of Londonderry then formed, with the old county of Coleraine as its geographical base, was defined by listing the "ballyboes", now called "townlands", and allocating them to the various London livery companies, which had to plant English and Scottish settlers and build towns in their portions. I shall not detain the House with details, save one, which is that the salmon fisheries of the Bann and the Foyle were one of the items specifically included.

Of even greater significance is the fact that, to protect the salmon fishery rights granted in the charter that set up the county, the county boundaries included the waters of Lough Foyle up to the high water mark on the Donegal side up to the town of Liffer, now called Lifford. That is a way of saying "the tidal limit" of the lough and river estuary. The fact that the waters of Lough Foyle—a sea lough—are specifically included within the county of Londonderry is unique within the British Isles.

All Irish counties are an English creation. I could go back further and say that they are a Norman creation. Throughout Ireland, and so long as the whole island was under the Crown, no one raised any objection to the county boundary including the waters of Lough Foyle. The question of that boundary assumed importance only when the 26 counties forming the Republic of Ireland broke away from the United Kingdom in 1920. The Irish Republic has consistently laid claim to Lough Foyle, or to at least part of it. The United Kingdom, having a real need to control those waters to gain access to Londonderry port, has so far refused to surrender to that demand.

The demands of the Republic were brought sharply to the attention of the United Kingdom when the IRA sank two coal boats at the mouth of the lough in the 1980s. I could say more about that but I shall desist. The Minister might like to investigate that matter and tell us who paid the compensation for those boats.

After the Republic came into being, some persons in the Republic objected to the Hon. The Irish Society owning the salmon fishery and many ugly scenes ensued as those people began wholesale poaching of the salmon fishery. The owner then decided to seek the protection of its interests in the courts on both sides of the border, but it soon became clear that the courts in the Republic were prepared to adopt a critical attitude towards the society's royal charters, on which its claim was founded. The former secretary of the Foyle Fisheries Commission wrote that

> "The Society discovered that the Irish Free State courts refused to convict in Foyle Fisheries cases brought before them on the grounds that as questions of title were involved, the cases did not come within their jurisdiction. One District Justice in County Donegal was even reported as declaring that the Society had no fishing rights in that area."

Given the costs involved in proceeding with a title action, the society contented itself with such protection as could be provided by bailiffs and water keepers. That kept illegal netting within reasonable bounds until the outbreak of war in 1939. The price of salmon immediately rocketed. It was said at the time that one throw of a net could bring in a catch worth £100, which was a considerable sum in 1939-40. By 1947, the river had hundreds of illegal nets, to the point where 60 per cent. of the fishery was under the control of lawbreakers and poachers.

The poachers, however, claimed that they were legally entitled to fish under licences issued by the Molville Board of Conservators in the Irish Republic. I remind the House that, before the island was divided into two states, one board of conservators covered the entire Foyle fisheries area. In 1948, the Dublin High Court declared that the "branch stream", which is the portion of river between an island and the Donegal side of the River Foyle, upstream of Londonderry, was a public fishery. The result of that decision was that the salmon had no protection whatever from the Donegal-based netsmen.

In the light of that, the Stormont Ministry of Agriculture—not Dublin—decided to make a serious effort to save that valuable resource and approached Dublin to see whether a solution could be found. The solution arrived at was the Foyle Fisheries Commission, set up in Bills passed through the legislatures in Belfast and Dublin early in 1952. By that time, more than 600 nets, mainly illegal, were operating in the estuary and all the illegal nets appeared to be operated by persons resident in Donegal.

Interestingly, some of the provisions necessary for the Northern Ireland Foyle fisheries legislation were beyond the competence of the Northern Ireland Parliament and an enabling Bill had to be passed through this House—the Northern Ireland (Foyle Fisheries) Bill—the Second Reading of which was held on 3 December 1951.

Given those facts, it is clear that the Foyle Fisheries Commission was not the consequence of good will by the Government of the Irish Republic but rather the consequence of that Government's refusal to recognise the validity of the royal charters that created county Londonderry. The outcome of that was the lawlessness that erupted on that border river estuary and lough. Indeed, even to this day the Republic steadfastly refuses to accept the boundary of Londonderry, despite accepting the boundary of every other county in Ireland and all the borders that form the counties of Northern Ireland. I wonder what the outcome of this miserable episode would have been if the United Kingdom Government had insisted on the County Londonderry-Donegal boundary, as defined in the charter, instead of not even mentioning it. It was not mentioned in any of the debates that took place in either the Northern Ireland Parliament or in the House at the time. Perhaps the Minister might spend a profitable hour reading those debates. In fact, it would not even take an hour, because those debates were very short and, unfortunately, no one took much interest in them.

The commission consists of four civil servants and a secretary—two of the civil servants are from each jurisdiction. The advisory body is, frankly, dominated by commercial netting interests. The balance of advantage of the commercial exploitation of salmon is significantly in favour of the Republic. The House should remember that the salmon fishery is reputed to be the richest in Europe. The balance in favour of the Republic is evident from the statistics, which show that, in 1994, 138 net licences were issued to people resident in County Donegal and only 32 to people living in Northern Ireland. For statistical purposes, the catch of all the nets is split equally between the Republic and Northern Ireland—that is nonsense, because that gives a false impression as to who reaps the benefit.

On the other hand, most of the rod fishery is in Northern Ireland, as the facts demonstrate. In the Republic, salmon rivers total 49 miles in length, draining 195 square miles. That represents the River Finn system, made up of the Rivers Finn and the Reelan. That system is of interest for a further reason because it is the only one that carries a run of spring salmon in the whole Foyle system. That is quite remarkable and no one can explain it.

The spring fish that run the Finn are not, of course, subject to netting pressure because they are already in the river before the nets start to operate. That means that in Northern Ireland, where there are 440 miles of river, draining 1,118 square miles, it is the stock that runs into those rivers in June, July and August that provides the bulk of the commercial catch. No one in government circles seems too anxious to discuss that. The figures show that the interests of the Republic and Northern Ireland in the fishery are different. The Republic's main interest is in commercial netting and the benefits from that. The interests of Northern Ireland are mainly in local recreational angling, of a high standard, and the possible exploitation of that angling for tourism. The latter will prove rather more difficult than some people imagine because of the question of angling rights on the various rivers and streams, many of which are owned by the Irish Society to this day and leased.

When the reports of the commission are examined, it is clear that the illegal fishing, which was the root cause of the creation of the commission, did not disappear at once. I do not speak of the normal up-river, small-scale poaching, which plagues all salmon rivers to some extent, but of the large-scale netting operations in the estuary and, to some extent in the lough. I have only glanced through some of the commission's reports, but they reveal that, in 1976, many poachers were operating in the Carrigans area in Donegal, to the extent that there was a complete breakdown in law and order.

In 1980, the Carrigans-Lifford area was the source of most of the problems; in 1985, two members of the commission's staff needed hospital treatment after being attacked by masked men in the Lifford area. In 1986, the majority of the problems once again arose in the Strabane-Lifford area. By 1990, the poachers were using CB radio. In 1991, a substantial number of unlawful fishing incidents were recorded. I hope that the House takes note that the problems were Donegal based and all occurred in the same area that gave rise to the problem in the first place—around the branch fishery area on the Donegal side.

I have also looked at the reported legal net catches from 1963 to 1992 and averaged them over five-year periods. The averages show that, in 1963-67, an average of 120,585 fish were caught; in 1968-72, an average of 99,250 fish were caught; in 1973-77, an average of 54,587 fish were caught; in 1978-82, an average of 45,815 fish were caught; in 1983-87, an average of 43,628 fish were caught and in 1987-92, the last year for which I have a report, 46,072 fish were caught. In other words, in the past 20 years, the legal catch has been consistently much less than half of what it was in the period immediately before that. The illegal catch is, of course, unknown and therefore the effect of the total catch on stocks is impossible to determine. I will not explore the problems that that raises for the organisation of the fishery and for deciding how much we can take out of it.

I did not seek the debate to condemn totally the commission's efforts; rather, I have tried to make clear the simple fact that it was created because the Irish Republic behaved abominably from 1920 to 1952. The commission was a mend-and-make-do exercise, which has had a measure of success in constraining poachers. Furthermore, the commission is composed of four civil servants and a secretary—it is not in any sense democratic. Anglers have always complained that their opinions have carried little weight in the decisions taken by the commission. The advisory body has simply been held in derision by the vast majority of anglers in Northern Ireland. That is not surprising, as Mr. Hadoke, a former secretary of the commission, describes it as follows in his brief history of the salmon fisheries of the Foyle:

> "The Council is elected every three years in accordance with the current regulations and comprises representatives of riparian owners, anglers and netsmen. The Council being purely an advisory body does not directly influence the activities of the Commission but it serves the purpose of permitting the users of the fisheries to give their opinions on matters connected with the Fishery."

In other contexts we have described that as an opportunity for the locals to let off steam.

Those who have praised that cross-border executive body as an excellent example of what can be accomplished seem to have scant understanding of its origins and how it is structured and controlled. Far from being a model for a cross-border institution, it is a first-rate example of what we should not create. It is a warning to all those who are unwise enough to believe that the Irish Republic acted out of concern for the welfare of the fishery rather than through an attempt to gain a

[Mr. William Ross]

measure of control over what was and still is a United Kingdom asset. It was in its genesis, and in its method of control, a tiny forerunner of what is currently being attempted over a far wider area.

I could say much about the way in which the commission has tried to fulfil its duties in regard to salmon and sea trout. The whole question of other freshwater coarse fish, the eels and the shellfish in the lough could be discussed. The recent changes to the commission could also be considered, but they are not the issues to which I wanted to draw the House's attention today.

On this occasion, I simply wanted to explode the nonsense of using the commission as a model for cross-border executive bodies, for it is the worst possible example.

1.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): I congratulate the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) on his success in the ballot and on his choice of subject. I doubt whether he has another peer in the House for knowledge of fisheries, in particular salmon fisheries in the Province of Northern Ireland.

The Foyle Fisheries Commission has been in existence since 1952. It was established by corresponding Acts passed by the Northern Ireland Parliament and the Republic of Ireland. Under the terms of the legislation, the commission has responsibility for the management of the fishing rights in Lough Foyle and the tidal waters of the Rivers Foyle and Faughan. It also has responsibility for conservation, protection and improvement of salmon and inland fisheries throughout the rivers of the Foyle catchment and the adjacent sea area from Malin head in County Donegal to Downhill in County Londonderry.

I would contend that, since its inception, the Foyle Fisheries Commission has had a history of considerable achievement. It has provided a commonsense, lasting solution to the protection and management of salmon stocks in a major cross-border catchment. It has operated effectively and has gained acceptance throughout its area of responsibility.

The commission has achieved good runs of salmon into the rivers in recent years and unprecedented levels in the past two seasons. As the hon. Member for Londonderry, East said, it has achieved considerable success against poachers. I refer especially to statistics from 1993, when 640 nets were seized and forfeited, 55 boats were seized and forfeited and 207 successful prosecutions were brought. Recently, a new high-speed patrol vessel was commissioned. It is under construction, and it is hoped that that will be available for the 1995 season.

My noble Friend Baroness Denton of Wakefield wrote to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East on 27 January 1995 about the powers of the Foyle Fisheries Commission and the benefits that have accrued to Northern Ireland as a result of its operations. For the information of the House, I shall outline those powers and refer to some of the benefits.

The commission has powers to make subordinate legislation to regulate management, conservation, protection and improvement of the fisheries of the Foyle area. Subordinate legislation made by the commission requires the approval of, first, the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland and, secondly, the Minister for the Marine in the Republic of Ireland. In consequence, it cannot introduce measures that are unacceptable to the responsible Minister in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

The commission also has power to enforce the provisions of the Foyle Fisheries Acts and the subordinate legislation made under them. In exercise of those powers, the commission may take legal proceedings against a person through the courts of the jurisdiction in which he resides, irrespective of where in the Foyle area an offence is committed.

As for the benefits accruing to Northern Ireland, the commission was established against a background whereby it was impossible to secure proper protection and management of the salmon stocks in the Foyle system, due to jurisdictional considerations.

Those problems were not confined to Lough Foyle or the open sea, where there was no agreement on the international boundary line. They extended to enforcement problems associated with detecting and making people amenable to the law for fishery offences in those significant areas of river that form part of the international boundary.

Mr. William Ross: That is the very matter that has always been in contention: that, under the charters creating the county of Londonderry, it was up to the high-water mark on the Donegal side to the town of Lifford. Has the Minister forgotten that? When the coal boats were sunk at the mouth of the Foyle, the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher, permitted the Donegal authorities to salvage them.

Mr. Moss: I confess to being ignorant of the fact that those boats were sunk at the mouth of the Foyle, but no doubt I shall be apprised of that situation fairly soon, if not in the next half hour or so.

I was referring not simply to where the boundary goes in the lough, but to the River Foyle on the way between Londonderry and Strabane, where the international boundary goes down the centre of the river. It was impossible to police fishing, because one could nip to the other side of the river, stick one's rod in and avoid being accused of taking the wrong fish.

Mr. Ross: I have taken the precaution of reading the charter, which is the key and which is at issue in international law between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. It is the charter that sets up the county of Londonderry.

Mr. Moss: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but there has been dispute, as he acknowledged, about the international boundary since the 1920s. He has also argued that it was for the people who established the border at that time to reach a proper accommodation. I do not know whether they forgot to include the boundary out to sea in the lough; all I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that history tells us that there has been dispute about that lough for the past 70-odd years, and at least the Foyle Fisheries Commission has brought about some sense and some organisation to salmon stocks in that lough and in the rivers that flow into it.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I thank the Minister for giving way, but he may not be familiar

with all the constitutional background. It was the legislation of the House which, in 1920, defined Northern Ireland as being the "parliamentary counties of Londonderry", and the charter defines those parliamentary boundaries. Therefore, as a Member of the House and a Minister responsible for that region, it is his job to vindicate it—not the job of some people in other times. It is his job today to vindicate the boundary as extending to cover, within Londonderry, the whole of the river and the whole of the estuary.

Will he take account of the main burden of my hon. Friend's speech—that the operation of the charter has favourod netsmen in Donegal rather than the people for whom he should have a responsibility?

Mr. Moss: I shall discuss the hon. Gentleman's second argument in a moment. In answer to his first argument, it seems to me that those people who, in the 1920s, determined the international boundary between the two states either forgot or ignored the boundary out to sea in the lough. I do not know what happened in 1920, but there has been dispute about that boundary and that border ever since. The Foyle Fisheries Commission has brought some semblance of order to an extremely difficult position.

The benefits accruing to Northern Ireland extend to not only enforcement problems but measurement of salmon stocks in the estuary and the river system. Due to the geography of the Foyle system—as the hon. Member for Londonderry, East said—Northern Ireland derives a disproportionate share of the benefits arising from angling exploitation of salmon stocks, as most of the rivers in the Foyle system lie in the Province. Fish-counting stations on the River Mourne and the River Faughan, located upstream of all commercial nets, recorded 27,000 salmon migrating up those rivers in 1994. Allowance is made for fish entering the River Roe, in which I know that the hon. Member for Londonderry, East has a specific interest. In the past, he has invited me to participate in that interest. Whether he will extend the invitation after today I do not know, but he has an interest in the River Roe.

If one adds all those rivers together, one obtains a measure of an angling resource made available to the Province, which has been a result of the operations of the Foyle Fisheries Commission.

In answer to the second argument of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), it is true that 138 of 170 commercial fishing licences issued by the commission in 1994 were issued to fishermen resident in County Donegal. I have inquired into that, because it would appear that there is a striking imbalance in the number of licences issued, but although there is an upper limit on licences—obviously, some control must be exercised—people from the Province of Northern Ireland do not apply for licences at anything like the same rate. There must be a difference of culture and tradition.

Although the commercial catch in 1994 was 38,854 salmon, the number of salmon entering the rivers in the system would have at least equalled, and probably exceeded, that number when allowance is made for the rivers on which counting facilities are not available.

My noble Friend Baroness Denton recently announced the restructuring of the Foyle Fisheries Commission and a significant extension of its functions.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East mentioned the KPMG report and local representation on the commission. He alluded to the advisory council, which has been in existence for some time and which was established by legislation. That is being broadened and strengthened as a result of the report, and an executive committee is to be established in the advisory council to enable it to play a much more meaningful role in the direction of the commission. The executive committee will regularly meet commissioners to discuss the main strategy issues relating to the conservation and development of fisheries in the Foyle area. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will see the establishment of that executive committee as a strong move in the direction of local representation.

In her announcement, my noble Friend talked about the committee's remit, which is currently limited to salmon and freshwater fishery matters. Subject to the introduction of the necessary legislative amendments, it will in future have responsibility for a much wider range of functions, particularly in Lough Foyle. They will include the licensing and regulation of shellfish exploitation and marine agriculture, and the regulation of sea fisheries in the lough.

Lough Foyle has considerable potential for shellfish production, and the development of that potential has been hampered by the jurisdictional uncertainties over the lough. As with salmon, placing responsibility for shellfish and marine—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Time is up.

Robin Hood Railway Line

1.30 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I shall start by giving a brief explanation of the Robin Hood line. I recognise that the Minister will know the details, but other hon. Members may not.

The Robin Hood railway line is being constructed in three stages. It was instigated by Nottinghamshire county council with the assistance of the district councils along the route of the line. The plan is to provide a regular rail service from Nottingham city, through Ashfield and Mansfield and, finally, to link in with the existing railway in Worksop. It will serve a corridor that takes in about 750,000 people in an area of the country which everyone would agree has been one of the worst hit by colliery closures.

The line serves an area of high unemployment and it will assist in the region's economic regeneration. It will relieve congestion, both along its corridor and in the city of Nottingham. It will reduce accidents on the roads and move people from road to rail—from car to public transport—in a positive way. It will do so not by road pricing or the regulation of cars, but because people will recognise that it is the best form of transport for that route. In social, economic, health and environmental terms, it is a winner.

Stage 1 of the line, which was opened in 1993, is already a success. Before that, market research had suggested that patronage of the line would increase steadily—and double—over a five-year period. As often happens, the market researchers were proved wrong. In the first year of the line's opening, its patronage was double the expected figure. The five-year figure was achieved within one year, and the patronage has been maintained despite problems such as the signalmen's dispute, which interfered with the operation of the line.

Just this week, the patronage figures reported to the executive group dealing with the line show that there is now a weekly average of 10,000 trips. One does not need to be an expert on transport, an accountant or a statistician to recognise just what impact that will have on the county of Nottinghamshire and the city of Nottingham. Those who use the service are travelling safely and arriving at their destination quicker. Those who do not use the service are finding less traffic on their routes and less difficulty with parking. Those in the city of Nottingham are experiencing the benefits of fewer cars and less pollution.

Stage 2 of the line was commenced under an agreement between Nottinghamshire county council and Regional Railways Central in March 1994. In April 1994 the British Railways Board was split into two companies by the Government, and the problems began. I have instigated today's debate to highlight the problems for the future developments of the Robin Hood railway that have been caused by extra costs, both capital and revenue, which are all outside the county council's control. A large proportion of the problems has arisen because of rail privatisation.

To stress the urgency of the problem I shall quote from a report of this Monday, 6 February, of the Robin Hood line executive group sub-committee. Paragraph 9 states:

"Railtrack have informally indicated that a guarantee of additional funding to meet the capital cost shortfall of up to £2.6 million will be required from the county by April/May. Without such a guarantee, they say they would have to halt works because of the financial implications of their contractual commitments with the BR infrastructure units engaged on Stage 2 track and signalling."

If the money cannot be guaranteed, the work on the line will stop.

I want to thank the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), who is now Minister of State for Defence Procurement and the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), the Minister for Transport in London, who have taken a personal interest in the line. I hope that by the end of today's debate, when I have heard his reply, I shall be able to thank the Minister for Transport in London even more.

Today's debate is not about privatisation—we had that last night. I do not agree with privatisation and my opposition to it is recognised, as is the Labour party's opposition to it. I do not want to criticise Government officials—I have nothing but praise for the officials at the Department of Transport, who have had many helpful and positive meetings with the county council, Railtrack and the regional director of the new regional integrated offices, and who still express support for the scheme in principle. They recognise that the position has changed dramatically in a way that could not have been foreseen and are exploring possible mechanisms for applying for extra funding for stage 2.

However, I have some worries about some of the correspondence. First, the correspondence seems to suggest that there is no acceptance that some of the extra costs have been caused by privatisation. The suggestions have come not from officials, but from leading politicians. Secondly, even if there is a recognition of the reasons for the extra costs, the Government may not respond positively because Nottinghamshire is not a passenger transport authority and does not have a passenger transport executive. Thirdly, there are difficulties with funding for stage 3 and other transport initiatives identified in the Greater Nottingham rail development strategy, such as the Greater Nottingham light rapid transit system—a unique partnership between Nottinghamshire county council, Nottingham city council and the private sector.

Mr. Howard Jackson thought that it might be worth while lobbying the Chancellor of the Exchequer as he was his local Member of Parliament. I need quote no more than the first two sentences of the letter that the Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote in reply to Mr. Jackson. It states:

"Dear Mr. Jackson,

Thank you very much for your recent letter about the mounting costs of the Robin Hood Line. I do not accept that these costs are in any way related to the privatisation policy."

The Chancellor of the Exchequer goes on to ask questions about how much the scheme is costing council tax payers and whether the council is wasting money on silly schemes—it is that sort of letter.

It does not surprise me that the Chancellor should wish to dismiss the idea of the extra costs of privatisation. When we discussed the Railways Bill in Committee, the Government, the Chancellor and some of the Ministers promised that privatisation would result in savings, but that does not seem to be so. Capital costs are increasing by £2.6 million and everyone accepts that the budget has exceeded the sum anticipated. British Rail and Railtrack have some questions to answer on the total sum. The figures produced by Eurolog, a leading consultant on the

subject which has conducted a risk analysis of the project for the project manager employed by Railtrack's major projects division—not by the county council—leave one in no doubt. They showed the biggest extra cost. I have the report entitled "Robin Hood Line, Stage 2, Project Manager's Report to Nottinghamshire County Council " in front of me. It points out that more than £1 million—one third of the total capital costs—of the extra cost results from the privatisation and reorganisation of British Rail.

That increase is not peculiar to the Robin Hood line project. The report includes a general analysis of cost increases in BR projects. The Robin Hood line, with a 15 per cent. increase in cost, is doing quite well. Eurolog's general analysis suggests that the cost of most projects has increased by 25 per cent. Appendix B of the report spells out those costs: the cost of maintaining organisation headquarters increased by 5 per cent.; finance, warranty, risk and profit increased by 7 per cent.; and staff fixed overhead costs increased by 10 per cent. Most significant costs were caused by privatisation—by accountancy changes, contractual arrangements and new profit margins.

That is not just Eurolog's view. I have received a letter from Robert Horton, who I believe is still in charge of Railtrack, in which he says:

"I must stress that these charges are as a result of Railtrack being separated from British Rail following the implementation of the Railways Act 1993.

I think that spells it out very clearly. He continues:

"While this results in some increases in our management charges because of the more complex arrangements, the vast majority of increases arise directly from the increased prices from our suppliers who remain part of British Rail".

I am not interested if the Minister chooses to claim that those costs are not related to privatisation. For the purposes of this debate, I merely wish to identify the costs that have resulted, not from the development of the scheme, but from changes in Government policy. I am quite happy for the Minister to call them something else. He may say, for example, that there is a new accountancy regime and that the money will be recycled. However, he must accept that the costs have not resulted from the project development.

The problem has an added dimension because revenue costs, as well as capital costs, will increase. In a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the director of planning and economic development says that the increase in costs can be attributed to privatisation. He goes on to say:

"With regard to operating costs, under the 'old regime' it would have cost the County Council £125,000 per annum including cover to hire a 2 car Class 150 train from Regional Railways Central. This was a commercial charge including depreciation and interest charges. We are now informed by the Train Operating Company that the latest indicative leasing charge received from the Rolling Stock Companies . . . for a 2 car Class 150 train is £256,000 per annum including cover."

That is an increase of more than 100 per cent. in leasing charges. As the county council was told by the then Minister for Public Transport and the present Minister of State for Defence Procurement, the right hon. Member for Kettering, that it could not purchase the trains but had to lease them, it has no choice but to meet that increase. Railtrack has also informed the council that access charges will increase substantially due to the change in charging principles, profit margins and increases passed on by BR.

I do not care what the Minister calls those increases. However, they are significant increases for the Robin Hood line project which the council cannot be expected to bear alone. That brings me to my point about Government responsibility for the extra charges.

I refer the Under-Secretary of State, who is in the Chamber, to his letter of 23 December to Nottinghamshire county council. The second paragraph on page 2 states:

"You also suggest that Nottinghamshire should be treated on the same basis as the Passenger Transport Authorities when it comes to funding of any cost increases brought about by privatisation. There is, however, an important difference. The PTAs and PTEs have statutory responsibilities in relation to the provision of rail services, and it was only reasonable that they should receive compensation for the increased cost of discharging these responsibilities."

In other words, passenger transport authority areas will receive compensation, but Nottinghamshire will receive nothing because it is not a PTA. That response would be fair enough if it were not for the fact that that aspect of privatisation was brought to the attention of the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Kettering, during the passage of the Railways Bill.

A letter sent to me by the head of strategic planning and transport prompted me to raise that issue. He said:

"One key issue (agreed by all commentators) is the lack of any shire county recognition in the Bill. This seems deliberate because there is a difference to PTEs/PTAs. Admittedly the PTEs have a statutory role in providing rail support for their areas . . . but even when the subsidy agreements end and are replaced by the new regime, the Bill still gives PTEs a 'planning' and consultative role . . . which they think is inadequate. This omission specifically in relation to Nottinghamshire is worrying, particularly since Nottinghamshire is the biggest urban area outside the Metropolitans; indeed the County Council's initiatives on Rail and LRT puts the County in the 'big league'."

I will be brief because I want the Minister to have an opportunity to reply to those points. In response to that letter, the Minister made some very reassuring noises in Committee. I must admit that I was fairly reassured and I thought that the Minister had made some sort of commitment to examine the situation after the Bill became law. However, when I read what the Minister said in an attempt to nail down a commitment, I found that he did not say that at all.

In a letter to the leader of Nottinghamshire county council, the Minister said:

"The fact that Shire Counties are not given the same powers as the PTEs in the Railways Bill should in no way be taken as an indication that the Government is not mindful of the valuable role that the Shires play in promoting public transport in their areas. We are keen to preserve local authorities' powers to support local rail services. Indeed, for the first time we are making clear in legislation the status of local authorities and PTEs as 'competent authorities' under EC legislation for the purpose of paying PSO grants."

I found the Minister's answer to the letter very reassuring, however, it now seems to be far from the reality of the situation.

I am worried not just about the Robin Hood line; I am also concerned about future transport initiatives. I can see my county and my city being disadvantaged by the fact that the area is not a PTA and I would be happy if the Minister would make it a PTA. In light of local government reorganisation, I am concerned about how future initiatives like the Robin Hood line will advance. How will stage 3 of the Robin Hood line go forward? How will the Greater Nottingham light rapid transit system develop?

[Mr. John Heppell]

I am concerned about the other services being developed as part of the Greater Nottingham area rail development strategy, such as the Nottingham to Ilkeston line, the Nottingham to Bingham, the Nottingham to Sandiacre and the Nottingham to Gedling services. All of those developing local services will be disadvantaged because the rules work against Nottinghamshire but not against PTAs.

1.48 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on having secured this debate on the Robin Hood railway line. He has always been assiduously interested in railway matters. I had the dubious pleasure of spending several months of my life in Committee considering the Railways Bill, and that pleasure was added to by the presence of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends the Members for Streatham (Mr. Hill), whom I am happy to see in his place, and for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping), who I know is interested in this line.

Let me say on a very sad note that I did not have the opportunity yesterday to extend my personal sympathy to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), who has suffered a grievous personal loss. I know that he would have been here, and I welcome the opportunity to express my personal sympathy. I note that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport was able to do so yesterday on his own behalf.

I am interested in and supportive of the general concept of railway improvements such as those to the Robin Hood railway line. One could call it a de-Beeching process, and I have been heartened by the extent to which much of my work is concerned not with closure orders, but with proposals for the opening of lines up and down the country. In London, we have the East London line, which, in effect, will bring back into use a piece of line that exists all but for track and trains; fortunately, the main infrastructure is complete. We have a good example of that in today's debate.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Nottingham, East will not mind me saying that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), and others of my hon. Friends representing Nottinghamshire have lobbied me assiduously about the line. I pay tribute to all the local representatives of all parties who played a part in raising its profile.

I might, of course, be tempted to make a mild political point were I not conscious of where I am standing. If I were to make that mildly political point, it might be to point out that the town of Mansfield—which has a population of more than 100,000—lost its passenger railway in 1964. That was the result of a study instigated by the previous Conservative Government and implemented by the then Labour Government. For the next 30 years, Governments of both persuasions—but notably Labour Governments—did absolutely nothing to bring back into use the line of which the hon. Member for Nottingham, East speaks so supportively and persuasively. I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that a Conservative Government have provided resources to bring the railway back to life. I know that the hon. Gentleman, with his customary fairness, will wish to acknowledge that and I am happy to put it on record.

Mr. Heppell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Norris: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not mind if I do not allow him to intervene.

We all agree entirely that the Robin Hood railway line is a valuable addition to the rail network. Let us look briefly at the success so far. Stage 1 opened in May 1993 between Nottingham and Hucknall and Newstead. The Bulwell station opened in May 1994. I was pleased that the Department contributed some £367,000 in supplementary credit approvals for that purpose.

Construction of stage 2 is now well under way, but problems on site have meant that the work is now running several months behind. We all agree that the engineering task was considerable. The total line from Nottingham to Mansfield is 19 miles.

While I do not wish to detract from the achievements, stage 1 was the easy part; it involved bringing an existing line up to passenger standard, when it had formerly been used only for freight traffic. There is no line at all between Newstead and Kirkby in Ashfield and the engineers have had a task not dissimilar to that of the great railway builders of the past age. Rather than constructing a tunnel, they have had to clear the old Kingsway tunnel of the colliery shale which had been deposited there. It was quite a challenging engineering task.

Unforeseen ground conditions at the portal to the tunnel meant delay to the bulk earth works and that was later exacerbated by the prolonged rains last November. Working on a railway line is, of course, not the same as building a road. There is a limited number of accesses to rail link sites, which makes it difficult to increase activity dramatically to make up time.

I should say something about our commitment so far to the reopening of the line. It is fair and square in line with our policy for traffic decongestion and encouraging a shift away from the private car towards public transport. The hon. Member for Streatham will know that I am signed up to that policy, as he is. We share a great deal in this area. It means buses as well as trains and light rail schemes where they represent value for money.

The public response to stage 1 of the Robin Hood line has been encouraging and, with park-and-ride facilities at the new Sutton Parkway station, there is further encouragement for people to leave their cars behind, either at home or at the station.

We are currently providing £6.5 million towards stage 2, £2.55 million of which is in the form of a section 56 grant. Such grants are available only for projects of exceptional merit for reasons of size, or, in this case, of a cross-boundary nature, where it is right to spread the costs beyond one local authority. That grant is justified primarily in terms of benefits to non-users—in other words, the traffic congestion benefits—and on the ground that the costs associated with those benefits cannot be met directly from revenue.

The hon. Gentleman has highlighted a number of difficulties affecting the scheme. The first involves capital costs. Nottinghamshire county council notified us that the cost of the full scheme has now risen from £16.6 million to £19.1 million.

I should explain that the construction of stage 2 is being managed by Railtrack's major project division under the guidance of Railtrack's midland zone, which is the sponsor, and that the value of the work is around £9 million. The civil engineering contract for the rail link, but not covering the track work and signalling, is the responsibility of Nottinghamshire county council and its own contractors on site.

It is the work on the rail link that has caused slippage to the project for the reasons that I have already explained. That has affected Railtrack's own costs and a contingency has been allowed within the £2.5 million increase for an extension of the signalling installation work within the present contract end date. That, in turn, means extra supervision and project management costs.

Despite what the hon. Gentleman said about spiralling costs, I think that he understands that they are not solely, or even mainly, the result of railway privatisation. Clearly, there are costs associated with the restructuring of the railways, but they are very much outweighed by previously poor estimating, some changes to the scope of the project and contingencies.

Over the past months Railtrack has attempted to regularise the position, establishing proper contractual relationships so that each party knows the amount being charged for the work carried out. They have moved, as far as possible, to a position of fixed-price contracts, where possible by competitive tender, given time scales and other constraints. The objective has been to give the county council as much confidence as possible over the anticipated final cost of the project.

My Department is in close touch with the county on the project and my wish to see stage 3 through to a successful conclusion is undiminished. In many ways it is the key element to the entire scheme.

We acknowledge that there is a funding gap and we have asked the county council to submit further information so that we can consider all the implications. I hope that, with continued co-operation, it will be possible to deal with the current difficulties.

The hon. Gentleman referred to increases in operational costs because of rolling stock leasing and track access charges. We have already accepted—I made this point to the county council—that the changes could affect the financial performance of the new service. I told the council that if the effect proved significant, it should be brought out in the further documentation that we have requested, and we would then reconsider the funding position and the split between grant and borrowings.

In regard to track access charges, I understand that the five-year operating agreement with BR to expire on 31 March 1998 was deliberately intended to give a degree of shielding from full charges during the initial period. My Department was not a party to that agreement, but it is one that the county council and the British Railways Board, and subsequently Railtrack, negotiated. Future infrastructure charges will be subject to the scrutiny of the Rail Regulator.

Stage 3 would take rail services to Worksop. Funding for local authority transport capital investment is made available through transport policies and programme. On the basis of TPP bids, a decision is taken on resource allocation and we normally make an announcement in mid-December.

In that context, we now have in place the package approach. Packages are essentially about a coherent local transport strategy for the area concerned. Nottinghamshire has done well in that respect. I pay tribute to that and £1.6 million has been allocated to the Greater Nottinghamshire area package for 1995-96.

Nottinghamshire included stage 3 in its TPP bid on the basis that work could commence in late 1996. It might be argued, therefore, that any bid for funding was premature at this stage. We have told Nottinghamshire county council that we are not able to fund stage 3 this year as a value for money case has yet to demonstrated, but it is open to the county to make a bid in its next TPP for resources in 1996-97. Incidentally, those bids are expected by 31 July each year.

We would like the county council to carry out some more work on the scheme appraisal, which currently shows a significant shortfall not covered by the decongestion benefits. Although we will be happy to work with the county council over the coming months, and stage 3 is relevant, we must concentrate on completing stage 2 satisfactorily in the next few months.

I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern about different treatment between passenger transport authorities and his own authority. He was right to quote from my letter to him of 23 December. As I stated in that communication, PTAs and PTEs have statutory responsibilities as against those of transport and highway authorities, which have in this sense discretionary responsibilities. It would be unreasonable to place too much reliance on that as an argument for dealing in a fundamentally different way with infrastructure that ultimately will serve the same markets and people doing the same things. I indicated that I am prepared to examine that aspect but I do not want to set hard and fast rules now, except to say that it is clearly of importance to a scheme of this sort.

I share many of the aspirations of hon. Members representing constituencies in the area in question, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling has found time to join me on the Front Bench as an indication of his own concern. I will certainly look at the matter again.

Yorkshire Water (Textile Industry)

2 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I am pleased to have this opportunity to raise an issue of great concern to a number of firms in my constituency and throughout Yorkshire—the reception charge that Yorkshire Water intends to introduce for receiving trade effluent and sewage. Coming as it does on top of existing high charges, it will hit the textile industry—particularly dyers and finishers. Other industry sectors will be similarly affected. Dickinsons Dairy of Holmfirth, well-known producers of yoghurts and creams, also faces a large increase in charges.

My constituency contains a significant number of textile companies, many of which have written to me. I can do no better than quote a letter from Mr. S. H. Gledhill, joint managing director of James Dyson Ltd. in Linthwaite near Huddersfield:

"As a small company employing 50 people, following a management buy-out in 1989, we have improved our performance through the recession with the co-operation of our work force and a vigorous sales campaign. Over this period we have received swingeing increases from Yorkshire Water, well in excess of published inflation figures. We have, of course, introduced tighter control of effluent and also made capital investments to meet the National Rivers Authority and EC legislative requirements. Maintaining business in highly competitive times is extremely difficult and only so much can be absorbed through improved efficiency . . . Our current annual bill is around £36,000 and after three years this will be increased to £96,000, a rise of 150 per cent. Because the proposed increases are so high, businesses are likely to be affected detrimentally when trying to pass them on to their customers. As you are no doubt aware, retailers are very resistant to paying any increases at all at the present time."

Companies affected by the new charge will receive no new or additional service. It is based simply on the volume of effluent discharged into the sewer. Yorkshire Water justifies the new charge on the grounds that it is getting industry to pay a proper share of waste treatment costs and that domestic customers are currently subsidising industrial customers.

Yorkshire Water and Ofwat have failed totally to provide facts or figures to substantiate those claims. Out of the blue and without consultation, Yorkshire Water wrote to trade customers last November saying that the new reception charge would be 15p per cubic metre in 1995-96, rising to 33p the following year and 50p in 1997-98. Yorkshire Water, no doubt in response to the furore that it created, told local companies this week that the charge will be 10.1p per cubic metre the first year and phased in over five years. We have made some progress, but the cost in the first year alone will range from £5,000 for a small firm to £60,000 for a local firm, Brooke Dyeing.

Once the full charge is introduced, the additional cost will range from £18,000 to a massive £245,000 for Brooke Dyeing. That successful textiles company employs 300 people at four sites within a five-mile radius of Meltham. Finding an extra £245,000 is a tall order for Brooke Dyeing, as it is for any company.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Does my hon. Friend agree that the new reception charge, which is being implemented without consultation, comes on top of millions of pounds of investment in effluent plants by the Yorkshire textile industry over the past two or three years, to conform with the regulations that my hon. Friend mentioned?

Mr. Riddick: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Yorkshire Water has moved the goal posts and created difficulties for companies. My hon. Friend emphasises the action taken by local firms.

The consequence of absorbing Yorkshire Water's increased charges could be a reduction in employment at the firms affected and in the money available for investment. I find extraordinary the arrogant manner in which Yorkshire Water simply informed its customers of the new charge and that Ofwat appears to have been perfectly happy to go along with it without properly scrutinising Yorkshire Water's proposals.

One of my constituents told me, "If I treated my customers the way Yorkshire Water treated us, I would lose their business." Yorkshire Water may have felt able to behave that way because it has a monopoly—but that is why the Government introduced the existing regulation system. Ofwat exists to ensure that water companies do not abuse their monopolies.

Yorkshire Water claims that 12 per cent. of sewage comes from traders but that they contribute only 1 per cent. to the costs of the sewerage system. The Yorkshire branch of Ofwat says that only a small number of industrial customers account for 40 per cent. of Yorkshire Water's sewage but are not paying 40 per cent. of the cost of disposal. No evidence has been forthcoming from Yorkshire Water or Ofwat to justify those claims, which are not entirely consistent.

Local industrialists stress that they entirely accept the "polluter pays" principle but are not prepared to tolerate a massive hike in trade effluent charges without full and proper justification—and that has not been forthcoming. Industry believes that it pays its fair share. It appears that Ofwat almost connived with Yorkshire Water in the way that the reception charge was introduced. In a letter to me dated 20 December 1994, Yorkshire Water's director of water services stated that the proposals were discussed with the Director General of Water Services, who

"'does not approve them' but satisfies himself that any undue discrimination element has been removed."

However, on 22 December, the chairman of Ofwat's customer services committee wrote to me, saying that he had asked Yorkshire Water to attend the committee's next meeting

"to explain the reasons for its change in charging policy."

He added that he awaited a clear statement from the company on the rationale for its rebalancing exercise. Does the Yorkshire branch of Ofwat not know what its head office is doing?

To be fair, I received a letter this morning from Eric Wilson, who heads the Yorkshire branch of Ofwat and is clearly concerned.

Mrs. Peacock: It is a bit late for that.

Mr. Riddick: Exactly as my hon. Friend says. I thought that the regulator's purpose was to ensure that water companies behave properly and reasonably. If that was the case with Yorkshire Water, Ofwat should have acted to ensure that the industry was properly consulted and had time to adjust to the new charges, and that all the information on which the new charge was based was made available. Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm

that Ofwat has a responsibility to ensure that water companies behave reasonably towards industrial customers? Is he in a position to tell us why Ofwat did not ensure that Yorkshire Water consulted widely on the new charge?

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his account of the difficulties faced by companies in his constituency, and of what appear to be the inadequate responses of the regulator, suggests some fundamental weaknesses in the way in which Yorkshire Water, as a monopoly provider in the area, has been set up and the powers of the regulator? Will he be demanding the evidence which I agree is necessary to prove that domestic consumers are footing the bill and that, as he suggested, many companies are getting off lightly? Does he believe that the figures should be made public by the regulator?

Mr. Riddick: I have made it clear that I think that Ofwat has fallen short in this instance. It clearly has a responsibility to ensure that Yorkshire Water does not exploit its monopoly position. To that extent, I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Yorkshire Water has a monopoly only in Yorkshire. Yorkshire textile manufacturers could move their businesses to Scotland where they would find skilled and able people and where Scottish Water does not impose an effluent charge. Scotland wants to attract the textile industry. My hon. Friend has secured this debate because Yorkshire cloth is world renowned. It is the benchmark by which all other cloth is measured—there is nothing to compare it with. In one sense, therefore, Yorkshire Water does not have a monopoly. It will simply drive careful business men to other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Riddick: My hon. Friend makes a telling point although, fortunately, Yorkshire has many other assets to make it an attractive place for investment. However, I entirely accept my hon. Friend's point.

In the textile industry, orders are often booked up to 12 months in advance. The industry heard only last November of the new charge to be introduced from April this year and therefore had only six months in which to prepare itself for a wholly unexpected additional cost.

Local companies have been faced with significant increases in trade effluent charges in recent years. The charges for the current year—1994-95—went up by 11.1 per cent., well above the rate of inflation. That was because, in March 1993, Yorkshire Water informed the industry:

"Tariff adjustments are being made to ensure that our different customer groups contribute their fair share towards the cost of each service. This re-balancing is taking place over a three year period."

The industry suddenly finds itself being subjected to another rebalancing exercise and one has to ask what went wrong with the previous one. My information is that, once Yorkshire Water's reception charge has been fully implemented, its effluent discharge charges will be either the highest or second highest in the country.

The Confederation of British Wool Textiles said that, because the reception charge is based on volume, the incentive for the industry to reduce pollutant concentration will be destroyed. In support of the claim that industrial dischargers are not paying their way, Yorkshire Water says that domestic effluent is easier to treat than industrial effluent. Yet the confederation has pointed out that Yorkshire Water's own figures disprove that. They show that the average chemical oxygen demand for domestic and industrial effluent is 965 mg per litre whereas dyehouses only effluent is in the range 400 to 700 mg per litre.

The head of Yorkshire Water's trade effluent section admitted at a meeting of the CBWT that Yorkshire Water needs trade effluent to dilute domestic effluent which tends to be more solid. I do not want to offend the sensibilities of any hon. Member by going into more detail, but it is an important point. These are the type of issues that Yorkshire Water should have discussed with its customers. Ofwat should also have ensured that they were debated properly before the new reception charge was imposed.

Most people accept that large treatment plants operate more efficiently than small plants and that individual companies do not have the financial resources or the space to install their own effluent treatment plants. The CBWT made the point that it would have been in everyone's interest if Yorkshire Water had tried to work with the industry to establish a few large treatment works rather than the present number of smaller units. This has not happened because Yorkshire Water, apparently with the green light from Ofwat, has not consulted the industry properly.

I have a suggestion to make. When we privatised British Telecom and British Gas it was felt that it would be very difficult to introduce competition in those two industries because it was not possible to duplicate the infrastructure that was already physically in place. However, since privatisation, we have achieved just that and the new Gas Bill takes that process much further. Has my hon. Friend's Department considered the possibility of introducing more competition in the sewerage industry? If not, perhaps it should do so.

I suppose that the textile industry in Yorkshire should be grateful for small mercies. As I said, companies have now been informed that the reception charge to be introduced from 1 April is to be 10.1p per cubic metre, not 15p as originally notified. Yorkshire Water has also now said that the reception charge is to be phased in over five years rather than three. That will make the new charge slightly easier for companies to cope with, but it is still a massive additional cost for them to bear. Yorkshire Water has refused to tell companies whether the final charge will remain at the originally proposed 50p per cubic metre.

I believe that Yorkshire Water and Ofwat should re-examine the trade effluent reception charge. Is it really necessary? Let us have all the facts and figures out in the open so that companies can judge for themselves. If they are indeed not making their proper contribution, local companies will not be able to argue against the proposed new charge although they would still argue, justifiably, that the charge be phased in over a longer period.

Of course, I am well aware of the need to keep charges to domestic users as low as possible. I do not believe, however, that Yorkshire Water's recent treatment of local companies which, after all, create many jobs for our constituents, can be justified. I therefore hope that, as a result of this debate and the representations made by many people and many local companies, the proposed reception charge will be reviewed and postponed and introduced only if and when it has been justified.

2.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) for having raised this matter and for having done it so delicately. I thought for a moment that it was going to be diverted into other pipelines. The central issue is the effect of the impending charge, or change in the charge, by Yorkshire Water and its method of charging for the handling of trade effluent. I shall deal succinctly with a few points, trying to miss some of the more scientific ones and, shall we say, the diagnosis of the differences in density between types of sewage. We can leave those for my hon. Friend to take to the meetings, which I am sure will take place.

My hon. Friend asked directly whether I could confirm that Ofwat has a responsibility to ensure that water companies behave reasonably to industrial customers. I can confirm that but feel that it needs a little expansion. The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) briefly mentioned Ofwat's responsibilities. Ofwat has a duty to ensure that the interests of every customer, domestic and commercial, are protected in respect of the fixing and recovery of charges and other terms on which all the services are provided.

As my hon. Friend is obviously well aware, Yorkshire Water—unlike all other water companies—currently has a system of standing charges for trade effluent. It now proposes to return to a system more related to the "polluter pays" system that it used until the mid-1980s. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that that will ultimately prove more equitable, and it is along the same lines as the arrangements used by all other water companies, some of which also have textile manufacturers in their areas—competitors, in other words. From the point of view of Ofwat—and ultimately, I am sure, from the House's point of view—that approach must be fairer to all other trade and domestic users in Yorkshire, and to textile industry competitors elsewhere in the country.

As ever, the impact of the changes on traders will not be uniform. I understand that approximately 30 per cent. of trade customers may well gain from them, while 40 per cent. will face increases of perhaps 50 per cent. over five years. Regrettably, 9 per cent. of traders will face an increase of more than £10,000—at 1994-95 prices—over the same period. That means that the majority of traders will either gain from the changes, or face an increase of no more than £500.

As my hon. Friend will know, the main gainers will be the domestic customers who are currently effectively supporting the textile industry. As predicted, while those who have been hit by the proposed charges—and some have been hit quite hard—are protesting loudly, the gainers are conspicuous by their silence.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend telling us that specific reductions will be made in the bills of Yorkshire Water's domestic customers?

Sir Paul Beresford: I do not think that my hon. Friend is as naive as that. Surely she appreciates that it is a case of relative or proportional costs. I detect by her smile that she does.

As I was saying, the gainers have been conspicuous by their silence, but I suppose that that can be put down to human nature. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, however, the biggest difficulty for the industry has been the lack of sufficient warning before the announcement. It is in that connection particularly that I side with my hon. Friend and others who have spoken, and it is in that connection that my hon. Friend seeks some action by Ofwat.

Ofwat has, in fact, already intervened in compliance with its duty to the water industry's customers. As my hon. Friend pointed out, in seeking explanations from Yorkshire Water, Ofwat has succeeded in persuading it to phase the introduction of the reception charge over five years rather than the three originally proposed. Furthermore, the prospect of today's debate stimulated Yorkshire Water to act: the company has written to my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, who is responsible for water, saying that it will take account of the industry's problems and consider the possibility of phasing in the reception charge over a number of years. It would appear, therefore, that while Ofwat has prised open the door, my hon. Friend and others have now enabled traders to approach Yorkshire Water directly through that door.

My hon. Friend asked whether additional competition could be introduced. I can reassure him that we are keen to introduce more competition in the water industry where appropriate, and a number of measures in the Competition and Service (Utilities) Act 1992 will facilitate that. We are continuing to consider possible ways of increasing scope for competition. It must be sensible to take advantage of every opportunity to promote fair competition, which will benefit all customers, whether domestic or commercial. If hon. Members feel that they have a contribution to make after the dust resulting from this small issue has settled, I shall be delighted to receive suitable suggestions. I emphasise the word "suitable".

One of the advantages of the "polluter pays" approach on one hand and protests over costs on the other is that the combination sharpens attitudes to conservation and efficiency on both sides of the discussion. Today's debate has, I believe, contributed to persuading Yorkshire Water of the need for improved efficiency; and a progressively fairer allocation of costs may persuade some of the larger textile industries in particular to consider recycling, or at least to examine ways of reducing usage. I was interested by the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson)—who has now disappeared—but I fear that the idea that major industries will up sticks and move to Scotland may be pie in the sky.

My hon. Friend has used the debate to concentrate our minds constructively on resolving the issue. I believe that that will eventually lead to a fairer system, and encourage efficiency and conservation. Like the rest of the country, we are rightly moving towards a "user pays" system: as I have said, Yorkshire Water has used that system in the past, and it is currently employed by all other water companies.

We must accept that the extent and abruptness of the rise in charges has come as a commercial shock to some traders, especially in the textile industry. The attack launched by my hon. Friend has opened the door, and ensured an improved response from Yorkshire

Water. I encourage him to continue his campaign of persuasion, and in particular to campaign for more competition in the present system. It is a difficult task; such competition must be reasonable and must reflect the mixed needs of domestic and trade users of sewerage and water supplies.

Ofwat has taken appropriate action, both in persuading Yorkshire Water to lengthen the phasing-in period and in persuading it that its current arrangements are unfair to the majority of users. Today's debate has inspired action from Yorkshire Water and forced it to listen further; I hope that that trend will continue.

Mr. Riddick: I find it rather surprising that Yorkshire Water's announcement came out of the blue, and that apparently there was no proper consultation between the company and Ofwat in the preceding months. If there had been, surely Ofwat would have told the company that it must talk to the industry about the charge. Can my hon. Friend shed any light on the discussions that took place before November?

Sir Paul Beresford: I cannot do so directly, but I look forward to my hon. Friend's report of discussions with the Office of Water Services and Yorkshire Water. The introduction of more competition means that, of course, new systems will have to be commercially sensitive. Today's debate and some of the cross reactions and words—made with some justification—will warn water companies to ensure that they think twice before charging too promptly into action.

It being twenty-eight minutes past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Martyn Jones to ask Question 1—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] My goodness, what a bad start—I call Mr. Gunnell to ask Question 2.

Invest in Britain Bureau

2. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total Government funding for the Invest in Britain Bureau for (a) 1992-93, (b) 1993-94 and (c) 1994-95; and how much of that sum in each year was made available in total to the regional development organisations.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The totals for my Department's programme expenditure on inward investment in those three years are £7.8 million, £8.8 million and £10.6 million respectively. Those include grants to regional development organisations of £5 million, £6 million and £7.2 million.

Mr. Gunnell: In setting the 1995-96 budgets, will the President of the Board of Trade recognise the excellent partnership between the Invest in Britain Bureau and the regional development organisations? Does he agree that investment successes, such as the recent attraction of a Korean company to north Yorkshire, are due to companies seeing themselves as entering the European Union and that pandering to the sceptics is potentially damaging to our continued inward investment success?

Mr. Heseltine: The House should have no doubt at all that the remarkable success in attracting inward investment into the United Kingdom is due to the UK being seen as the most effective place to trade, invest and manufacture in the European Union and the Government are determined to keep it that way. That is why we are so opposed to the Labour party policy of introducing the social chapter.

Mrs. Peacock: I welcome the figures given by my right hon. Friend on the Invest in Britain Bureau. Does he have figures for investment by British companies in British industry? Is he aware that in my part of west Yorkshire, millions of pounds have been invested in manufacturing, new jobs and new technology since 1983?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The figures could be easily provided and are in the public domain. The latest forecast by the Confederation of British Industry showed growing intentions to invest further, which is much to be welcomed. There has also been very widespread investment by British companies overseas.

Mr. Wigley: Will the President of the Board of Trade clarify whether the figures that he mentioned include any contribution to the Welsh Development Agency in view of the work that that agency does? If his figures did not include any such contribution, is he confident that the WDA is receiving adequate resources for its important work, which is of general benefit not only to Wales but to the UK despite cuts in its budget and the fact that it now has to fund its activities by selling off its assets?

Mr. Heseltine: Everyone is aware of the remarkable success of the WDA under this Government and the inward investment that it has attracted. The Invest in Britain Bureau acts as an umbrella organisation across the entire United Kingdom. Although the regional development organisations are specifically located in England, there is an interplay between the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales and myself: put the whole lot together and we are attracting a far and away more advantageous share of inward investment than any of the other European Union members.

Gas Care Services

3. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to ensure that British Gas will continue to maintain its free gas care services for the elderly, disabled and blind.

13. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will meet the Gas Regulator to discuss the future of services to gas customers who have disabilities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Charles Wardle): British Gas has made it clear that it will not cut the services that it offers to the elderly or disabled, and that it will not introduce charges for such services. The forthcoming Gas Bill will provide that all suppliers make special services available to those groups of customers.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a 15 per cent. cut in the price of gas in real terms since privatisation, even after allowing for the recent increase in VAT, and that customers have therefore had an extremely good deal from British Gas? In those circumstances, the interests of those in society who are less able to look after themselves—the old, the disabled and the blind—should be fully protected. Will my hon. Friend do all that he can to ensure that those interests are fully protected both now and, above all, under the new Gas Bill? When the industry is deregulated such services will come under further pressure.

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend is right about the fall in gas prices; he will also know that the standing charge has fallen by 28 per cent. in real terms since privatisation. British Gas is not cutting special services. It was made clear in the consultation document last May that all suppliers of gas would have to offer such special services, and that obligation will be written into the Bill which will be published shortly.

Mr. Jones: Why can the Minister not guarantee that British Gas will continue to offer the sort of free service currently available to the blind and disabled? We have heard rumours that under the new regime the company will charge blind people up to £25 for the privilege of having their meters read. Can the Minister guarantee that there will be no additional charges for disabled or blind people?

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman should not listen to such rumours or stir such mischief. He knows that British

Gas provides the special services to about 1 million customers, at a cost of about £30 million, and that the company has no intention of charging for them.

Mr. James Hill: My hon. Friend will be aware that the gas companies are very capable of helping in the regions, especially in connection with the arts, culture, the support of orchestras, and so on. Clearly there is much good will in the British Gas corporation, but will my hon. Friend ask it again to dispense with the myth that heavy penalties may fall on the elderly, the disabled and the blind?

Mr. Wardle: I am happy to confirm yet again that there will be no such penalties. It is also worth adding that safety remains of paramount importance to British Gas. The company has recently spent more than £1,000 million on replacing pipelines in the interests of safety, and routinely spends £100 million a year on safety checks and measures.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: But Michael Alexander, the director of public gas supply, has said that he cannot guarantee the special services unless there is a level playing field. Paragraph 6.11 of the Minister's discussion document says that obligations to elderly and disabled gas customers are a matter for debate; the document also says that it may be unnecessary to retain prescribed levels of service. If the Minister thinks that he can pretend otherwise, he is a nitwit.

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman is in more than usually excited and excitable form. I hope that he will bear in mind what the consultation document says—that a condition of the licence that gas suppliers will need before they can supply domestic consumers is that they must offer such special services. So who is the nitwit?

Small Firms

4. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of new businesses started up in 1994 were small firms employing 20 people or fewer.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): Almost all the 450,000 businesses started up in 1994 had fewer than 20 employees.

Mr. Rathbone: My hon. Friend's answer illustrates the Government's success in helping small businesses to start up. Can he give an indication of the numbers employed in those firms and what benefit those firms had in establishing themselves from our membership of the European Union?

Mr. Taylor: Last year was the first for about four years in which there was a net increase in the number of firms, with a rise of about 24,000. That suggests that we have a strengthening economy, which is one of the best factors for encouraging small businesses to perform. Membership of the EU is also important in terms of widening the home market. The Department of Trade and Industry continues to give considerable attention and support to small companies, particularly those involved in high technology. We have launched and adapted the Smart and Spur schemes, which are targeted at smaller companies bringing forward new ideas and technology.

Mr. Bell: The Minister could have said more about small firms, but he did not have the opportunity. We lost 55,000 small firms in 1993, and one in three small firms goes to the wall every three years. Is there not still a finance gap which means that small firms are not getting long-term finance, a skills gap which means they are not getting the core skills, and a government gap because there is no proper statutory definition of a small firm? Will the Minister promise the House and the small business community that we shall have that definition?

Mr. Taylor: I am not sure that small firms are particularly interested in statutory definitions—they are interested in success. The hon. Gentleman's own definition shows that two out of three firms do survive, and it is important to remember that starting up a business is a risk. The Government must get the economic climate right, and that is what we are doing. We must also target innovative schemes, providing support through business links and special loan facilities where the normal banking arrangements perhaps cannot function, and we must encourage companies to tackle the new high-tech challenges with entrepreneurial spirit. I think that the Government have a good record, and the hon. Gentleman might reconsider the tone of his question.

Mr. Harris: The economy of west Cornwall is absolutely dependent on small firms. While I welcome and agree with what my hon. Friend said, does he recognise that many small firms are coming under increased pressure as a result of the current revaluation? Will he have discussions with the Department of the Environment and with the Inland Revenue, which carried out the revaluations, and look at the basis of them? I can assure my hon. Friend that they are imposing a tremendous burden on small firms, despite the transitional relief that the Government have introduced.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend knows that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has taken that into account. The Government realise that revaluations can be difficult, and therefore transitional arrangements were brought in. I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government office for the south-west is alive to the difficulties faced by companies in that region and has targeted particular help to them. Some of that help has been targeted through European Union structural funds. I believe that those schemes are now bearing fruit. Any company in the south-west that is concerned about the schemes should contact the Government director, who will provide further information.

Takeover Bids

6. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many successful takeover bids have been notified to him in the last five years; and what information he has on the number of takeovers in Germany during the same period.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): There is no requirement for takeover bids to be notified and we keep no records of successful bids. Over the last five years, around 1,000 mergers qualified for investigation under the Fair Trading Act 1973, while more than 7,000 mergers were notified to the German competition authorities.

Mr. Wareing: I believe that there are more than 40 contested takeover bids per year in Britain, compared with fewer than 40 in a decade in Germany. Is not the

ease with which takeovers can take place in this country a basic reason for the short-termism and the lack of investment in British industry? What are the Government's proposals to deal with this? For example, they could restrict the voting rights of shareholders or—more importantly, so far as I am concerned—they could set up supervisory boards on which workers could have a say. What happened to the Dorrell inquiry set up by the Government?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman's perception of the distinction between the German and British systems is incorrect. Under German rules, all takeovers must be notified. In Britain, some 2 per cent. of qualifying mergers which are considered by the competition authorities result either in the bid being blocked or in undertakings being required, compared with only 0.5 per cent. of those examined in Germany.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the features of a free market is that the Government do their level best to keep out of the natural coming together and breaking apart of businesses unless a monopoly is being created? The Opposition should be exposed: they believe that the Government should be involved in every one of the mechanisms, thus distorting the market.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right that the mere fact that a bid may be hostile is not a reason to refer it. The Government's view is that competition is the primary factor that should be the subject of examination. Of course, where necessary, the public interest also has to be considered by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Dr. Moonie: Is the Minister aware of growing anxiety in the medical research community about the takeover of Wellcome by Glaxo? Has he sought any assurances from Sir Richard Sykes about the level of research in both companies following any proposed merger? What advice will the Department give to the European Union when the bid is submitted to it for reference?

Mr. Evans: I shall not pre-empt the outcome of the issue, which may be considered by the appropriate competition authorities. I am sure that in those circumstances the hon. Gentleman will make his representations clearly. The Government have a record that is second to none on support for the medical research community.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend confirm that many of Britain's most successful companies today are the result of takeovers and bids in the past? Does he agree that that is an integral part of the dynamism of a successful market economy? Does not the original question to my hon. Friend demonstrate how little the Labour party understands about market economics?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right. Furthermore, from the responses that I have given, my hon. Friend will have noted how wide of the mark the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) was.

East London

7. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to provide assistance to the London borough of Redbridge and include it in initiatives to help the regeneration of east London.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Partnerships in the London borough of Redbridge will be eligible to compete again this year for support for new projects in the second round of the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Gapes: Does the Minister know where the London borough of Redbridge is? From his answer, it appears that he has no idea. Is he aware that all the surrounding boroughs in east London are included either in the initiatives by the President of the Board of Trade for the east Thames corridor or in the Lea valley programmes? My borough of Redbridge has received not a penny from single regeneration budget projects. Is it not about time the Minister recognised that in my constituency one in seven males are unemployed and 11.2 per cent. of the population are unemployed compared with the national average of 8.5 per cent.? Why do we not get support in Redbridge when we need it?

Mr. Wardle: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is yes, I do know where it is, but I wonder whether he does, and also whether he realises that the London borough of Redbridge submitted five outline bids for the first round of the single regeneration budget but chose not to put any of them in as final bids.

Mr. Evennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Thames gateway provides tremendous opportunities for Redbridge and other boroughs north of the Thames and for boroughs such as mine in Bexley, south of the Thames? Does he agree that co-operation and enthusiasm from the Opposition as well as from business men and Government is needed to get the project off the ground?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend is right. I am sure that he agrees that it is a pity that the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) did not sing the praises of the London East training and enterprise council and its schemes, which provide help to Redbridge through a local office which also covers Waltham Forest. The hon. Gentleman should also, perhaps, have talked about the merits of the London business link network, which is developing as it should.

Regional Electricity Companies

9. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice his Department has given the Office of Electricity Regulation on mergers and acquisitions of regional electricity companies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None.

Mr. Marshall: I thank the Minister for that curt and short reply. Does he agree that the recent bid for Northern Electric highlights the weakness of the Government's position in terms of seeking to foster regional electricity companies that are responsive to local need and intent on fostering a regional identity? If he accepts that, how does he intend to ensure continued ministerial and

parliamentary control over electricity policy? Will he refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission as a number of his hon. Friends are urging him to do?

Mr. Evans: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will give careful consideration to all aspects of the specific case raised by the hon. Gentleman before announcing his decision in due course. I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that when the Director General of Fair Trading gives his advice to the President of the Board of Trade, he takes account of all relevant factors including any views that may be forthcoming from the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Mr. Brooke: Before we become immersed in a series of possibly irrelevant issues, does my hon. Friend agree that if the bidder for Northern Electric was within the European Union the only consideration to which the bid would be subject would be competition? If a British bidder is involved, would it not be sensible for the same conditions to apply here?

Mr. Evans: My right hon. Friend will understand that the decision will be taken in accordance with the statute and with the practice followed by the President of the Board of Trade in relation to all such matters. My right hon. Friend will understand that it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Mr. Beggs: What assessment has been made of the likely impact of the acquisitions and mergers of regional electricity companies on the ultimate price that industrial users of electricity have to pay? Does the Minister agree that highly priced electricity is most likely to damage our existing industries and that it threatens our ability to attract inward investment?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that one factor to be taken into account by the President of the Board of Trade in the case in question will be the views of the Director General of Electricity Supply. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the regulator is given specific powers in this area.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I do not wish to draw my hon. Friend further, but does he accept that many Conservative Members hope that this particular bid will be referred to the commission?

Mr. Evans: I note the views expressed in those measured tones by my hon. Friend. I assure him that all views expressed in relation to this matter will be given appropriate and detailed consideration.

Dr. John Cunningham: Is the Minister clear that the powers of the regulator will be sufficient to safeguard consumers' interests if a succesful bid takes place, whether for Northern Electric or for any other regional electricity company? Is he satisfied that sufficiently effective and transparent accounting procedures will be put in place to ensure that any new owner of a regional electricity company will not be able to drain finance out of it for other purposes? Is his Department now satisfied that there is no question of insider dealing being involved in the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric?

Mr. Evans: I do not wish to pre-empt the decision to be made by the President of the Board of Trade on this. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the powers given to the regulator. Those powers were given by the Government to protect the interests of consumers and the right hon. Gentleman would be well advised to recall that.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that if regional electricity companies were immune from takeover they would have less incentive to become more efficient? Will he confirm that Trafalgar House has said that if it acquires Northern Electric consumers will receive a 30 quid bonus? Should we not consider the consumers rather than the esoteric views put forward by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham)?

Mr. Evans: I am well aware of the views expressed by my hon. Friend, which are among a range of views expressed to the President of the Board of Trade on this. My hon. Friend will understand, however, why I shall not comment further on whether those views will ultimately prevail.

Coal Privatisation

10. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken or intends to take to protect local authorities from the effects of coal privatisation in relation to opencast mining sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The regulatory regime established by the Coal Industry Act 1994 affords substantial protection to third parties, including local authorities.

Mr. Hood: The Minister will know that the Dalquhandy opencast site in the Clydesdale constituency is the largest in Europe and that the cost of restoration will be at least £15 million. Having had a ministerial meeting with representatives of the council, he is also aware that the Government refuse to acknowledge that the Coal Industry Act 1994 transfers liability for that restoration directly from the Government to the local authority without consulting the local authority during the process of the Act or the restructuring agreement negotiated with the new co-owners. Will the Minister, first, answer the eight questions that he promised to answer when we met on 12 January and, secondly, even at this late stage underwrite the terrific cost, which could not be borne by the local authority? That cost would bang up the local authority and devastate the local community.

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman has raised a number of questions in correspondence and at a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. I assure him that those matters are being dealt with. The Coal Industry Act 1994 gives the Department of Trade and Industry powers to ensure full continuity from British Coal to the successor companies, which have the same rights and obligations as British Coal. Planning consent and the enforcement of planning conditions remain matters for the planning authorities. With regard to the hon. Gentleman's concern about the ability to meet obligations for opencast sites, the Department checked carefully the financial status of the successor companies as part of the bid process.

Mr. Dover: Does my hon. Friend agree that, far from seeking protection, many local authorities welcome privatisation and particularly the selling off of

non-operational land such as Ellerbeck, an opencast mine near Chorley, which will enable the environment to be improved?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will be aware of this morning's debate, which dealt with precisely those subjects and in which some of the points that he has just raised were made.

Mr. O'Neill: The Minister has yet to give concrete assurances. Companies which have acquired mining rights in the UK—Budge and, in Scotland, Mining (Scotland) Ltd.—are narrowly based companies which do not have great resources. As they have been given massive responsibilities for opencasting, there must be some arrangement whereby local authorities are protected. The Minister has not yet come forward with such an arrangement. It is one thing to sweep the matter aside in the privatisation process and hand it over to the Coal Authority, but as the Coal Authority has no teeth and little inclination, local authorities will have to pick up the tab if anything goes wrong. Does the Minister accept that he has a lot of work to do, and quickly?

Mr. Wardle: The Act makes the operators' obligations clear. The key point is that all purchasers of British Coal's mines were subjected to a thorough scrutiny of financial viability. The new Coal Authority is required to check the financial strength of companies to which it envisages issuing licences in exactly the same fashion.

Steel Subsidies

12. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made concerning EU member states employing subsidies in steel production; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government have made their opposition to continued subsidies to steel producers very clear both to the Commission and to other member states. We have done this at Council meetings and in correspondence. Our lobbying will continue.

Mr. Jones: Does the Minister agree that the strip mills of Llanwern, Port Talbot and the sister plant at Shotton in my constituency are performing magnificently in producing the required products? What will happen, however, when the current excellent trading conditions for steel end? What will he do at the heart of Europe to ensure that member states cease cheating by employing subsidies against the best interests of British steel and British plant? So far, it seems to the Opposition that the Government are unable and unwilling to act.

Mr. Taylor: There is an inconsistency in the hon. Gentleman's question: the credit he has paid to the current production and capabilities of the steel mills in Wales compares with the policies of the Labour Government in the 1970s, when those mills performed extremely badly. I have already told the hon. Gentleman that Ministers are taking up problems with steel subsidies in the rest of the European Coal and Steel Community at every opportunity. Yesterday, in Brussels, I met Commissioner van Miert and raised that very issue with him. An important balance must be obtained. We will do no good, however, just by screaming from the sidelines. We must ensure that we have an overall package to persuade other member countries that they should reduce their subsidies so that long-term competition in the industry, as shown by the excellent performance of British steel, will prevail. That will be achieved only through argument.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend agree that the extreme difficulty that Her Majesty's Government have already encountered in trying to persuade our European Union partners not to subsidise steel illegally would be made even more difficult if we went into a federal Europe as advocated by the Labour party, where we would have no chance of success?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend has particular views on the subject of Europe. As a Department of Trade and Industry Minister, my interest is in looking after British manufacturing. British manufacturers would find it impossible to compete in world markets if they did not perform strongly in their own home market—the European Union of 370 million people. Without strong institutions in the European Union, we would never be able to ensure that competition policies were properly put in place in other countries as they are in this one.

Mr. Wilson: Does the issue not go to the heart of Tory troubles on Europe? We have Ministers making different statements by the hour on their attitudes towards Europe, while the Prime Minister is a Euro-sceptic on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday and pro-European on a Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. What we need is action rather than words; yet when we need tough action in Europe, we throw away our ability to wield that influence in defence of our national industries because of the barbed messages that come out of the Government every hour and every day of the week.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman should pay more attention to the excellent work of Under-Secretaries of State, who are fighting for Britain day after day in the Councils of Europe. There I was yesterday, face to face with Commissioner van Miert, saying that we want a strong Commission to enforce competition policy throughout the European Union. That is the consistent line that we take and I enjoy doing just that. I am delighted to say that a Belgian socialist has an acute understanding of why it is essential to have competition policy throughout the Union. Perhaps if the hon. Gentleman compared notes with Commissioner van Miert, he might understand the subject better himself.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that the subsidies currently given to the European nationalised steel industries are a disgrace, as are the subsidies paid to state monopolies in telecommunications? Does my hon. Friend further agree that those state monopolies in other European countries are gaining some support from the thought that even the Leader of the Opposition cannot remove clause IV from the socialist constitution on the basis that the Opposition still believe that one must subsidise industries to make them efficient?

Mr. Taylor: I shall leave the problem of clause IV to the private grief of the Labour party. In the European Union, it is important to attempt to achieve common rules and regulations. One can do that only with strong Community institutions—with a strong Commission making proposals about competition policy that are enforced and then backed up by the European Court. I remind the House that, if it were not for the European Court of Justice, it would not have been possible for us

to challenge the subsidy to Air France—as we are doing—and if it were not for a strong Commission, we would not have achieved the British Airways flights into Orly against the opposition of Air France. The European Union works for Britain when we enforce the rules, and that means working with the institutions.

Mr. Hardy: The Minister will recall that, 14 months ago, the Government proclaimed it a great triumph when the Council of Ministers said that it would carefully monitor that unfair trade. However, is the Minister aware that his recent written answer to me suggests that the Government have remarkably little knowledge of the results of the work of the monitors? When will the Government monitor the monitors to ensure that we can find out whether those practices are continuing or being stopped?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman may wish us to monitor the monitors monitoring monitors. I simply want some action. We shall get action if we try to persuade other member countries of the long-term need to work towards non-subsidised industries. If the hon. Gentleman pays attention to the detail, he will realise that, in many cases, we have managed to persuade other countries, against internal political opposition, to transform the basis of the way in which they treat industries such as the steel industry. It is not an overnight success. All nations are confronted by domestic pressures, with industries that are declining. Nevertheless, the success of British steel is a sign of what could happen throughout the European Union, and domestic success is the best way for us to argue our case.

Manufacturing

14. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of future prospects for manufacturing in the north-west region.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In the competitive international market, a wide range of north-west manufacturing companies continue to win major orders. The latest economic survey by the north-west chambers of commerce provides evidence that the manufacturing and the service sectors in the region are experiencing good levels of business and are showing confidence about their prospects for 1995.

Mr. Orme: Is the Minister aware that the drastic reduction in the engineering industry in the north-west has had a catastrophic effect on the north-west as a whole, and that further redundancies are being announced at British Aerospace? What action will the Government take to offset that problem? Has the Minister considered the proposals made by the Engineering Employers Federation, which has suggested a policy of development, investment and expansion in the engineering industry?

Mr. Evans: The Government continue to engage in a wide range of steps to help the north-western economy. That economy would be helped if more hon. Members representing constituencies in the north-west spoke up for the north-west and drew attention to the fact that, even in a climate in which unemployment has decreased consistently for the past two years, the north-west has played its part, with unemployment decreasing by more than 40,000 in the past 12 months. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the number of people employed in his constituency has increased by more than 1,000 in the past two years.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend aware of the recent Lloyds bank survey, showing that north-west businesses are enjoying a record surge on order books and in profits? Does that not augur well for the future of manufacturing industry in the north-west?

Mr. Evans: I am well aware of the information to which my hon. Friend refers. Undoubtedly, he is one of the hon. Members who portrays a positive view of the north-west, which is so important for winning new inward investment to Britain and to the north-west region.

Mr. Eastham: The Minister has boasted about what he has done for the north-west. I bring to his notice the fact that, in the past 15 years, Trafford Park industrial estate, which was one of the biggest engineering estates in Europe, has become almost a ghost town. We are closing down all the rolling stock companies, cuts are being made in aerospace and the place is a complete disaster, because of the effects of the Government's policies.

Mr. Evans: I am aware of the Trafford Park manufacturing institute and its specific initiative in that district, and officials from the Department are in contact about the initiative in relation to developments in Trafford Park. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman something to set against the image that he chose to give of the north-west: manufacturing investment in the north-west in the five years between 1988 and 1992 amounted to £9.4 billion. The hon. Gentleman would do better to talk up the region than to talk it down.

Industrial Activity

16. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to increase industrial activity in the north-east region.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Overall Government assistance has created 35,000 jobs since 1986. The Department of Trade and Industry will continue to encourage local business through the business links system, through support for inward investment, and through measures set out in the competitiveness White Paper.

Mr. McWilliam: What steps does the Minister propose to take specifically to protect the manufacturing of ammunition in the north-east of England given the talks that are taking place between British Aerospace and GIAT of France, a wholly owned French Government company? That poses a threat to the royal ordnance factory at Birtley and to the jobs and the excellent work that the men do.

Mr. Taylor: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is greatly concerned for his constituency and his constituents who work at British Aerospace. It would be inappropriate for me, as a Minister, to intervene in discussions with a private sector company, but I hope that all companies, including British Aerospace, understand the importance of maintaining a presence in a vibrant north-east region. I visit the north-east regularly as sponsor Minister and have excellent meetings with Gateshead metropolitan borough council. There is an influx of inward investment and there is no sign that companies around the world have anything

other than the highest regard for the north-east. That may have a determining influence on the discussions to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Knapman: Would I be right in thinking that if a British-owned firm, such as an engineering firm in Gloucester, wished to expand its production or perhaps even export its production to Japan, no such subsidies would be available to it, but if a Japanese-owned firm wanted to set up in the north-east, several thousand pounds per job would be available for it? Is that wholly satisfactory?

Mr. Taylor: It is wholly satisfactory for those people employed by the Japanese company in the north-east. There is a constant flow of companies wishing to invest in the north-east—the most obvious recent example was the Korean company, Samsung, which is itself creating 3,000 jobs and to which another 3,000 jobs will be connected through local suppliers. That is extremely good news for the north-east of England and for Government assistance to inward investment. The north-east has benefited particularly from that, which is why the region's vibrancy is now the most striking feature I see when I visit it. I hope that when other north-east Members come to the House, they will talk up and praise what is happening in the north-east so that more and more people in the House appreciate the region.

Electricity (Standing Charges)

17. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will discuss with the Electricity Consumers Committee the benefits of abolishing standing charges to customers on low incomes.

Mr. Ian Taylor: That is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply and for the regional electricity companies, which must decide how best to structure their charges.

Mr. McAvoy: As electricity companies can afford share options worth £23 million to the executives and directors of National Power and PowerGen, does the Minister agree that those companies should use their profits to abolish standing charges, which would go a long way towards offsetting the extra cost of VAT on fuel imposed by the Government?

Mr. Taylor: For a start, the hon. Gentleman should know that electricity prices have been falling, which has been more than offsetting the cost of value added tax to the consumer. Secondly, it is within the remit of the regional electricity companies to abolish standing charges if they so wish—the Merseyside and North-Western electricity board has done so. Thirdly, in nearly all cases, standing charges have been frozen for the past two years, and where that has not happened, they have been reduced. I hope that the example set by Eastern Electricity only yesterday will be copied in other parts of the country.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my hon. Friend confirm that many executives who are leading the nation's privatised electricity companies are performing extremely well? Electricity prices have fallen in real terms and they are likely to continue to fall. Will he confirm that the executives at the head of our privatised utilities earn a lot less than many of those who contributed to the Leader of the Opposition's fighting fund in his bid to lead his party?

Mr. Taylor: The job of senior management in any company, including electricity companies, is to run that company and ensure that it makes a profit which ultimately can be reinvested to improve services. As the electricity companies have clearly improved services since privatisation, senior management can be congratulated on those grounds. How they are remunerated is a matter for them and their shareholders.

Mr. Stevenson: The Minister said that standing charges have been frozen and have not increased, but does he realise that, in the five years following privatisation, standing charges in the Midlands electricity board area increased by no less than 33 per cent? Does he also realise that standing charges have not been frozen but have increased through the application of value added tax? Standing charges have nothing to do with the use of electricity and they hit those people on low incomes the hardest. When will the Government stand up for those on low incomes and intervene to remove standing charges?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman should remember that the overall decline in electricity prices included standing charges. In the past two years, prices—even in the Midlands area—have been effectively frozen.

The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the help that is targeted on those who are most in need and he should also realise that, if standing charges were abolished, the cost would have to be recovered by changes in consumer pricing based on consumption. Many people have high levels of electricity consumption because of the way in which their houses are heated, and they would be penalised. The argument is not quite as simple as the hon. Gentleman makes out.

Coal Privatisation

18. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the reduced R. J. Budge bid prior to the privatisation contract from English pits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Adjustments to RJB Mining's bid reflect developments since tenders were submitted in September 1994, or otherwise information which was not available to bidders at the time. The price paid by RJB Mining is still substantially higher than other tenders.

Mr. Skinner: How on earth can the Government justify the fact that a bidder for the English coal industry put in a bid of approximately £900 million, which was accepted as the highest bid, but the Department of Trade and Industry then reduced the bid to around £800 million? In other words, the Government have ripped off the taxpayer by £100 million.

If that practice occurred in local government, the councillors who accepted a bid and then reduced it by that kind of percentage would be surcharged and kicked out of office. The bid should be investigated and, what is

more, there should be an investigation of the Department of Trade and Industry which has allowed this sordid episode to occur.

Mr. Wardle: If the taxpayer has been ripped off anywhere, I suspect it is in the form of the £20,000 million in taxpayers' money that has subsidised the industry since 1979.

The hon. Gentleman must know that it was always intended to adjust tender prices to reflect developments that took place after the tenders were submitted. It is not a static situation and there was a reduction in all the successful bids. In any case, the price paid for the English bids was considerably higher than the other tenders.

The hon. Gentleman should remember that 28 deep mines which were owned previously by British Coal are now owned in the private sector. The hon. Gentleman has contributed to that process by shouting for more subsidies, resisting change and resisting the realities of the competitive world in which we live.

Mr. David Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that since we privatised the coal industry we have created jobs in that industry day in, day out? Does he further agree that when that lot opposite were in government during the 1960s and 1970s, they closed 325 pits at the cost of 250,000 miners' jobs? That is what that caring, sharing Labour party did.

Mr. Wardle: How could I possibly match my hon. Friend's eloquence and persuasive force? He is absolutely right. Those 28 deep mines are now in the private sector and they have the best chance they have had for years to prove how competitive they can be.

Mr. Clapham: Is the Minister aware that, out of the blue, the supervisory unions in the mining industry have been told that the industrial death and retirement scheme will be wound up? It is a scheme to which they have contributed and which has £2 million in funds. Can the Minister tell us why the scheme was not carried over under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981? What will happen to the £2 million in funds?

Mr. Wardle: Employment contracts for those whose jobs were transferred to the new enterprise are protected by TUPE, as the hon. Gentleman appreciates. The new industry-wide pension schemes are required to provide benefits no less advantageous than those provided by the mineworkers' scheme and by the staff superannuation scheme.

Trade Associations

19. **Mr. Page:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to ensure that only a single trade association liaises with each industrial sector.

Mr. Heseltine: As I made clear in a speech at the CBI last week and on other occasions, I want to see powerful, well-resourced and effective trade associations which represent the interests of all within their sector. To encourage that process, I have said that officials should refer to me only proposals or representations from a lead association in a sector.

Mr. Page: I thank my right hon. Friend for that positive response. Does he agree that, without one umbrella lead trade association in a sector, the Government would receive only a host of confused and muddled messages? That would waste the time of officials and Ministers getting those diverse messages and, worst of all, those trade associations would be doing a disservice to their members by not putting their views coherently to the Government.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend has taken great interest in this important subject and I agree with him. There are too many trade associations. Many are too small and under-resourced. If they are to represent their members effectively to the Government and the European Commission with a wider audience, there is room for rationalisation and we in the Department of Trade and Industry are doing what we can to encourage that.

Inward Investment

20. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of jobs created or safeguarded by inward investment projects during 1994.

Mr. Heseltine: According to figures notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau for the financial year 1993-94, almost 30,000 new jobs have been created and some 69,000 jobs safeguarded as a result of inward investment. Figures for the financial year 1994-95 will be available in June.

Mr. Congdon: I welcome those figures. Does my right hon. Friend agree that companies choose to invest here because of the favourable economic climate that has been created for business with flexible labour markets and a positive approach to deregulation? Would not all that be put fundamentally at risk if we imposed the unnecessary burdens of the social contract on businesses in Britain?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is a surge of inward investment into Britain because it is perceived that it is the best place within the European Union in which to locate both service and manufacturing activities and, I am delighted to say, an increasing number of company headquarters and research and development facilities. With the Government's policy of maintaining the maximum competitiveness within the British economy and the European Union, we can build markedly on that success.

Mr. MacShane: The President of the Board of Trade is following the Prime Minister yesterday and in Question Time on Thursday in saying that the lack of a social chapter here has some impact on inward investment. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Employment quoted Daimler-Benz extensively, saying that the chairman of Daimler-Benz decided to come to the United Kingdom because there was no social chapter. *[Interruption.]* I have his statement in German. He does not mention the social chapter, he does not mention Europe and he does not mention England. Will the President of the Board of Trade ask the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Employment when citing European business men at least to be accurate and not dishonest?

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is accurate in pointing out that European companies are flowing into every part of this country under our inward investment programme, because they

know it is the best place to be. If we want to bring that to an end, all we have to do is replace this Government with the Labour party.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Can my right hon. Friend think of anything more likely to discourage foreign investment in this country, other than a Labour victory at the next general election, than sending a signal to the world that we are decoupling from future developments in the European Union?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct to make the vital point that the inward investment we are attracting from outside the European Union and the rationalisation of investment within the EU are based on the United Kingdom's competitiveness within the European Union.

Dr. John Cunningham: As to inward investment, ABB invested £70 million in new technology at the carriage works at York—making it one of the most advanced factories of its kind in Europe. What does the President have to say to the workers and management of that plant, when it is threatened with closure because of the complete shambles caused by rail privatisation and the ending of British Rail orders from that works for new coaches? What signal does that shambles send to other companies about inward investment in the British economy?

Mr. Heseltine: I tell those people straight that, if they think that if Labour came to power it would bring to factories jobs for which there is no demand, they are even sillier to listen to the Labour party than I thought.

Mr. Jenkin: Should not my right hon. Friend be at pains to stress that if Britain opts out of the single currency, we will still be part of the single market? Would it not be better to spend £75 million on the Invest in Britain Bureau than to waste it on a speculative venture and the European Monetary Institute?

Mr. Heseltine: We are not faced with that decision. I am sure that my hon. Friend, with the wisdom that he brings to this as to all other matters, would want to be in possession of all the facts in all the circumstances before taking a decision.

British Telecom Connection Charges

22. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to British Telecom on the level of its connection charges to residential customers.

Mr. Ian Taylor: None. Regulation of BT charges is a matter for the Office of Telecommunications. Connection charges have fallen by 17 per cent. in real terms since 1984.

Mr. Gerrard: Does the Minister not accept that the cost of installing a telephone in the UK is significantly higher than in most industrialised countries? It is four times higher than in Germany, three times higher than in France and double the cost in the United States. Is that not a real deterrent, particularly for people on low incomes and pensioners, who are among those who could benefit most from having a telephone? Is it good enough for the Minister to say that he does not care and that it is not a matter for him?

Mr. Taylor: Far from not caring, I care deeply that the UK telecommunications industry reaches every part of the country and people who were not previously able to afford a telephone. The hon. Gentleman should not assume that this country's industry comprises only BT. It is interesting that cable companies offering telephone services are attracting subscribers who could not previously afford a telephone, because cable company entry terms are more attractive. That is the effect of market competition. Incidentally, by definition, such new subscribers live in urban areas, because that is where most cable companies operate at present. This country has a good overall record of universal telephone coverage. That will continue with new technology, such as use of the radio spectrum, particularly in outlying areas.

Mr. Sumberg: If we had listened to Labour, telecommunications would still be a nationalised state monopoly and imposing high charges. Instead, there is competition and the public benefit. UK telecommunications lead the world.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Certain countries represented on the European Union Telecoms Council still do not understand that the consumer can only benefit from liberalisation of services, and that only in that way will consumer costs decline. That is why it is a triumph for this country to have persuaded the rest of the EU to liberalise all services by 1 January 1998, to the great benefit of telephone companies of all sorts in this country, which will be able to offer their services and supplies throughout the European Union.

Gas Standing Charges

23. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will discuss the impact of standing charges on low-income customers when he next meets the Gas Consumers Council.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones).

Mr. Olner: The Minister's previous answer was not satisfactory. Does he agree that the 75 per cent. increase in pay awarded to British Gas's chief executive, coupled with a 13 per cent. reduction in showroom staff, is a crime? Does he not think that some of the company's £1.6 billion profit should be used to reduce standing charges for people on extremely low incomes who are suffering from the value added tax increase imposed by the Government?

Mr. Taylor: What appears to be a crime is the Opposition's wilful misunderstanding of the benefits to the consumer. The consumer has benefited from a fall in prices since privatisation. That is what hon. Members who are concerned for their constituents should be talking about. There has been a 15 per cent. fall in prices, even allowing for 8 per cent. VAT. That shows that we have an extremely efficient industry. Simply to go on about management salaries is to distort the truth. It also reveals the hon. Gentleman's complete lack of understanding of what is in his constituents' interests.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I should like to bring to your attention some correspondence that I have received relating to my private Member's Bill which is due to receive a Second Reading on 3 March. The British Field Sports Society has written to say that there is insufficient time for the Bill to pass through all its parliamentary stages. The correspondence also contains a letter from the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) which tells colleagues that it is not the intention to divide the House as there will be insufficient time.

It is my contention that such correspondence will militate against a full debate and votes on a closure motion and Second Reading. It may also lead to a false impression being given to hon. Members. I seek your advice, first, on the propriety of an outside body such as the British Field Sports Society daring to interfere with the rights of Members of Parliament by stating that there is insufficient time. Secondly, is it in order for the hon. Member for Wimbledon, to whom I gave notice of this point of order by putting a message on the board at 2 pm, to speak for other hon. Members in a way in which he is not entitled to do?

Madam Speaker: There seems to be nothing wrong with the course of action that has been taken. Hon. Members often receive letters giving advice or guidance on what they might like to do. As the hon. Gentleman knows, letters and correspondence do not bind anyone to anything.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During my contribution to last night's debate on passenger service requirements under rail privatisation, I was remiss in not declaring an interest—that I am sponsored by ASLEF, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen. May I take this opportunity to apologise unreservedly to the House for that omission?

Madam Speaker: I am much obliged to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) asked me to thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in notifying him of the point of order and to apologise for the fact that he was unfortunately unable to be here.

Madam Speaker: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not know whether you have seen reports today that the Secretary of State for Health was summoned to see the Lord Chancellor about the legal action that was going to be taken against her because of her Department's lack of beds for severely disturbed mentally ill patients. Has the Secretary of State announced that she intends to make a statement on this alarming state of affairs?

Madam Speaker: I have had no notification that the Secretary of State for Health is seeking to make a statement to the House, at least not today.

While I am on my feet, may I say that some right hon. and hon. Members seem to think that it is rather smart or clever to manipulate the English language when referring to other right hon. and hon. Members across the Floor of the House. I remind the House of the wise words of "Erskine May":

"Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language."

I hope that hon. Members will bear that in mind in future interventions and that they will make use of the richness of the English language and select elegant phrases that express their meaning without causing offence to others. I know only too well from my postbag that some exchanges across the Floor of the House do not enhance it in the eyes of our electorate.

Financing of Political Parties

3.34 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to regulate the financing of political parties by requiring disclosure of the source of donations, by the prohibition of donations from overseas, and by the publication of accounts.

Let me make it clear at the outset that my Bill does not concern state funding of political parties; it concerns the regulation of donations and accounts. It has three main aims—to prohibit donations from foreign nationals not normally resident in this country, and from overseas companies and Governments; to ensure the recording and publication of donations above a certain limit, not tied to a particular figure but probably about £1,000; and to require political parties to publish income and expenditure accounts in the same way as companies and trade unions.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Like Maxwell's donations to the Labour party from Liechtenstein?

Mr. Spellar: I am pleased to hear that there is all-party support for that last item. In 1949, the House passed a motion requiring parties to publish accounts, but unfortunately it has not yet been activated by the Tory party.

This is the third occasion on which I have presented the Bill. It is fortunate that it falls on a day on which the Tories are having to declare redundancies because of the collapse of their domestic operations. Regrettably, on previous occasions the Bill has been blocked by Government Whips. It is extraordinary that the Conservatives should be so reticent about disclosure; that could, after all, lead people to believe that they have something to hide. Presumably such feelings also led the Prime Minister to state in the House recently that he revealed the existence of donations only when they had resulted in a vote at his party conference. That must have caused people to ask why the Conservatives become so excited about what is essentially a modest proposal, which would be regarded as normal in most democracies.

The prohibition of foreign donations, for example, has been in force for some time in the United States, with no complaints and with general approval. People find it hard to understand why the Tory party seems to be excessively dependent on large donations or loans from people who do not even have a vote in this country. Perhaps we are being unfair, and all the stories have been fabricated by ill-intentioned media; in that case, the Bill would help the Tory party by dispelling unhealthy myths that thrive in an atmosphere of secrecy.

If, for example, the Conservatives had been required to declare donations, they might have had second thoughts about accepting £400,000 or so from Asil Nadir. Think of the embarrassment that that would have saved them. If they had taken the money anyway, the report that they would have filed would have provided them with a record, enabling them to answer the receiver's questions about how much had been improperly donated. Their hapless head of administration, Mr. Judge, would not have had to admit that the records of donations had all been dumped in 1992—which was his explanation of why the Government were unable to accede to a perfectly reasonable request from the receiver.

Furthermore, by publishing proper accounts Conservative central office would be able to demonstrate to party members that they had not been funding the £300,000 estimated legal costs run up by the unfortunate Mr. Judge in his ill-advised libel action against *The Guardian*. That is an important point. When it was revealed that the legal bill of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) had been paid by Conservative central office, the party lost an estimated £500,000 in donations. Presumably even the dwindling hard core of Tory party members do not think that that is the reason for their wine and cheese parties and jumble sales. The party probably lost some members over that; although it is hard to tell, given the general collapse of Tory party membership—especially in the Young Conservatives, who were once the biggest youth movement in Europe but now have about the same number of members as any Trotskyist sect, and exhibit much the same behaviour. That is increasingly the nub of the problem, and it is presumably why the Conservative party is blocking any attempt to introduce transparency to its accounts.

Even the Prime Minister does not seem to be very well informed about the funding of his party. When I asked him about Tory party finances at Question Time on 19 October 1993, he said:

"There are a great many secret sources and they are all cheese and wine parties up and down the country."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1993; Vol. 230, c. 144.]

One would have to be a real dimwit to believe that.

The Tory party has recently admitted receiving more than £400,000 from Asil Nadir; an estimated hundreds of thousands, if not millions of pounds, from John Latsis, a Greek ship owner; money from Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka Shi; and funds from tax-evader and ex-Nissan boss Oktav Botnar.

Mr. Latsis and other ship owners and foreign business men are estimated to benefit from a tax loophole called foreign domicile tax status, estimated to cost the Exchequer £1 billion a year. That sum would have enabled the Chancellor to have been far more generous in imposing VAT on fuel, instead of trying to claw it back from all sorts of other taxpayers. That £1 billion a year is being given to very few people rather than being distributed among the population of the country. This country is one of only four in western Europe to have such an arrangement. The others are the Channel Islands, Luxembourg and Switzerland—all well-known tax havens.

If there were transparency, we would know clearly who was donating, who was benefiting and how much was being given. We would also know how the £15 million overdraft of the Conservative party is being covered. It would be extraordinary if a major bank were offering such a facility without proper security. What assets does the Tory party have and who is underwriting that huge sum? I suspect that many small business men would like the same generosity from their banks. The Royal Bank of Scotland seems to have much to answer for about overdrafts that it has given to business men.

The Bill will also deal with the amazing and increasing dependence of the Tory party on donations from individuals, corporations, foundations and—possibly—even Governments from abroad, none of whom has a vote in this country. There are persistent rumours that many of the deals that have attracted public attention for other

reasons—the Pergau dam affair, the Al Yamamah project in Saudi Arabia, the Malaysian arms deal and relationships with the Government of Brunei—all connect to donations to the Tory party.

The fundamental reason for all that is simple: the Tory party is in crisis. As it becomes increasingly unpopular, its membership is falling and aging away; as it is wiped out in local government, its local structure is withering; as it decimates industry, its traditional friends are closing their cheque books; as it loses Members of the European Parliament, its influence at European level is seen as eroding. The Government are now a narrow oligarchy, clinging to central state power, propped up by a few heavy-spending companies mainly from the City and by foreign interests. The Government are kept together only by their monopoly of patronage through honours, quangos and political favours.

The Bill corrects some of the worst abuses and ensures that the public know what is going on. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Spellar, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Mr. David Winnick, Ms Angela Eagle, Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Gordon McMaster and Mr. Chris Mullin.

Financing of Political Parties

Mr. John Spellar accordingly presented a Bill to regulate the financing of political parties by requiring disclosure of the source of donations, by the prohibition of donations from overseas, and by the publication of accounts: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 3 March, and to be printed. [Bill 47.]

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance (Wales)

3.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 140), which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

Madam Speaker: I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (Wales) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 141), which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (Wales) 1995 (House of Commons Paper No. 142), which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

Mr. Redwood: The motions allow total standard spending of £2,782 million for local government in Wales in 1995-96; an increase of 3.24 per cent. and an increase well ahead of inflation. The motions represent £15.1 million more than that which I announced on 29 November 1994, as the amount includes extra money for the police following the consultation. That takes the total increase to £87 million, when compared with the equivalent spending this year. It brings the increase to £600 million—or 30 per cent.—since 1990-91 which is well ahead of inflation at 21.3 per cent. That gives the lie to some of the criticisms that were made ahead of the debate to the effect that we had cut spending or been mean. Here is another large increase for the people of Wales and the services provided by their local government.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): The Secretary of State has mentioned a figure of £2,782 million, and *Hansard* tells us that on 14 December 1994, talking about the budget for Wales, he said that £2,767 million represented an increase of 2.7 per cent. However, I have a letter here from the chief executive of Dyfed county council saying that that £2,767 million is in fact £48.9 million less than the local authority budgets for this financial year. What the Secretary of State portrays as an increase of 2.7 per cent.—rising today to 3.2 per cent.—is really a cut of 1.8 per cent. below the existing level of expenditure. Can the right hon. Gentleman explain what is wrong with the chief executive's arithmetic?

Mr. Redwood: There are two ways in which the chief executive could be wrong. First, we must adjust for the change in functions. I was very careful about what I said, and if we compare like with like we see the increase that I have described. Perhaps the council's figures were not properly adjusted for the change in functions.

Secondly, as I have said, we must compare like with like. We must compare the total suggested to the House last year with the total suggested this year, or we could compare budgets with budgets. But we must not confuse the figures or we shall get a silly answer. I am comparing

[Mr. Redwood]

like with like, and making the right adjustments for the new range of functions that local government is undertaking.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Does the optimism of the Secretary of State's opening statement presage an intervention, or even a subvention, for the benefit of the hard-pressed local education authority in Clwyd? The possibility of major cuts in teacher numbers and the problems facing the county in providing for special needs are causing deep concern there. Will the right hon. Gentleman deal with those issues?

Mr. Redwood: Willingly; I shall speak in detail about Clwyd's budget later. I know that concerns have been expressed, but I believe that there are easy ways in which Clwyd could find the money that I believe its schools need and deserve, and I hope that the county councillors will look more carefully and find the right answer for local people.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): The chief executive of Clwyd county council has said that as a result of the grant figures before us Clwyd will face a cut of £8 million—about 4 per cent.—because inflation has not been included in the settlement at the proper rate. Schools and many parents in my constituency and elsewhere are appalled at the consequences of the settlement and have urged me to vote against it. What justification can the Secretary of State offer me to take back to them?

Mr. Redwood: I shall explain later where I think the money can come from to provide high-quality education in Clwyd. That is what I want, and I am sure that it is what Opposition Members want, too. Given the generosity of the settlement, the solution lies in the county's hands.

The notional amounts report adjusts this year's county figures for the creation of self-standing police authorities from 1 April 1995. I propose to use those adjusted figures to measure increases in 1995-96 for capping purposes. The counties have been consulted on those figures and agree that they are accurate.

The special grant report will enable me to pay grants totalling £19.5 million to the new unitary local authorities in Wales that will be elected on 4 May. These grants meet in full the local authority associations' estimate of the running costs of the new authorities in their shadow period. I want them to get off to a good start and I hope that, if nothing else, Opposition Members will welcome our generosity in not only meeting the bill in full but meeting it by way of grant, so that there can be no question but that the money will be there to do the job.

I have consulted the local authority associations on the formula for distributing the grants and they have endorsed it. Total standard spending of £2,782.1 million includes £315.8 million for the new police authorities and £124.4 million for community care; £156 million will be paid as police grant to authorities by the Home Secretary, which the House has already approved, and the balance of £159.8 million will be provided by standard spending assessments.

I propose to provide £2,466 million in aggregate external finance, an increase of 2.4 per cent on the 1994-95 level. This will comprise £1,718.3 million in revenue support grant, £520 million in distributable non-domestic rates and £227.7 million in other revenue grants. It accounts for about 89 per cent. of total standard spending, compared with about 80 per cent. in the English equivalent settlement.

That means that Welsh council tax payers will continue to benefit from substantially lower levels of tax than their counterparts in England as a result of the settlement. I hope that Opposition Members will weigh that up carefully before thinking about voting against the proposal.

A new non-domestic rating list will come into force on 1 April. That shows an overall increase in rateable values for Wales of 18 per cent., reflecting the relative improvement in property values compared with London and southern England since the last valuation. That shows that the Welsh economy is doing relatively well, and that it is growing fast during a strong recovery.

The levels of rates raised from the new list must by law be the same in real terms as the rates raised in 1994-95. To counterbalance the rise in values, the poundage will fall from 44.2p to 39p next year. Some ratepayers' valuations have risen by considerably more than the compensating decline in poundage since the last valuation.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget, we have acted to limit the real rate rise in 1995-1996 to 10 per cent. for any given property and 7.5 per cent for smaller properties, usually occupied by smaller businesses. The cost of this will be met in part by phasing in rate reductions for those who gain from the revaluation and in part by a £25 million Exchequer contribution. Around 60,000 ratepayers in Wales will be assisted by the transitional arrangements.

The aim of the police funding formula is to distribute resources fairly to police authorities in Wales and England, taking account of each area's need for police services. The settlement represents an increase of over £30 million for Welsh police authorities compared with police budgets for 1994-95. It gives the new authorities a sound base for providing high-quality services in their first year. It also shows how disappointing Welsh Labour local government has been in meeting the needs of the police when it had the freedom to do so. I withdrew that freedom with great reluctance, but the decision represented by this budget is extremely popular in Wales, especially south Wales, where it gives a big boost to the police force.

I want the authorities to concentrate on appointing more constables and sergeants to patrol our streets and detect criminals. I do not wish to see the money spent on too much extra management or new offices. I look to the new police authorities to spend it wisely in line with the public's wish for effective crime control and reassurance.

I thoroughly disagree with the Labour party in its contention that £87 million more is not enough. Next year the counties will have sufficient money to pay for the teachers currently employed and, if they wish, they could recruit some more. LEA schools in Wales began this financial year with balances of £47.6 million. That was money given to schools in past years, and they still have considerable balances.

I remember an early visit which I made as Secretary of State to Clwyd to see a new development project. I was greeted by a crowd of chanting pupils from a local school, who had been permitted to do so by teachers and Labour

councillors—perhaps they had even been organised by one or two of them. They shouted that the settlement that year was too low.

When I tried to discuss the matter with the pupils, I discovered they did not know how big the budget was, how much it had gone up by, or how the county proposed to spend the money that Parliament had voted. I felt that those pupils had been manipulated by people out to play politics with their lives in a quite disgraceful way.

Imagine my interest in discovering that Clwyd LEA schools had £5.2 million in unused balances at the start of this year—hardly evidence that past settlements, which have been criticised, have been mean. If the schools spent that money next year, it would have the effect of increasing their delegated budgets by almost 5 per cent.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): The Secretary of State knows that schools which manage their own budgets have to keep balances. The district auditors would be down on them like a ton of bricks if they did not. If the Secretary of State is so keen on giving money to the police because they face cuts under the present SSA arrangement, does he not realise that Clwyd faces cuts in teacher numbers under the present SSA arrangement? Will he treat the education of children in Clwyd in the same way as the police force in Clwyd?

Mr. Redwood: I do not propose to take powers away from Clwyd county council to decide how much should go to the schools. That is an important local democratic power. I am entitled to argue about how schools should carry out their functions when they argue that I have not given them enough money. I am about to demonstrate that there is plenty of money if the schools choose the right priorities in line with those of the electors whom some Opposition Members represent.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that in addition to the reserves that the schools in Clwyd have, the county has balances of some £6 million.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend is ahead of me in the argument that I am about to make to the House. The *Western Mail* tells me that spending the balances is not the answer. Yet it is money voted by the House for local government which has not been spent at a time when I am told that more money should be spent on education.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The Secretary of State said that schools have their own accumulated budgets. I ask him a simple question. Will he confirm that the latest advice given to schools was contained in circular 294, which says:

"the ability to make savings in one year and deploy them in the next (e.g. to purchase a piece of equipment) is an essential feature of schemes of local management."?

Is that the advice that he gives to schools?

Mr. Redwood: Of course schools should budget wisely. Of course they have some powers to save for the things that they most want. But when we have balances of more than £5 million, or 5 per cent. of the annual delegated schools budget, and schools tell me that they do not have enough money, I am entitled to ask why they do not spend some of that balance on the things that they say are most needed—enough teachers paid at the rate for the job.

The Labour party has run a wicked campaign to alarm school governors, parents and pupils.

Mr. Davies: I put a specific question to the Secretary of State. I am surprised that he did not answer it. The largest school in Clwyd, which has a budget of more than £2 million, has an accumulated budget of less than £40,000. That is well within acceptable levels. If the Secretary of State is so concerned about accumulated budgets in schools in Wales, why on earth has he not responded to the county authorities in Wales, which for the past 12 months have asked him to spell out his policy? The Welsh Office has promised those people for the past 12 months that the Secretary of State's guidelines will be published to explain what procedures he expects them to take. If he now criticises them, why did he not accept his responsibility 12 months ago and give schools the advice that he magically expects them to follow now?

Mr. Redwood: There is a great deal of delegated power in the system, I believe rightly so. I see that once again Opposition Members want to centralise everything. We give considerable scope to the local authorities to decide on priorities. We then give scope to the schools to decide on their priorities. I do not attack schools or local authorities unless they tell me through the elected representatives on the Opposition Benches that they do not have enough money. Then I ask where all the money has gone and whether they have some money that they could use for those priorities.

Opposition Members have been busy saying that the Government will not provide for the teachers' award in the settlement when they do not even know what the pay award is. I do not see how they can possibly judge that it cannot be afforded out of the settlement.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does the Secretary of State admit that the balances are not transferable from one school to another? Some schools have done badly and others, admittedly, have a surplus. If the funds were held by the local education authority at county hall level, they could be distributed to where the need was greatest. The Secretary of State talked about pupils demonstrating. I have received a letter from Mr. McCarthy, the headmaster of St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic primary school in Newport, and from a host of parents expressing great concern about losing teachers from the school. What am I to say to them? Am I to say that there are surpluses in other schools in the county? That is not the answer.

Mr. Redwood: The rest of my argument will help schools that do not have large balances. The aggregate balances are large, so my point applies to quite a large number of schools within the county. There is other money, which I shall reveal in a minute, which will also help.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) for making the point about balances in schools. On local authority balances, the Secretary of State knows as well as I do that district auditors, under Labour and Conservative Governments, always advised local government to hold reasonable balances. What sort

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

of reasonable balances does the right hon. Gentleman suggest that Clwyd and other county councils should have? What is his definition?

Mr. Redwood: Of course there should be prudent balances; it is right that auditors discuss that with the county councils. It is for the finance specialists on the county along with their auditors to satisfy themselves about what is prudent and what is wasteful. There is a level of balance that is excessive and could be better spent on the services that are Parliament's primary intention in voting the money.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The right hon. Gentleman has already accepted that there should be some balances and he has said that those balances should be prudent. How does he reconcile his present argument that he must tell the schools what to do with the Government's argument that they are leaving it to the governors and the parents to decide what to do?

Mr. Redwood: The right hon. Gentleman should not confuse the issue. I have already made it clear that, unlike Labour Members, I believe in the maximum of delegated power. We have backed that view with our actions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not in this settlement."] All I am saying is that if Labour Members and Labour councillors criticise the settlement because there is not enough money, I am quite within my rights to explain why I think that there is more than enough money in the settlement and to explain how very easily the teachers can be paid and can provide a good quality of education.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman explain, because I am a little confused and I am sure that some of my colleagues are, too, exactly what he means by the word "prudent"? Will he spell out what he means?

Mr. Redwood: I have already dealt with that point. It is a matter for the judgment of individual counties based on their budgets and their requirements, and for the auditors who obviously comment on these matters. I believe that the aggregate level of balances, both in the schools of Clwyd and in county councils around Wales, is considerably higher than is needed for a prudent balance.

I want now to make some progress with my argument—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: I want to make a little progress with my argument and I shall then take interventions if hon. Members still think that there are problems with my analysis. I am sure that they will not think that because it is a carefully constructed analysis of the budget position that their authorities face. When we decided on the increases—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has made it clear that he will not give way yet.

Mr. Redwood: When we decided on the increase in cash for local government next year, of course we took account of the need to pay teachers more. It is not some new development that has taken us by surprise. I also took account of all other relevant points about the budgets and requirements of Welsh local government in framing the settlement. I expect education to be a high priority for county councils next year; that is what the people of Wales clearly want.

The average results in schools in Wales are still too low. They are lower than those in England, lower than those in Scotland and lower by far than those in Japan. Tests on pupils with an average age of 15 years and eight months in England and Wales have shown that only one quarter could calculate correctly the total in the decimal sum 2.6 minus 4.12 plus 6.3 minus 0.44 without a calculator.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): We shall find out how good the Secretary of State is at percentages. What is the percentage of the total budget of schools remaining in the balance?

Mr. Redwood: I have already answered that point; the hon. Gentleman was not listening. It is about 5 per cent. of the delegated schools budget. I have given the £5.2 million figure for Clwyd. I am saying that that figure is higher than it need be; it means that there is money there to help.

I go back to the point about levels of competence. I am sure that hon. Members in their more honest moments would agree that levels of competence in both English and arithmetic need to be raised as a matter of urgency in many Welsh primary schools so that secondary pupils have mastered the basics before moving on to other studies. The tables show that the schools that receive most money per pupil often produce the worst results. They warn against the idea that all that is needed is more money. What is needed is more ambition for the pupils, better teaching and more stretching assignments.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Secretary of State must understand that we expect answers to our questions because the people to whom he refers are our constituents. I must press him on what he considers to be "prudent". Does he understand that in Mid Glamorgan, for example, although there are balances, 85 per cent. of the budget is held by fewer than a quarter of the 45-plus secondary schools? Nothing in the Secretary of State's local management of schools arrangements will allow him, under the proposals that he now puts to us, to take money from the schools that have balances and give it to those running a threadbare economy. He must answer that question before he proceeds.

Mr. Redwood: I do not want to take money away from the successful schools. I simply stress than many of them have good money—

Mr. Alan Williams: Which ones are successful?

Mr. Redwood: Those that are successful at budgeting. They may also be successful at teaching and educating, and I hope that they are. I do not want to take away from them money that is there to be used for educational purposes. I shall go on to identify other money that may help schools which Opposition Members say have no balances on which to draw.

Clwyd county council spends a little over half its total budget on education. If it chose to spend an extra 1 per cent. of that budget on education and 1 per cent. less on other things, that would yield £3 million, or 3 per cent. extra on the delegated schools budgets. The ideal areas

for spending less would be council publicity, members' allowances for too many committees and working parties, and general office overheads.

Mr. Barry Jones: Has not the Secretary of State launched a mean and organised attack on Clwyd county council aimed at creating a diversion to save his skin in this matter?

Mr. Redwood: Spelling out the facts about accounted budgets is hardly a mean attack. It is the sort of analysis which Labour as well as Conservative councils should encourage in council chambers throughout Wales. The public need to know how much money is there and how it is being spent, so as to ensure that the priorities are right.

Clwyd county council also has substantial balances, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) pointed out. If it spent £2 million of those on education, that would produce another 2 per cent. for the delegated schools budgets. I hear that it may now be thinking along those lines.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The Secretary of State said that money could be taken from councillors' allowances and expenses. Have not the Government recently introduced new measures to allow councils to pay councillors higher expenses? Do not all parties agree that it is necessary to increase, as far as possible, allowances given to councillors to ensure that we have a higher standard of councillor, which I am sure the Secretary of State would appreciate?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman was not listening. I said that there were too many working parties and committees. That is so in the case of Liberal-Labour Berkshire council—the hon. Gentleman's council—which has massive balances that it should spend on a decent education for children in Berkshire. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for intervening and giving me a chance to say that.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am mindful of what Madam Speaker said earlier about exchanging insults, but I wonder whether the Secretary of States lives on this planet. I have in my hand a document from Gwynedd council, which says that this is the worst revenue support grant settlement in its history with a cut of £3.346 million. Unless the Secretary of State is right on everything and Gwynedd council is wrong, he must answer that point.

A second document from Dyfed council says that it is cutting school meals and charging more for them, stopping further expansion of its community education programme and giving up responsibility for the maintenance of buildings.

The settlement is an absolute disgrace and however much the Secretary of State tries to dress it up in fancy language and stupid figures, it is still a drastic cut. He must recognise that.

Mr. Redwood: Madam Speaker, £87 million extra next year is no cut or fancy figure. It is good money which I trust the House will vote for tonight. It is money that the councils need and which I want them to spend well.

If we look at Clwyd's education budget, what is even more depressing is how little of the money that Parliament votes for local authorities in Wales gets through to schools. In Clwyd, of a total 1994-95 schools budget of £146.5 million, only £99.6 million is given to schools for their delegated budgets. Whereas in Powys 78p in every pound of the schools budget goes to the schools to spend on what they think matters most, in Clwyd only 68p reaches the schools for teachers' salaries and other delegated items. If Clwyd matched Powys in its spending pattern for delegated spending on schools, rather than getting £99.6 million, schools would receive £114 million, which is a massive increase of 14 per cent.

Mr. Martyn Jones: The Secretary of State offered us a rather glib analysis of how much money Clwyd could save from council publicity, committee members' allowances and so on, which amounted to £1 million. I should like him to spell out in more detail how that money could be saved. I accept that Clwyd could take some money from budgets, but I hope that the right hon. Gentleman would also ensure that the district auditor did not look too unkindly at budget balances of between 1 and 2 per cent. The comparison with Powys is hardly fair because its SSA is much bigger than that of Clwyd. It has more money because it is an old rural county. If Clwyd received the same SSA it would not now face such problems. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that he will allow the council tax payers of Clwyd to make a decision to increase their council tax to a level that would ensure that teachers in Clwyd do not have to face compulsory redundancy? I am sure that the people of Clwyd would accept that. It is in his gift to do so.

Mr. Redwood: The comparison between Clwyd and Powys does not hinge on the SSA, but on how much of the schools budget gets through to schools for their delegated purposes. The comparison is entirely fair. As to the rights of the councillors and constituents of Clwyd, I want them to make the decision. I am not taking that decision from them; I am just trying to influence it. It would be wrong of councillors to make teachers redundant when there is money in the settlement to pay for them.

We must ask what Clwyd is spending the money on that it is not delegating to the schools. The most obvious item in the education budget is the £3,256,000 spent on management and administration. That amount is 13 per cent. above the level of the next highest council. Let us say that Clwyd could save £2 million from the total of £46 million that does not get through to the schools. That would represent another 2 per cent. on the delegated schools budget.

As hon. Members will be aware, I have already identified easy ways of enabling the schools of Clwyd to see their budgets boosted substantially. The county could do that next year without cutting any other county service. I have suggested a list that adds up to about £12 million. I am not saying that Clwyd needs to find all that money or that it should, but if it found a proportion of it, Clwyd could have more teachers rather than fewer and schools could make more of their own decisions about which services they need and which teachers they wish to retain and recruit.

The scope for using balances and delegating more money to schools can be reproduced across Wales, county by county.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Mid Glamorgan will draw no less than £8 million from

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

its balances and reserves, but that will still mean a cut of £1.5 million in the school formula budgets and, the cruellest cut of all, a £1.5 million cut in the building maintenance budget. Many schools desperately need such spending because of their age and character. Mid Glamorgan has obeyed the right hon. Gentleman's instructions and taken money from its balances, but it is still encountering difficulties, so there must be something wrong with the right hon. Gentleman's formula rather than with local government.

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted that it will use some of its balances for good purposes. It can prudently do so and I look forward to it using that money. I also hope that it will look at the other items that I set out for one county, because Mid Glamorgan may find that some of them also apply to it.

As to improving run-down schools, no one is keener than I am to see the standard of maintenance and building repairs improved in those schools that need it. That is why I have made sure that there has been a generous capital settlement for education and for local government in general.

In the current financial year counties receive credit approvals of £42.5 million for educational capital spending—up by 11.6 per cent. on the previous year. For next year I am proposing a further increase of 7 per cent. to £45.3 million. I want to see that money spent on buildings of which we can be proud for the schools of Wales and I trust that Opposition Members agree with that aim.

In suggesting that councils control their central overheads, which in some cases are large, I am asking local government to do only what central Government are already doing. I told the House on 14 December 1994 that there would be a cash and real terms reduction in Welsh Office running costs for 1995-96, and similar reductions for Welsh executive non-departmental public bodies.

The local authority associations tell me that there is little room for further significant efficiency savings. In my experience, there is always room for large organisations with multi-million pound budgets to achieve savings by innovation and improved working practice. That judgment is supported by two recent reports from the Audit Commission on pay and performance, which concluded that savings of £500 million could be achieved by local government in England and Wales.

I am providing £43 million on top of the settlement in 1995-96 through special grant and credit approvals to meet the costs of local government reorganisation. As I promised, the costs of reorganisation are not a call on this revenue settlement.

Care in the community, which is another important matter, will receive £124.4 million—an increase of £38 million, or more than 44 per cent., on the current year's figure. It is not calculated for capping purposes. I have kept the November 1993 plans for care in the community, despite the further decrease in inflation, because I regard that as crucial.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I apologise to the Secretary of State that I was not here when he started his remarks. Does he recognise that the predictions that were made, when community care was introduced, of the number of people who would be cared for in their own homes, considerably underestimated the number of people who have made that choice? Is he satisfied that the increase that he is announcing will satisfy that increased demand?

Mr. Redwood: Yes; I think that it will. It is a generous increase. What matters is not the number of people who opt for a specific type of care but the total number of people who need care, whether it be in their home or elsewhere. I think that the plans do take more than fair cognisance of the likely growth in numbers. We want the policy to succeed; I am sure that Opposition Members do; I am sure that all sensible people in local government want it to succeed. A 44 per cent. increase in the amount of money for that purpose shows how important we believe it to be.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) always comes to Welsh debates empty-handed. In all the time that I have debated with him, he has never promised more money than I have proposed. He had his chance this winter to offer more for the police, when local communities throughout Wales said that I had suggested too little. He did not take that chance. There was no shadow money for the police from the hon. Gentleman. Today he has his chance to say how much extra the Labour party would give local government in Wales if it had to make the decision.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will duck and weave again. I notice him already beginning to duck and weave because he knows that it is true. I can presume only that he never raises the cause of Wales in shadow Cabinet meetings, for fear of being slapped down by the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor. There he sits, long on criticism, devoid of ideas, bereft of even shadow money. If he cannot deliver shadow money from a shadow Cabinet, why should anyone believe that he could deliver anything for real, were he ever in a position to try to do so?

It is odd that the hon. Gentleman does not wish to intervene. I think that he knows that it is a fair criticism. The hon. Gentleman obviously does not mention Wales in the shadow Cabinet. He goes out to make the tea instead of asking whether Wales can be given a decent place in shadow Cabinet plans. I look forward to hearing the shadow budgets. I am sure that, were they ever to leak out, we would discover that there was not an extra penny, let alone an extra pound or ecu, for Wales anywhere to be seen.

Local authorities will also receive generous capital provision next year. I announced on 14 December 1994 that that would total £525.6 million, up 4.5 per cent. on this year. I expect Welsh local authorities to act responsibly in setting their budgets. I shall consider those budgets carefully, in the light of my provisional capping principles and of all the available information.

This is a good settlement for Welsh local government. It is a delight to see that it puts Opposition Members in such good humour as I tease them about their inability to come up with anything better. It gives Welsh local government an increase greater than inflation. It gives it extra resources to prepare for local government reorganisation. It could mean more teachers in the classroom if councillors want them to be there and are determined to budget sensibly. It will definitely mean more police on the streets and more care in the community.

I want local authorities in Wales to raise the sights of local communities, raising standards in schools and providing generously for elderly and disabled people. I commend the settlement to the House.

4.19 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): If the Secretary of State had any friends, I do not think that even they would congratulate him on his performance.

Mr. Rowlands: Offer him a shadow salary.

Mr. Davies: I can hear my hon. Friend urging me to increase the shadow budget. There are no restrictions on our shadow budget; the problems begin with the restrictions that the Secretary of State is imposing on the real budget. It was interesting to note that all the detailed questions asked of the Secretary of State today have been pointedly ignored.

The thesis of the Secretary of State's argument was that unspecified schools, unnamed councillors and unquantifiable council officials had conspired together to build up unreasonable balances in Clwyd. He only managed to single out Clwyd county council and did not refer to any other counties in Wales. He suggested that the solution to the problem of local government finance in Wales could be dealt with by attacking Clwyd county council.

When the right hon. Gentleman was asked what constituted a prudent balance, he gave no answer. When he was challenged specifically on whether it was Government policy for those schools prudently to accrue balances for use in future years, he gave no answer. I cannot make the point strongly enough that those schools are following the specific advice given to them by the Government. It ill becomes the Secretary of State to criticise them for following Government policy.

Of course, Clwyd has built up balances. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) explained what had happened to Mid Glamorgan. But the Secretary of State signally failed to say what proposals he had to meet the expenditure next year if Clwyd and all the other counties in Wales used all their balances this year. We all understand, even if the Government do not, that one can sell and spend the family silver only once. That represents exactly what the Government have done—the bonanza of North sea oil, the proceeds of privatisation and all our industry have gone.

After 15 years of Tory Government, there is an increase this year equivalent to 7p in the pound on the standard rate of income tax. The right hon. Gentleman now wants Welsh local authorities to do precisely the same. If they get rid of the balances this year, next year they will face the prospect of either increasing rates—which he will not allow them to do because he will rate-cap them—or cutting deep into the body of public services. That is what the Government have been about. The Secretary of State's disgraceful speech demonstrates the fact as clearly as anyone would wish that he does not care for the future of Welsh local government, which has co-operated with the Government for the past 15 years.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is it not an interesting commentary on what the Secretary of State said that he seemed to equate the quality of a school with the size of its balances?

Mr. Davies: I shall return to that point. However, I shall first deal with some of the generalities in the Secretary of State's statement.

It is worth looking at what the right hon. Gentleman said last year when he announced an increase of 4.2 per cent. in total standard spending. He said:

"the settlement proposals are fair and will mean that good quality services can be delivered by councils throughout Wales, and that they offer enough money to avoid sacking essential staff."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. 876.]

Those objectives could be achieved with a 4.2 per cent. increase last year. This year, the increase is 2.7 per cent. Judging the Secretary of State by his own standards and using his speech, what will the settlement mean? If 4.2 per cent. was fair, is 2.7 per cent. unfair? If 4.2 per cent. was the minimum necessary to allow councils to avoid sacking essential staff, what will be the consequences of a 2.7 per cent. increase in total standard spending? It means that essential staff will be sacked. The Secretary of State is condemned by his own arguments.

Mr. Redwood: Has not the hon. Gentleman noticed that the inflation rate has gone down?

Mr. Davies: By the Government's own estimate, the current inflation rate is 3 per cent. How can the Secretary of State expect local authorities, which will receive a real terms funding increase of 0.4 per cent., to cope with inflation of 3 per cent.?

Why will the right hon. Gentleman not tell us what the inflation figure will be for teachers' salaries? Once the Government have agreed to that inflation figure—it will be 2.5 or 3 per cent.; good luck to the teachers—the Government will have direct responsibility for it. Will the Secretary of State make complete resources available to meet the full cost of the teachers' pay award? Perhaps he will answer that question. The Secretary of State should get to his feet and give the House a proper answer.

Mr. Redwood: For about the third time: yes, of course we have taken full account of the likely teachers' pay award in the settlement. It is in the funding that we have described.

Mr. Davies: They are weasel words. When the Government say, "We have taken it into account," the House knows that they will underfund the teachers' pay award in the current year.

This is a harsh settlement by any standards. How can it be reconciled with all that we have been told over the past 12 months about the country's economic performance? The Secretary of State comments at every opportunity about how well we are doing. If we are doing so well, why will we have to sack teachers and stop caring for the elderly and the infirm in our communities? How is that a measure of economic success?

This year the effective increase in aggregate external finance support for standard spending assessments is 87.6 per cent. The Secretary of State did not mention that

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because last year the figure was 88.5 per cent. If he had managed to maintain AEF at last year's level, the council tax increase this year would be 2.5 per cent. rather than the 10 per cent. which every council tax payer in Wales now expects to pay.

The Secretary of State has managed his own unique triple whammy. As a consequence of the financial settlement, we have cuts in services, tax increases and a boost to inflation. Economic success, as defined by the Tories, brings cuts in public services and tax increases. The Secretary of State knows that the funding cuts will hit the education sector hardest.

The Secretary of State and his colleagues must understand that if we are to begin to address the problems of the economic and social malaise which their policies have created, we cannot neglect the educational needs of our society. Only one strategy matters to the Government: the political strategy of achieving tax cuts before the next general election.

The Government have no economic strategy, otherwise they would not cut education standards. They have no strategy for dealing with the increasing problems of alienation and unemployment among young people, otherwise they would not cut education standards. They have no strategy for dealing with drug abuse, crime and related social problems, otherwise they would not cut education standards.

I will tell the Secretary of State what goes on in Wales because he does not know much about it. Since 1990 there has been a four-fold increase in the number of registered drug addicts. Since 1979 the number of drug offences has increased by 184 per cent. I will use Islwyn as an example—if the Minister bothers to talk to the people, they will tell him what is happening.

In Gwent police C division, which is centred on Blackwood, the number of recorded drug offences has increased from 81 in 1990 to 294 in 1993. The Secretary of State says that he is good at percentages, so he can work that one out for himself. At the same time, the force strength in C division has fallen from 259 to 253. This year the county council is being forced to cut its expenditure on education and social services in that area by £5.5 million. The Secretary of State's arguments do not hold up, even if we accept his basis for presenting the figures. For those who are responsible for local government, the reality is far worse.

I acknowledge that there has been an increase of £87.6 million in total standard spending over last year and that is welcome. But let us look at it. It includes £38.4 million transferred to fund community care. That is not new money or additional expenditure, as the Secretary of State implied; it is a straightforward transfer from a different budget. It is ring-fenced and hypothecated for a new statutory duty; it is not available for expenditure on any other sector.

There has been a £37.5 million increase for police authorities. That is welcome, but it is a belated acknowledgement by the Secretary of State that his initial proposals were inadequate. All Welsh Opposition Members went to the Home Office or the Secretary of State last year to protest about the inadequate level of funding of our police forces in Wales.

What was the response of the police forces to the initial settlement that the Secretary of State proposed in December? Barely two months ago, he tried to tell us that it was satisfactory. The North Wales police had to announce an immediate freeze on recruitment. They prophesied that in 12 months' time there would be 60 fewer police officers as a result of the Secretary of State's proposals; there would be a freeze on recruitment of special constables, the closure of smaller police stations, community projects would be cut and there would be a failure to invest in communications, which the chief constable described as possibly catastrophic.

In Dyfed Powys the police faced a 10 per cent. reduction in the number of serving officers—a reduction of 100 police officers. The chief constable's view was that policing would be decimated, with a consequent inability to protect the public.

South Wales, which this year has had the lion's share of the increase and has done relatively well under the settlement, was underfunded, settlement by settlement, in previous years by the Government and the Home Office. Even after the increase, the treasurer of the police authority comments:

"with the settlement for 1995-96 we are able to look at increasing the operational strength of the force but even now we are not able to return to previous levels."

All that the Secretary of State has done to improve police funding is to ameliorate a crisis of his own making. If he now expects us to give him credit for correcting his own mistake, he will be disappointed.

Mr. Redwood: Surely the mistake was made by Labour councillors who would not support the police.

Mr. Davies: That is not true. The Secretary of State knows full well that he was asked time after time—certainly by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael)—whether under his budget he would give Wales the same indicative SSAs as were available for English local government and he refused.

The Secretary of State bears full responsibility for any underfunding of the South Wales police. He also knows that, whereas for one or two years the police authority received less than the SSA that he knew existed although he would not tell the public, in other years, because of how local authorities were budgeting capital expenditure, it received in excess of what was in the notional SSA.

Given that the Secretary of State is telling Clwyd to cut a few caretakers here and a few administrators there, and he is prepared to lay down to Clwyd what it should do now in response to the current crisis, why on earth did he not over the years give any indication to Mid Glamorgan, South Glamorgan, Gwent or West Glamorgan of the indicative strategies for police funding that he had in mind? Why?

Mr. Redwood: The Government always made it clear that it was the responsibility of local authorities. The money was there within the settlement and we wanted them to spend it.

Mr. Davies: It is a changed story now. In respect of Clwyd county council, the Secretary of State is prepared to look at the budget under a microscope and say item by item where the cuts should be. How can the Secretary of State say on the one hand that it is perfectly proper for

authorities in south Wales to fund the police authority according to their own priorities and it is not a matter for him even to give the indicative SSAs, and on the other hand tell Clwyd county council almost item by item how it should organise its affairs? It is completely unacceptable.

Mr. Redwood: It is entirely similar. The Government always made it clear that they disagreed with the policing priorities established by Labour councils in south Wales. If Clwyd goes ahead with some of its threats to school budgets, I shall disagree with those priorities in the same way. I have no powers to stop those concerned, but I hope that common sense will prevail.

Mr. Davies: That shows the Secretary of State's double standards. Of the 38 Members of Parliament representing Welsh constituencies, 27 are members of the Welsh Labour group. Twenty-seven of us wrote to the Secretary of State expressing our concern and asking to meet him to discuss the police funding crisis in Wales. I am sure that hon. Members from other Opposition parties would have joined us. Such is the right hon. Gentleman's sense of accountability and sensitivity to public opinion that he refused even to meet us. The Secretary of State has no credibility in these matters.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I know the cheap point that the right hon. Gentleman wants to make. If he intends to refer to this side of the House, I remind him that the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for education in Wales has not even shown the courtesy of attending this debate.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is fulfilling the engagements that I would have undertaken if this debate had not been held today. I am sure that Wales will welcome my hon. Friend, who is to present awards and to hear the views of people in north Wales. The hon. Gentleman is right to be nervous. Why are only 13 Labour Members present out of 27? Why is Labour unable ever to marshall the majority of its Members of Parliament to support the hon. Gentleman—whether in the Welsh Grand Committee in Cardiff or for this debate, which the hon. Gentleman says is crucial?

Mr. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman answered his own question. My hon. Friends are fulfilling other duties—as Conservative Welsh Members are doing, no doubt. Of course the hon. Members for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney), for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) and for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) are fulfilling other duties.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Davies: There is no need for the right hon. Gentleman to become agitated. He knows that all Members of Parliament have other responsibilities. Even if only one third of the members of the Welsh Labour group were in the Chamber, we would still outnumber Conservatives from Wales by two to one. The right hon. Gentleman should not labour the point.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friends are entirely happy with the settlement and think that it is good news for Wales—so they do not need to be present. Only the Opposition tell me that it is a bad settlement. Why cannot at least half of Welsh Labour group members turn up to tell me that in person?

Mr. Martyn Jones: There are 14 of us present, which is more than half.

Mr. Davies: I am sure that *Hansard* will record my hon. Friend's sedentary intervention.

The Secretary of State wants to divert attention from the funding question. Community care, which is hypothecated, and police expenditure together total £75.9 million, leaving an increase of more than £11.7 million—4 per cent.—for all other services. Local authorities are required to cope with inflation, which is near 3 per cent., new legislation, increasing numbers of elderly people and a massive backlog of essential repairs and maintenance to buildings, roads and bridges.

The Government have scored their most spectacular own goal in education. First, they changed the composition of governing bodies to do away with party political influence and replaced people appointed under that system with teachers, parents, business men and others from the community. The Government then changed the rules governing finance, to give greater local discretion. They altered the rules governing local education authority financial allocations, giving less discretion to central services. Next, the Government changed the rules governing central Government allocation to local government, to give greater control to central Government. They changed the rules again, to rate-cap local government and prevent it meeting local needs. At the same time, the Government established new quangos under their control, with open-ended purse strings.

After spending 15 years constructing a system that the Government wanted, the people whom they chose to run it in the way that they wanted are in open rebellion. There are hundreds if not thousands of decent, law-abiding, respectable school governors in Wales who are now being placed in an impossible position. They are being asked to take decisions to cut the services that they are in public life to protect. What sort of Government are doing that to our communities? Only a party stupid and inept enough to give us the poll tax, VAT on fuel and the Post Office fiasco could plunge our education service into such chaos.

The Secretary of State has made three fundamental mistakes with education funding. First, the settlement itself is inadequate. Secondly, no provision has been made for the continuing increase in the number of pupils in Wales. Last year, there was an increase of 7,000 and next year there will be an increase of 8,000. That is roughly the equivalent of a new, large comprehensive school for each county in Wales. The full running costs of that new comprehensive school will have to come from the existing schools budget. That is a measure of the increase in pupil numbers alone.

In addition, the Government have made wholly inadequate provision to fund the teachers' pay increase. A 0.4 per cent. increase in the standard spending assessment falls far short of the 2.9 per cent. widely trailed as the teachers' pay award. That pay award alone will cost Welsh counties £17.5 million. That money has to come from somewhere—from other services or from the education budget itself. If the money has to come from education spending, there will, as a direct consequence,

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be between 500 and 600 fewer teachers in Wales next year. If there are 8,000 more students, the inevitable consequence will be larger class sizes which will, in the words of the Secretary of State for Education, "shoot up" and falling standards of education.

In typical fashion, the Secretary of State has tried to divert attention from his own inadequacies by attacking schools, teachers, governors and local authorities with the ridiculous claim that they are not spending the money allocated to them. The fact is that they are following very specifically the advice given by the Department for Education which states in its circular that balances are

"an essential feature of schemes of local management".

Despite repeated requests over the past 12 months from Welsh education authorities, and despite repeated promises, none of which has been fulfilled by the Welsh Office, the Secretary of State has refused to give schools and local education authorities his advice on the question of building up balances.

One would have thought that the Secretary of State would at least acknowledge his own inadequacies and have the modesty to refrain from attacking the people who have been asking for advice for the past 12 months. In typical Tory fashion, he is now going to penalise most unfairly schools without balances for the supposed failings of schools with balances because they did not foresee that his views would apparently differ from those of the rest of the Government. He knows that he has no mechanism within local management of schools to divert the funds in these particular circumstances that he now chooses to criticise. Inevitably, the schools with the smallest balances are in the least prosperous parts of Wales and they will be hardest hit.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): Will not one of the consequences of what the Secretary of State has said be that outlined clearly by the Audit Commission in its document entitled "Adding up the Sums"? The governing bodies of schools will have to reduce the number of highly qualified and trained teachers and substitute less qualified and less trained younger teachers. It will be the quality of education and the quality of teaching that will suffer as a consequence.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is one of the many inconsistencies in the system. Having established local management of schools on the basis of a desire for local accountability and decision making, how on earth can the Secretary of State now criticise schools for operating the very system that he wanted?

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to yet another consequence? The very few grant-maintained schools that exist in Wales, with their additional funding, will not be as badly hit as state schools. Could that not be portrayed as an attempt to hit state schools hardest, to persuade those that have so far resisted the call to adopt grant-maintained status to adopt that status in order to secure the funds that they need to maintain their teaching staff?

Mr. Davies: It hardly constitutes gentle persuasion, but I suppose that it is the sort of genuflection to democracy that we expect from the present Government. I have already mentioned an article in, I believe, last week's *The Times Educational Supplement* about the balances held by grant-maintained schools in England. I have tabled a parliamentary question to the Secretary of State; I hope that the few schools that have been misguided enough to opt out of local authority control in Wales will be given an honest answer. Certainly, according to published figures, grant-maintained schools have carry-over budgets far in excess of those of locally managed schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I will, but I am anxious to finish my speech. This is the last intervention that I will take.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Is it not inevitable that grant-maintained schools will have larger surpluses? They receive 100 per cent. of the money due to them, while schools in Clwyd receive only 68p in the pound.

Mr. Davies: Grant-maintained schools are in a better position to build up carry-over surpluses because they receive more money than locally managed schools. As a former Minister of State in the Welsh Office, the right hon. Gentleman knows the consequences of that very well. When he presided over the Welsh education budget, once grant maintained schools had been established he top-sliced the budget to try to bribe Welsh schools to become grant-maintained. It was plain that, if they did so, they would have a direct relative advantage over schools that remained under local education authority control. That was a specific attempt to destroy the idea of a planned comprehensive education system. Unfortunately, at every opportunity, the people of Wales have overwhelmingly shown that they do not want a different system.

Let me give the Secretary of State an example of the impact that his policy is having. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) referred to the district auditor. Let me refer the Secretary of State to the Office for Standards in Education, which was set up to monitor standards. It has recommended, time after time, that local schools use the roll-over facility to meet the needs that have been identified.

One of the schools that the Secretary of State chooses to criticise happens to be in my constituency. I know it well; it has the distinction of having taught Neil Kinnock, my former colleague in Islwyn. Lewis boys' school in Pengam has a balance amounting to just over 3 per cent. of its budget. It desperately needs investment in buildings and facilities: some of its buildings date from 1860. Following Ofsted's recommendations in a report on the school, it is trying to purchase new information technology equipment. The school has to find £20,000 and it cannot get it from the local education authority. One of the consequences of the settlement is that schools like that across the length and breadth of Wales will not be able to secure the minimum finance necessary to equip themselves with new information technology.

Mr. Alan Williams: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Secretary of State for Education in England has announced in the past couple of weeks that she is making available money for IT in English schools and that the Welsh Office has refused to introduce a similar scheme for Wales?

Mr. Davies: That point invites me to use one of my favourite arguments in favour of devolution, which will,

no doubt, give my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) palpitations. Enormous powers have been devolved to the Secretary of State for Wales. He can choose the ways in which the education policy and the funding of education schemes in Wales differ from those in England. So there is already devolution of power in Wales—to the Secretary of State for Wales. I very much look forward to the day—I shall invite my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West at some time to warmly endorse our view—when power will not be devolved to the Secretary of State for Wales, who represents an English constituency, but to the people of Wales and their elected representatives.

As a result of the settlement, schools such as the Lewis school in Pengam will be forced to try to second-guess the Secretary of State. He will not tell us what he has in mind. Schools will have to wonder what is a reasonable budget, what is a prudent percentage to carry over and how much their funds should be. If they try to build balances for a new science laboratory or new IT or, perhaps, to build a new sports hall, they will not know whether the Secretary of State will change the rules and penalise them the following year. His settlement has implied that intention this year.

It is typical that, under the Secretary of State's uncaring regimes which lack understanding, schools such as the Lewis school will be penalised. Once again, this centralising, dogmatic, intolerant Government have sought to remove local discretion, to reduce the powers of local government and to undermine accountability to the people. They have got it hopelessly wrong; the settlement is hopelessly wrong and that is why my colleagues and I will be voting against the motions tonight.

4.52 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the settlement was good, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) called it a harsh settlement and, in the spirit of compromise, I shall call it a fairly tight but, nevertheless, manageable settlement, as has been almost every settlement that I have known.

There are certainly very good points to the settlement. The increase of 3.2 per cent. in total standard spending is welcome. Indeed, my understanding is that no less than 89 per cent. of it is being met by central Government. Some specific features have caused concern, but have been resolved. The police settlement has been greatly welcomed by the police force in Wales and substantial provision has been made for local government reorganisation. I also welcome the 4.5 per cent. increase in capital grants and credit approvals, which, I am sure, will be put to good use by Welsh local authorities.

The point has not been made that this year is the last for the Welsh counties and that some, if not all, have substantial balances. My county of Gwynedd, for example, has balances amounting to £8.6 million and it has already taken the view that it could reduce them to £6 million and possibly less to cushion the effect of the settlement. Other counties must be in the same position. If the Liverpool *Daily Post* is correct, Clwyd has already decided that it may devote at least £1 million of its £6 million in balances to strengthening services following the settlement.

Mr. Llwyd: In the light of the right hon. Gentleman's opening remarks which, because of the tone in which they were delivered, I heard some of my colleagues describing as almost rebellious, may I ask him whether he received the briefing from the chief executive of Gwynedd county council, which says clearly that there will be a cut of £3.346 million? Is he saying that that man is misleading Members of Parliament about Gwynedd?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for leading me on to exactly what I was going to say next. When the counties talk about reductions they mean not that the 1995-96 settlement is less than the 1994-95 settlement but that the 1995-96 settlement is less than their actual budgets for 1994-95. That is precisely what the treasurer of Gwynedd said in the report to his finance committee, of which I do indeed have a copy. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the bottom of page 1 he will see that like is not being compared with like. As I said, the 1995-96 settlement is being compared with the council's actual budget for 1994-95, which was indeed higher than this year's settlement.

Of course the 1995-96 actual budget is also likely to be higher. Indeed, the Government permit counties to spend an average of about 3.3 per cent. over and above their SSAs before the cap comes into effect. The report by Gwynedd county treasurer shows that there is an anticipated increase in the budget for almost every individual service. In education, for example, the budget for this year is £86.894 million and the base for next year it is £89.21 million.

Of course there is concern about the level of the teachers' pay settlement and about inflation, and there is clearly a need for contingency reserves of about £2.9 million to cover those, but, as my right hon. Friend said, it is not only the counties that have balances. We heard yesterday that about £700 million was available in reserves in school budgets in England, and now we hear that Welsh schools too have about £47.6 million available in their reserves.

The Opposition have made a great deal of what my right hon. Friend said, but surely he would reply—I certainly would—that schools cannot have substantial reserves yet at the same time complain of an inadequate settlement. They can use their reserves. Of course there are schools that may not have reserves, in which case there is nothing to stop the county education authority coming to their assistance with its balances. I am sure that in practice that is what will happen.

There is no excuse for a drastic reduction in teacher numbers or in staffing generally in Gwynedd. Work has been done on some options, such as a 1 per cent. cut in the staffing budget, with a 1 per cent. cut in the total budget and up to a further 2 per cent. I dare say that those exercises are good for the souls of those concerned. The Audit Commission would approve, and I am sure that we should do so, but, given the balances available, it does not seem that drastic cuts will be necessary.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly should bear in mind the fact that expenditure per primary pupil in Wales is now 52.6 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1979-80. Expenditure per secondary school pupil is 64.2

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979-80. Considerable expenditure has been made on education in Wales, with real terms increases.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Does not most education expenditure go on capital equipment, teaching or buildings? Throughout the period to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, the number of pupils declined enormously and a great percentage of the money was required simply to keep empty classrooms and school buildings. The Government's policies of opting out have made it difficult for local authorities to do anything about surplus places. Does not that artificially inflate the figure that is allegedly spent per child?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is protesting too much and is seeking a complex explanation for the fact that expenditure per pupil now is much higher. If he had visited classrooms, he would know that that increase has shown up in the facilities available.

There are a substantial number of surplus places in schools in Wales, and whatever policy is pursued it must certainly be adhered to. Some grant-maintained schools might otherwise have been closed by local authorities, but there is still a duty on local authorities, which they must not shy away from, to get rid of surplus places. I do not think that the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) can use the policy on grant-maintained schools as an excuse for not getting rid of surplus places. I do not want to pursue this argument too far as the amount of time available is limited.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been able to increase the moneys available for community care, which was something of a pinch point. Gwynedd's social services budget will increase from £29.328 million this year to £33.5 million next year. That, and total expenditure of £124.4 million in Wales, will be widely welcomed in Gwynedd.

The failure of my borough of Aberconwy to secure a significant allocation under the strategic development scheme has caused it disappointment, which I share. I have been dealing with the matter in correspondence with my right hon. Friend, and I am grateful for the letter that I received today in which he emphasised the strength of competition for SDS funds and stated that only seven out of 35 projects succeeded in attracting funds.

The borough welcomes the increased funding for housing renovation grants, which are much needed in the renewal area of Penmaenmawr. Aberconwy has a surplus on its collection fund, which will help to keep down the council tax, but the gross cost of rent allowances will have risen by about 300 per cent. between 1991-92 and 1995-96.

The borough's director of financial services therefore suggests that the rent allowance element be excluded from the capping calculations, because councils have little or no control over it. Rent allowances are in the hands of landlords and rent officers, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will look into the matter.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Caerphilly, although I am bound to say that his speech sounded rather like an old, clattering alarm clock. He failed to wake us up for the simple reason that he did not answer the key questions: would the Labour party, if it were in government, increase grant and, if so, by how much, or would it remove the cap and allow the council tax to rise? Those are the alternatives open to the hon. Member for Caerphilly. He has not told us which he would choose, and neither has he said by how much he would allow the council tax to rise.

More surprisingly, I heard no mention of the Opposition's local government policy document, "Renewing Democracy, Rebuilding Communities". I have used the title of the document to oblige the Opposition and to ensure that it is placed on the record. The Opposition's policies are explained in the document: to abolish the cap and compulsory competitive tendering, to return business rates to local authority control and to release capital receipts and payments to councillors. Are those Labour policies or not? If they are, why on earth did we not hear about them?

Mr. Ron Davies: Let me reassure the right hon. Gentleman that it is a consultative document. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Unlike some of his hon. Friends, the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate the virtues of consultation. I look forward to him writing to me with his detailed observations on that consultation document.

Sir Wyn Roberts: If I can help the Labour party by contributing my views, I may do so—if I thought that it would have any effect.

I am bound to say that the tone of the document suggests that the consultation is not very real. The precise propositions to abolish the cap and so on are likely to be adopted by the Labour party, which will lead to a return to the old, profligate, bureaucratic and inefficient local authorities of the 1970s and 1980s.

I think that Mr. McKinstry was right, and in case any hon. Member does not know what that former Labour councillor and adviser wrote in *The Spectator* on 21 January, here it is:

> "In my job with the Labour party at Westminster . . . I could see only too clearly that the spirit of Labour in local government—that mean minded cocktail of political correctness, bureaucracy, intervention and abuse of public money—pervaded the whole party".

I am disappointed that we did not hear what the Opposition would do if they were in government. Until we know rather more positively what they will do, we shall continue to be disappointed.

I began by saying that this was a fairly tight settlement but a manageable one. I shall finish by joining my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in describing it as a good settlement.

5.10 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): This is the first opportunity that I have had to follow the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) since he returned to the Back Benches. It would be wrong if we did not put on the record the great kindness and courtesy that he showed to those of us who came to see him on various issues and problems. It was always appreciated. We welcome him back to the Back Benches. I hope that his successor will learn the right hon. Gentleman's courtesy, style and kindness as quickly as possible. Our personal relationships with the right hon. Gentleman have certainly been beneficial.

For a moment at the beginning of the right hon. Gentleman's speech it sounded, on the Richter scale of language that we have come to expect from him, as if he was going to be slightly rebellious. He managed not to be. I saw slight signs of worry on the Secretary of State's face. If the right hon. Member for Conwy starts to rumble him, the Secretary of State really has to worry.

There are a number of symptoms of the late stages of a Government in decline. We saw an extraordinary set of them today. Financial decadence has been preached by the Secretary of State and, believe it or not, even by the right hon. Member for Conwy, who suggested that because county councils were to be abolished in 12 months, they ought to clear their balances out. Is that the official position of the Government?

How much does the Secretary of State think should remain in the balances of county councils in their last year? What sort of assumptions does he make in his plans for the changeover from county to unitary authority? Has he made assumptions about the amounts of money that will be transferred and how they will be transferred? I should be grateful if the Secretary of State could advise us on that. The recommendation of the right hon. Member for Conwy was that county councils should clear out their balances in their last year of office. That is a sign of a Government preparing to leave office.

Then there was the prescription of the right hon. Member for Conwy that balances should be run down to cover the costs of the failure of the Secretary of State to reach a satisfactory settlement with the Treasury.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I wonder why my hon. Friend is surprised. Does he recognise a parallel between the subject that we are discussing and what the Government are doing with the Welsh Development Agency? They are running down the assets of the WDA in preparation for the time when they are no longer in office. We shall then have to refund that organisation for the capital assets that it has been forced to spend.

Mr. Rowlands: I said that there were a number of symptoms of a Government on their way out. They have been manifested in the debate this afternoon. The concept of running down one's assets and balances is a striking contrast with the Thatcherite prudent housekeeping about which we had lectures for a decade and more. None the less, it is interesting to note the right hon. Gentleman's solution for local authorities which face tight financial problems such as those described by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), those referred to by Welsh Members in their representations to Ministers and those which I am sure will be described in the debate.

I know that among Conservative Members there is a feeling that local government cries wolf every year when this annual ritual takes place. That seems to be the idea. I will tell the Secretary of State the symptoms that have appeared this year which I have not seen before. I have never received so many representations from governors of schools as I have this year. Governors of schools took on the greater responsibilities placed on them by the Secretary of State and in the overwhelming majority of cases rose to the occasion. As a result, they recognise forcefully the consequences of some of the decisions that have been made by central Government. Whatever the Secretary of State may think about previous years' ritual objections and criticisms—I gather that in England criticism has reached monumental proportions when Shropshire is up in arms—I have received more representations from governors of schools than on any other settlement.

I have never received so many letters from headmasters in the terms that I have received this year. They do not speak for the National Union of Teachers. The Secretary of State ought to distinguish between the stolid representations against which he has gained a level of immunisation and the new phenomenon this year of representations from head teachers who do not necessarily belong to a union. They may or may not belong to a union, but they have written and spoken to me in terms different from anything that I have heard before.

Head teachers feel that the system and the financial arrangements are closing in on their schools and on the type of education service that they are capable of providing. They have been told that they should spend their balances, as should the county councils, while remaining prudent. We repeatedly asked the Secretary of State during his speech to tell us what percentage was a prudent balance. Time and again, the Government have been more than willing to give the strictest possible advice on capping formulae. We need a new formula to determine what constitutes a prudent remaining balance.

The nature of the representations that I and many hon. Members have received this year compared with previous years should at least make the Secretary of State think that he might be the one who has got it wrong. Just for once, he should consider that the various representations received indicate that there is at least a genuine major doubt about the financial settlement.

We have had some comments not from the Secretary of State but from the right hon. Member for Conwy about surplus school places. In his ministerial days, the right hon. Gentleman used to lecture us about surplus school places. I do not know whether he has gone to look for surplus places in his constituency or campaigned in his constituency to close down school places. Perhaps as a new Back Bencher he will now suddenly find that when one talks about surplus school places one is talking about schools that are cherished and loved by parents and their young children.

It is easy to talk about surplus school places. The right hon. Gentleman should visit Bedlinog and see the concept of surplus school places in practice. There is a small nursery school and primary school at the top of a hill and another school right down at the bottom. Both schools are loved by the community, by the parents and by the pupils. When people say, "Let us remove X thousand school places from the system," they really mean that schools in villages should be closed down, creating in a village already suffering from dereliction—a pit may have been closed, for instance—yet more dereliction. The last school that was closed lay derelict and empty for years. Closing schools to deal with surplus places would create more dereliction in small communities such as Bedlinog. I am sorry, but I will not advocate that.

The county council made a proposal as part and parcel of its attempt to balance the books to close schools in Pentrebach and Bedlinog. There was an immediate, natural and full reaction by the community to the idea of its schools being closed. It is easy to talk vaguely about surplus places, but in fact they represent much-loved schools.

[Mr. Rowlands]

I will not support the closure of school surplus places in Bedlinog. If there was a Bedlinog in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Conwy, he would not support the closure of the school. We heard quick and easy words from the English Secretary of State for Education yesterday. I should like to see her going round doing away with surplus school places.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) was right. One of the other curious consequences of the Government's reforms is that it is more difficult for a county education authority to plan and reorganise its education system in the way that the Secretary of State supports. If a school is threatened with closure, the automatic consequence is that that school will seek grant-maintained status. Will the Secretary of State for Wales support the closure of schools by the county education authority or will he be tempted politically to say, "At last I have an application for grant-maintained status before me, and I do not have many: I have tried everything under the sun—I have made schools have recounts and treble recounts to try to get grant-maintained schools off the ground, but for some reason they do not seem to get popular support from staff, teachers and parents."? If the Secretary of State can persuade the county education authority to threaten to close some schools, he can then come as a saviour and have a brand new collection of grant-maintained schools. If that is the right hon. Gentleman's cynical ploy, he should admit it. If it is not, he should agree that his policies have made it infinitely more difficult for there to be planned management of the development of education within any county.

Mr. Redwood: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in view of the enormous popularity of grant-maintained schools with the children of shadow spokespeople, to have enough places for the rest of the people who want to go to such schools we need to have more of them?

Mr. Rowlands: I have never indulged in the politics of personality in any shape or form and I will not lower my tone and my contribution to the right hon. Gentleman's level. We are talking of schools in our communities that have no wish to become grant maintained. The only possibility of an application for grant-maintained status has been when there has been a threat of closure, after which the Secretary of State has come forward as a saviour. Is that the thinking behind some of the proposals? If it is, it is a cynical ploy and we are right to reject it.

It is not a matter of just hanging on to the education that we have. We desperately need new investment in our schools. The county of Mid Glamorgan has obeyed the exhortation of the right hon. Member for Conwy and taken £8 million out of the balances to cover some of the £12 million deficit. Despite raiding £8 million from its surpluses, the county has had to make two cuts. It cut £1.5 million from the schools formula budget. I do not present that as a draconian cut, but I believe that it is damaging the local management of schools. The one Government reform that I have strongly supported is LMS, which has been a success story. Headmasters, headmistresses and staff have taken to the concept of LMS and have managed to make it work. It is sad that as a consequence of this financial arrangement counties may have to put pressure on school formula budgets, as Mid Glamorgan has attempted to do, while desperately trying to avoid the worst impact.

The other cruel cut in Mid Glamorgan is a cut of £1.5 million in the centrally controlled building maintenance budget. The Secretary of State and other Conservative Members frequently portray the money held back at county level as being used to finance a bloated bureaucracy. That is a standard accusation. If it is true, the matter should be looked at—I accept that—but when the right hon. Gentleman makes such sweeping statements he should look more closely at what has been kept back centrally.

I give the Secretary of State one example. In my area—I do not know whether this is the case in other areas—many schools do not want to take on the responsibility of financing school transport. The county has offered to transfer that responsibility, but most of the local schools have said that they do not want to take on the headaches and administrative costs of school transport. Parents are very worried about how their children get to and from school. There is an understanding between most schools in the county and Mid Glamorgan county council that that area of expenditure should not be transferred.

Another responsibility is major external repairs to buildings. It is not that the county council is in some wicked way holding back money from the local schools: on the whole, schools have wanted responsibility for big external repairs to remain at county level. There has been a tragic cut of £1.5 million in Mid Glamorgan. I come back to my Bedlinog school. Because of the age of the building, the external wall of that much-loved school, which is strongly supported by parents, teachers and children, is in desperate need of substantial repair. The same point could also apply to Vaynor and Penederyn high school.

This expenditure is vital to schools that are old fashioned, but which have many years of life left in them if investment in repairs and maintenance is made now. There is no reason to think that an old building is dead and must be knocked down. As I have said, that creates a form of dereliction. I am afraid, however, that as a result of this financial settlement, much essential building maintenance may be postponed. The postponement of such investment has disastrous consequences on the whole fabric of some of the old but characterful schools in our community. I hope that the Secretary of State will think twice when he makes sweeping allegations about the counties' centrally held funds.

We have missed a trick. We should have asked the Secretary of State to come to the Mid Glamorgan orchestral concert which is held every January. Perhaps we shall get him to come to the last one, next January, in St. David's hall. There are some 2,500 parents present, so children have the chance to play before an audience as big as the audiences for Shirley Bassey and Tom Jones. The hall is packed out and the places could be sold all over again. It is a tremendous and wonderful success story of the past 15 years.

One of the success stories of the time during which I have represented the constituency has been the growth of orchestral music in Mid Glamorgan. We were always able to sing and we always had choirs, but there was a strange absence of orchestral tradition in our community. In Merthyr, we have a youth orchestra of 160 youngsters who practise every Friday evening between 4.30 pm and

6 pm. My daughter and [illegible] belonged to that orchestra and never missed a rehea[illegible] a Friday night; they would then go out for the nigh[illegible]ey would go to the rehearsals with 'flu, no matter how ill they were. We now have a magnificent county orchestra.

With the new unitary policy, we must be careful that we do not destroy these collective arrangements. The orchestra is funded by the county. Its success depends on the centre at Ogmore, where the children go for five or six days. That visit is paid for by money held centrally. It is not bureaucratic money, but money held centrally and used to make a county orchestra from the smaller building bricks of the Merthyr, Bridgend, Rhymney and Pontypridd orchestras. The Secretary of State makes sweeping statements about centrally held funds. Some of those centrally held funds support the activities that I have described, which could be in danger as a result of a poor financial settlement and, unless we are careful, local government reorganisation.

We should not just be trying to hang on. An area in which we should be spending money is nursery provision. Curiously, as a result of being an old county borough, Merthyr has considerable nursery provision. One of the historic successes of this old county borough is that it developed nursery education fairly comprehensively. As the borough's boundaries are now rather different, there are areas, including areas in the Rhymney part of my constituency, which have no nursery provision. We have the nonsensical position where Abertysswg has no nursery provision but lower Rhymney has full nursery cover and upper Rhymney has no formal nursery education.

What has happened to all the Government's plans for nursery education? Where is the great initiative that was supposed to come from the Prime Minister down for the development of nursery education? Where is the Secretary of State's nursery provision? And where, in this financial settlement, is the extra money needed to fill the gaps in nursery education in the communities that I represent?

When I say nursery education, I mean education. I do not believe in too much play. I started school at the age of three and learned to read at that age. Like many others of my generation, I believe that the learning process opens up the real world for children, so I favour old-fashioned nursery education. I should like to see the gaps in nursery provision in Wales filled. I hope that filling those gaps will be one of the missions of the new county boroughs of Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. I feel that I am spitting into the wind when I write to county education directors and ask why they make no provision in next year's budget for filling those gaps in education and they turn round and say that they are just about hanging on to the nursery provision that they have now.

Before the Secretary of State decides that the proposals are fair, generous and wonderful, he should realise the pressures on the ground in what we all agree is one of the most vital services for the future—our education service.

5.31 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted to have a chance to participate in this debate, not least because I listened to the Secretary of State's announcement on 14 December, which turned out to be some sort of Budget for Wales, when the bad news for local government finance in Wales was first revealed. I had hoped that the battering he had on that occasion would have lent him some strength in Cabinet discussions and given him a chance to return with better proposals today. Sadly, my hopes have been dashed in that regard.

My hopes were raised again when we debated the local government settlement for England; I had hoped that the Secretary of State would have taken the warning that the country felt that the amount of Government money going towards local government resources was inadequate. Sadly, that, too, seems to have passed him by, as has the rumpus that erupted recently between school governors and parents who are trying to get their children educated in our schools. They feel extremely sore about the effect of this Government's actions on the education system, not only in England but in Wales. I am sorry that the Secretary of State has chosen to take no notice of what has happened in this Chamber or outside it since he made his announcement on 14 December last year.

Unfortunately, the settlement means that people, particularly teachers, are likely to be thrown on the scrap heap. In effect, therefore, the settlement will waste resources, be inadequate for Wales's needs and probably cause a reduction in local government services in Wales.

I shall concentrate on education, because, not surprisingly, it has been a major subject of debate today, not least because it plays such a major part in local authority finances. Wales has a particular problem with the education system because of the sparsity of population in its rural areas. We are all aware that sparsity of population is not yet fully taken into account in the formulae that the Government use to decide on standard spending assessments and grants to local authorities. I hope that the Government will face that problem before we reach this occasion next year, because it needs to be dealt with not only in Wales but throughout the country.

I return to the point made earlier about school closures. In sparsely populated areas, the closure of a school, even if there are empty places, presents p[illegible]icular difficulties. The Government have not yet fully understood that point, so it needs to be made again. School closures in sparsely populated areas present financial difficulties when the nearest school is some distance away. Social difficulties arise when children's education is disrupted and family arrangements are also disrupted as parents find that they must take their children to a different school. They also have financial consequences for the community as a whole.

It is easy for the Government to think purely in terms of the cost of education to local government, but the cost of educating a child includes the cost of getting that child to and from school, not only for daytime work but for extra-mural activities. It is important for the Government to recognise that a saving for local government in terms of direct funding of a school may be counterbalanced—even overturned—by the extra costs to the community as a whole of moving children to a different school some distance from where they live.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Another factor that must be borne in mind is the quality of education that children receive. When numbers run very low, the quality of education suffers because it is impossible to maintain an adequate supply of teachers.

Mr. Rendel: It is interesting that that argument is often advanced by Conservative Members, many of whom pay large sums of money to ensure that their children are educated in small classes. The suggestion that the quality

[Mr. Rendel]

of education necessarily worsens when school sizes go down is not valid. It has certainly never been proved. In Powys, for example, attempts have been made to increase school sizes to about 1,000 pupils. Those attempts have not proved successful and some of the best-quality education is given in schools with only about 500 pupils.

The problem of nursery education was rightly discussed by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands). It is a significant factor in terms of education in Wales. As we know, it presents problems throughout our nation but particularly in Wales, where clear gaps exist in nursery provision, especially in the state sector. We should all seek to fill those gaps. I admit that there are some good voluntary and charity nursery schools that are well worth their place in the education system and I hope that the Government will see their way to encourage such schools. For example, the Malldwyn family centre has proved highly successful; if the Government could copy such schools, it would be well worth while. Such nursery schools allow children to get a decent education while allowing parents to live their lives as they wish. That cannot happen in parts of Wales with an absence of nursery provision.

Care in the community is a major and growing part of local government financing, so it is right that the Government now see the need to put more money into it. Many of us have believed for some time that the care in the community policy is right in principle, but we have seen what a shambles has been made of it in practice.

The money that is provided for care in the community always has to catch up with requirements a year or two late. Any hope that the Government might have that the extra money put into care in the community this year means that there will be a real increase in spending is damned by the obvious fact that that money is needed simply to plug the holes in the care in the community programme that have become evident in the past few years. The claim that so much more is now provided for Wales as a result of the Government's settlement must be countered with the contrary claim that the settlement merely represents a catching-up exercise.

The transitional costs of introducing care in the community are not being met. The most serious problem relates to the most severely handicapped adults. An attempt has been made to shut many of the older institutions that used to care for those people. That has caused enormous anguish to those who will be forced to care for them in the community without adequate resources. If one listens to the parents of those who have reached adulthood, but are so severely handicapped that they cannot properly care for themselves, one is immediately aware of the difficulties that they face in looking after their adult children in the community. One must therefore accept that the Government still have a long way to go before they can claim that they have properly funded their care in the community policy in Wales.

A particular problem for Wales this year is that it is rapidly moving towards the election of the new shadow authorities for the new unitary authorities. This year's settlement must obviously provide for the costs of those shadow authorities and, happily, to a large extent it does. It is also setting the trend for the future of those authorities, because those authorities have been given a guideline as to how they should plan for local authority expenditure once they become fully fledged authorities in their own right. It is sad that they will have to plan for a base of spending well below the real needs of the people of Wales. It is sad that, in effect, they will have to plan for cuts in services well below the level of need.

The settlement is a sad reflection of the Government's lack of care for Wales. It shows what happens when the man in charge is more interested in bribing the voters of south-east and southern England with tax cuts than in looking after the real needs of, and providing services to, the Welsh people. Wales deserves better.

5.42 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) mentioned the sparsity of the population in Wales, but perhaps he should have referred to the sparsity of Tory speakers in the debate. It seems that only the Opposition are interested in the settlement and its effect on Wales. The Opposition have made a healthy contribution to the debate and we will continue to do so during the remainder of it.

I have been driven to speak by the scurrilous attack that the Secretary of State for Wales—let us remember that he is the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—made on my county of Clwyd and the effect that that settlement will have on it. I should also like to respond to the Secretary of State's interpretation as to what Clwyd should do about that settlement. I have been in the House for just three years, but I was struck by that vitriolic attack on Clwyd. Perhaps it was meant to boost the right hon. Gentleman's virility on the near empty Conservative Benches, but I am sure that it failed in that objective.

Apart from that attack on my county council, the Secretary of State for Wales expressed his strong concerns about the tactics used by my constituents—the schoolchildren of Maes Garmon in Mold. Last year, they had the temerity to go to a meeting held by the Secretary of State in north Clwyd to protest about the effects of the spending assessment and grant allocation on local education authority spending. The right hon. Gentleman described their actions as politically motivated and he implied that, by putting across their strength of feeling, they were almost deranged. As for their political motivation, I should tell the right hon. Gentleman that those schoolchildren came to my surgery to lobby their Labour Member of Parliament, just as they lobbied Labour councillors. They felt so impassioned about the effects of any cuts in the education budget on their school and its teachers that they felt that they had to lobby the Secretary of State for Wales. What was his response? It is not apparently part of Tory party democracy of the late 20th century that people should be able to lobby the Secretary of State about the effects of spending cuts on their schools.

I should like the Minister and the Secretary of State to tell me how many schools in Clwyd they have visited in the past year. In the past year, how often have they expressed their concerns about education to local councillors? How often have they written to Clwyd Members drawing their attention to the concerns that were expressed by the Secretary of State in the Chamber this afternoon? On all three counts, the answer is that they have taken such action on very few occasions. I certainly

never received a letter from the Secretary of State expressing concern about the level of balances in Clwyd. The Minister might like to respond on that point.

The blunt fact is that the settlement is a very difficult one for local schools, the local education authorities and all local government services in Clwyd. The Secretary of State has argued that Clwyd should consider its management costs and be prudent with its balances: apparently, it should consider reducing its overall expenditure so that it is more in line with the expectations expressed in central Government diktats from the right hon. Member for Wokingham.

The Secretary of State offered no suggestion on the level of balances that he wants Clwyd county council to set. He mentioned £5.5 million as the current balance; the county council's budget this year is £271 million. Is £5.5 million a prudent balance on that level of expenditure? Although some money may be taken out of the balances—I am sure that the county council will do that as a result of the settlement—does £5.5 million represent a prudent balance? What is a prudent balance? Perhaps the Minister will tell us.

Is it prudent for Clwyd county council, in its final year of existence, to plunder its balances so that, next year, the new authorities of Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham have to go back to the Secretary of State and say that they have no inheritance from the former authority? They will tell him that no balances were passed on to them and that they are therefore in a difficult position.

We have heard many Members of both Houses talk about selling the family silver. If we spend that family silver as a short-term measure to shore up Clwyd county council and to overcome its current problems, when it has only a £5.5 million balance from £271 million expenditure, what will happen next year? What will happen to Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham, when the undoubted central aim of Government policy is to reduce public spending? What will happen when, next year, the Government reduce the settlement still further and impose a stricter cap?

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: It will be a generous settlement next year because it will be election year.

Mr. Hanson: I hope that my hon. Friend is right because my constituents deserve a better settlement than that offered today.

Clwyd county council has made it clear that, this year, as a result of the settlement, it will have to make cuts of £8 million in the services it provides centrally—a cut of approximately 4 per cent.—if it is to keep within the Government's set capping limit. I take my council's word on that, because it has examined the issue properly.

My authority was not elected to make cuts of £8 million in services and it has no intention of doing so. It has no mandate to do that, because I remind the Minister that 32 of the 66 members of that authority are Labour and only six represent the Tory party. Four out of five Clwyd Members of Parliament are Labour Members and none of us was elected on a mandate to make cuts of £8 million.

Mr. Jones: Where is the Tory Member for Clwyd?

Mr. Hanson: The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), the Under-Secretary of State, is out on duty today, when he should be in the Chamber to answer for the Government's policies. This year, Clwyd county council, my local county council, will be confronted by an £8 million cut in expenditure. That money cannot be made up simply by prudent management. It cannot be made up simply by raiding the balances and selling the family silver for future years. It must be made up—unless there is an increase in the cap or, even better, perhaps an abolition of the cap or an increase in grant—by direct cuts in services in my county.

Those cuts will fall, by and large, on the education committee, because the education committee makes up most of the cost of Clwyd county council's expenditure. The county council has already considered making large cuts and has cut the central non-schools budget; nevertheless, it must make £3.5 million of proposed cuts, which in my county means the loss of nearly 300 teachers. Cuts in the non-schools budget have been made. Those cuts are now falling on the delegated school budgets, as governors are realising.

As my hon. Friends said, the reaction to those cuts is not an uprising of politically motivated people. I have received hundreds of letters from worried parents who do not blame the county council. They are streetwise parents. They know where the responsibility lies and they all, individually and collectively, have said to me, "Please go to the Welsh Office and ask it to review the grant, or, at the very least, we are willing, as ratepayers in Clwyd, to pay more on our local council tax by a higher cap to allow us to spend money in investing in our children's future."

As recently as last night, I presented a petition to the House on behalf of a school in Carmel in my constituency, signed by 2,000 parents who specifically asked for a review of the grant and the rate cap. I have received 200 letters from parents from one school in Northop Hall in my constituency. They are not politically motivated by unions. They are genuine parents who send their children to Clwyd schools—as I do—and whose children need investment in the future. Those parents want a proper settlement that reflects their aspirations, yet my county is confronted with a cut of £8 million, which will translate into £3.5 million in the education budget.

Clwyd county council social services have reviewed their budget recently because of the settlement and, as a result, must plan cuts of £1.4 million in a budget that is already unable to sustain the demand, statutory and real, that hits it. They are considering "rationing" services or charging for them, which would have a significant impact on the people in our community, whom I represent, to whom we try to deliver top-quality services. It will almost inevitably hit the most disadvantaged people in our community with the most difficult problems, who need the support of the county council. It makes any idea of a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach to community care a pipe dream, because that reduction in funding will hit hard the county council's ability to deliver locally based services.

The highways committee has considered services and has already identified £400,000 of cuts in the local maintenance budget for roads in Clwyd. I drive on roads in Clwyd continually and I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that work certainly needs to be done, and that cut will really have an impact on our local services.

In answer to the Secretary of State, of course Clwyd county council has considered, and will continue to consider, its central core services—the services provided at shire hall in Mold in my constituency. The county council has already considered about £400,000 worth of

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savings in central departments, and I am sure that it will consider further. No Labour authority is about inefficiency. If there are genuine inefficiencies, I hope that the Secretary of State will write to me and tell me about them, so that I can write to the county council and ask it to review them. Let him put it on the record today. When the Minister replies, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let him tell the House, and tell me as the local Member of Parliament, the savings that Clwyd county council can make. If he is to go down the road of considering budgets and determining what is waste and what is not, let him tell Members of Parliament who represent Clwyd what should be cut from the budget to make the savings and compensate for the loss in grant that will confront us. I look forward to hearing his response to those questions.

All that is from a Government who, while the settlement continues, continue to plough money into grant-maintained schools throughout Wales—enormous amounts of capital spending—and recently announced a £20 million good schools initiative. In my opinion, the £20 million would be far better spent by local authorities in Wales rather than in response to a central diktat of what is a good school from the Secretary of State for Wales.

On the funding of schools, perhaps the Minister will tell us why the small schools initiative of England does not translate to Wales, and why small schools do not receive similar financial support to that which such schools receive in England.

My local authority would wish many steps to be taken today. I shall therefore be forced to vote against the settlement unless those steps are announced in the Minister's reply. The county council would certainly want the cap to be raised, so that additional resources might be raised locally by local taxpayers to pay for services that local taxpayers want. People have consistently voted for better spending and improved spending on education; if the Minister cares to visit Clwyd, he will find that many people in my community are willing to pay more in the absence of proper Government spending to achieve that level of services.

The Minister needs to consider many technical aspects of capping. In Clwyd, matters such as the Dee crossing and the Bryn Estyn case place additional costs on the county council, but are not, in the opinion of the county council or Members of Parliament who represent that county, adequately reflected in the calculation of the standard spending assessment.

Obviously, the council cannot achieve cuts of £8 million in 1995-96 without seriously reducing services. Let me remind the Minister that those serious reductions follow £22 million of reductions in county council spending in the past three years alone. The county council cannot do that without further serious cuts in services. The settlement is detrimental to the people of Clwyd and to the people whom I represent.

I leave the Secretary of State and the Minister with the thought that there are things that can be done by the Government to improve the situation in Clwyd. There is a will in Clwyd to find additional money from existing resources to help to offset the effects of the settlement, but, ultimately, people in my county want and demand good services. They want and demand maintenance of the existing level of services. If the Minister votes tonight to maintain the settlement, he will commit my county to serious decisions on the future of schools, social services, highways, the infrastructure and the industrial development of Clwyd.

People in my constituency say that they do not want increased class sizes; they do not want reduced numbers of teachers; they do not want less spending on buildings, fewer books and less spending on the range of school matters. They do not wish old people to be forced to pay increased charges for their home helps. They do not wish the infrastructure of our local community to be run down. The one way in which I can reflect those demands is to vote against the settlement, and I shall do so with pleasure.

5.57 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am disappointed that the Secretary of State is not in the Chamber at the moment. For some time, I had tried to obtain a meeting with him to discuss some important economic matters in the south of my constituency. I wrote to him in English, as I know that he does not like anything Welsh, but I could not obtain a reply. Eventually, I received a reply saying that he would see me after Christmas—that is when he would be up in the constituency.

Nevertheless, the Secretary of State appeared in September on the set of the "White Knight" film. He has since referred to "White Knight" in speeches with worrying regularity. He even referred to "White Knight" in the Welsh Grand Committee. He sees himself as some kind of white knight. I should prefer to call him something else, but he is not here to meet that particular barrage just now and, in any event, time does not permit the full number of words that I should like to use.

The white knight syndrome typifies the right hon. Gentleman's style of politics. I am grateful for the revised settlement for the police, which is sensible and will serve the needs of north Wales very well; but we have seen the white knight syndrome in action, because the first offer was ridiculous and would not have afforded any level of policing. I speak as the son of a policeman and the brother of a policeman, and I am a qualified lawyer and have had many dealings with the police. As the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) well knows, the first settlement would have been a disaster for north Wales, hence the review of £3.3 million when the white knight came riding in with bags of much-needed money. It is a silly ploy to offer a couple of peanuts and then hand over half a bag of them. We can all see through it; the public can see through it and are clearly aware of what is going on.

The right hon. Member for Conwy and I have a common interest—apart from being two humans, our constituencies split the borough of Aberconwy. He said earlier—I think in reference to Gwynedd—that further cuts were good for the soul. I do not accept for one moment that further cuts are good for the soul given the consistent deep cuts in Gwynedd over four or five years. Those are not empty words—as the right hon. Gentleman well knows, there have been substantial cuts. To say that those cuts are good for the soul is little short of disingenuous.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I said—the hon. Gentleman can check it in the *Official Report*—that the exercise experienced in Gwynedd of a 1 per cent. cut, an additional

1 per cent. cut, then a possible 2 per cent. cut might be good for the soul and might appeal to the Audit Commission. I also said that I did not think that the cuts would be called upon.

Mr. Llwyd: With the greatest of respect, if the right hon. Gentleman looks back over the past three or four years, he will see that such cuts have been made. I do not know why this year should be different from those years. I have attempted to make that point. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I do not think that it took us much further.

I agree entirely with the remarks of the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who spoke of the pressing need for nursery school provision. We in Wales have a great pride in our education system and have always seen the value of good education. I have one perfectly true story of what happened in my constituency five years ago. A gentleman came from a public school to teach a science subject in a secondary school in the south of my constituency. When he arrived at the school, he saw that the laboratory was a shambles. Gwynedd education authority had no money to invest in the school—I do not blame it for that, as it had other priorities all over the county and a small budget with which to meet the needs. The teacher rang a friend of his in the science department of a public school and asked him if he had [illegible] equipment. His friend said that it was just as [illegible] had rung as the public school was installing a new laboratory and his friend could have the old one.

That secondary school now has the best-equipped physics laboratory in Gwynedd. We are relying on scraps. There is a hidden agenda, and we know what it is. The Government want education for the rich and any old nonsense for the rest of us. They are in the business of establishing, yet again, a ruling class. We are not blind and we can see what is going on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) mentioned the hidden problems of this year's budget. Care in the community is becoming an increasing drain on local authority resources. As the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) said, there is no doubt that the policy is welcomed in principle, but unless it is properly financed, it will not achieve what was intended.

The right hon. Member for Conwy mentioned one or two matters raised by Aberconwy borough council in its responses to the settlement. As he said, the strategic development scheme announcements were disappointing for the borough. I echo that sentiment and go further—there is no conceivable reason why the scheme should not have been allowed.

Aberconwy is not designated for European assistance in the form of grant aid. If what I have seen of Welsh Office applications to Europe for grant funding in south Gwynedd is anything to go by, its procedure is a shambles. I wonder when, if ever, we shall gain any form of credibility in the European Union. The application for south Gwynedd has been submitted to the European Union Commission three times. It was submitted in March and was bounced back, marked in red—we are talking about education—to show where the application had gone wrong. It was resubmitted in April or May and was bounced back marked in a different colour. Shortly after Christmas, this year, there was a meeting so that the directors general of the various departments could tell the Welsh Office how to put a case together. We in south Gwynedd have waited almost 12 months to advance one inch, and have not yet done so. I suspect that that is one reason why the white knight would not see me earlier than next week, despite many attempts by me and those in my office to see him earlier. I am disappointed in the general level of proficiency in the Welsh Office vis-à-vis its contacts with the European mainland.

I shall develop the argument put fairly and squarely by the right hon. Member for Conwy about the concern in Aberconwy about the rent allowance costs, which are a heavy burden. I would be obliged if the Minister would look again at the effects on Aberconwy and other areas in Wales of that policy. At present, it is a drain and little else, and it should be shored up, otherwise other cuts will have to be made—where, I cannot say. I appreciate that the SSA formula recognises the incidence of rent allowance, but it does not deal sufficiently with its effects. Will the Minister respond to that point in due course?

The right hon. Member for Conwy mentioned the £3.46 million cut. Whatever the position and the mathematics, that represents a real cut. Gwynedd, Dyfed, Clwyd and other responsible authorities throughout Wales have avoided cutting their education budgets. Part of the reason for that is probably that we in Wales respect good education and what it can provide in a normal economy. This year, there is no doubt that Gwynedd's education budget will be cut. It is no use the Minister saying that it is because of this, that or the other; it is directly because the money allocated is insufficient to meet the county's needs.

Mention has been made of the further 1 per cent. cut in Gwynedd's staffing budget, the 1 per cent. cut in the total budget and a possible further 2 per cent. cut. Those are stark enough cuts in themselves, but when they come in the fifth year of cuts, the position becomes almost unmanageable. I am sure that many officers and members in local government in Gwynedd are fed up with being apologists for the Government. They are at the sharp end and have to deal with the cuts and try to explain them. They know that if a responsible administration were looking after a central, core budget, the cuts would not have to be made. But there will be a cut in Gwynedd's budget. It gives me no pleasure to say that. As various hon. Members have said, there are hidden problems in the budget in Gwynedd which involve community care and which will impact even further than has been suggested.

Dyfed county council is proud of its education system and of the way in which it has looked after its schools in the face of tremendous funding pressure. There is a link between Dyfed and Gwynedd, as both counties have a large number of fairly small primary schools. Those of us who come from rural backgrounds know how important village or town schools are to communities. The local authorities have recognised that fact and they have hitherto safeguarded their schools. However, they fear that they cannot hold out any longer; the dyke will burst any minute. Many dozens of villages throughout Dyfed, Gwynedd and Clwyd will suffer directly as a result of the settlement that has been offered.

As I mentioned in an intervention, Dyfed has recognised that it will have to cut its community education provisions. The nature of school meals will change and they will cost more. The local authority will be not be able to maintain school buildings. We obviously face difficult times, and it is not good enough for the Government to

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say that we should cut the cloth accordingly. The cloth has been cut as much as it can be cut, and the Government must recognise that fact.

The Secretary of State recognised that there was a crisis in policing in north Wales. I had several meetings with him to discuss that subject, as did other hon. Members. We are now facing a crisis of equal proportions, and this crisis is not simply confined to the police; it extends to education, transport, social services and community care. I invite the Government to reconsider this savage settlement, which will do nothing for local government.

The new unitary authorities will be grossly disadvantaged. Many of us were involved in the legislative process last year, and we do not want to bequeath those authorities a legacy of failure before they have even commenced operations. The settlement must be reviewed if we are to adopt a responsible attitude to local government in Wales.

6.12 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): It is a pleasure to follow the thoughtful remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). At the end of his speech he highlighted a matter which worries a great many Welsh people as we move towards the establishment of unitary authorities in Wales. In that respect, we are much further ahead than England.

I am worried about a whole range of subjects, and my hon. Friend referred to some of them. We face a serious problem with the maintenance of school buildings in the valleys of south Wales. School buildings are literally sliding down the hillsides because of the extensive mining that occurred in the past, and the cost of shoring up those buildings is often exorbitant.

A question mark hangs over the future of special needs education in schools in south Wales. Marvellous initiatives have been taken in special needs education—mainly instigated, not by the Government, but by staff and pupils. The "much despised creatures"—as they are described by the Government Front Bench—the administrators of education in Wales, have done a marvellous job trying to integrate children with handicaps into mainstream education. We aim to give everyone an equal opportunity in society and allow them their rightful civil liberties.

My children do not have fields to play in and I perceive a constant need throughout the urban centres in Wales for green spaces for our children in schools.

I am concerned about the state of our schools and the problems associated with their maintenance. Owing to the topography of south Wales and its industrial past, many buildings in Pontypridd will have to be grouted at a cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds. Many of the schools in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) have faced a real crisis. Old and newer mining operations have burrowed under schools and under whole communities. What might be a quite expensive repair bill for a household, can prove catastrophic for a school. As a result, ordinary care and maintenance jobs, such as painting walls and repairing electrical fittings or windows, are often put off for many years in schools in south Wales. The money must be spent simply to keep the walls and the buildings together.

A school in my area, ysgol Gyfan Rhydfelin, had to nail doors shut because subsidence had forced the walls askew and prevented the doors from locking. It was a fire hazard and an absolute disgrace. We solved that problem, but only after quite a struggle. That school also has terrapin classrooms. Time and again, schools in south Wales solve their maintenance problems by housing children in temporary classrooms. The climate is invariably very wet and often very cold, and no child should spend his or her educational life under those appalling conditions.

Mine was the most lucky of generations because when I went to school in south Wales the schools had just been built. They were airy and light. People believed that children should not be trapped in concrete playgrounds, and the schools were surrounded by fields. They were marvellous places.

Those same schools which were built in the 1950s and 1960s are now falling apart because the maintenance costs simply cannot be met. The school maintenance budget in Mid Glamorgan alone has been cut by £1.5 million. There is no excuse for that, and I hope that the Minister will address the problem.

Special needs education concerns me enormously. Many schools in Wales have done a marvellous job providing special education. The special care unit at Bryncelynog school in my constituency has pioneered all sorts of projects. A little primary school at Pentyrch has transformed not only the lives of the disabled children who have now been integrated into mainstream education, but the whole school, because it has changed schoolchildren's views of those who have physical handicaps. That marvellous initiative must not be threatened in any shape or form by the Government's tight-fisted fiscal policies. Integration should continue and special needs must be met.

The schools in the constituencies of my hon. Friends are crying out for speech therapists and for peripatetic physiotherapists, which would solve the problem of children taking whole days off school in order to receive physiotherapy treatment in hospitals. We are talking about our future wealth-creating base: our children. We cannot afford not to tap the potential of children with disabilities any more than we can afford not to tap the potential of those children who are lucky enough not to suffer any disability.

Finally, I return to the problem of the lack of green spaces in so many of our schools. My own children's school, Coedylan primary and junior school, has no grass for the children to play on; it has a small, concrete playground. That position is echoed throughout Wales.

There was a time when children could play on the mountainsides and in the streets. They cannot do that any more. Anyone with kids knows that parents are too paranoid and frightened to allow their children to roam on the mountainsides because of the stories that we hear. Children cannot play in the streets because there are too many cars.

If I may be slightly flippant, I suspect that one of the reasons why the Welsh rugby, soccer and cricket teams have performed so badly in recent years—heroically perhaps, but pretty badly—is that kids are inhibited by the

fact that their whole sports lives are structured. The only time they ever indulge in sports is when they take part at school or go to a special coaching class on a Saturday.

If financial pressures are to be brought to bear on boards of governors, education authorities and schools, there must be no more sell-offs of school playing fields and green spaces. Those facilities have to be properly maintained and extended.

I am glad that the Secretary of State has returned to the Chamber. He has missed some marvellous speeches from hon. Members who have kids attending schools in Wales—as mine and those of my constituents do. He will have heard that there is what amounts to a crisis, certainly in the minds of many of us who observe what is happening in schools today. For that reason alone, I shall vote against the Government tonight. I hope that they listen to what has been said. It is extremely important because those children are the future of Wales.

6.20 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I apologise for croaking my way through just a few comments in the aftermath of cold. The nub of the debate was an exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) in his opening speech and the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend pointed out that when we take out of the settlement the special amounts for the police and for community care, we are talking about an increase of 0.4 per cent. at best. Immediately, the Secretary of State rose to his feet and his answer was, "It is all right because inflation has fallen to 2 per cent."

It seemed strange that the Secretary of State could put forward such a proposition. He was saying that it was all right because the rate of inflation will be only five times higher—instead of six or seven times higher—than the extra money being provided. Most of us know that it will be six or seven times higher at some time during the year. That is what it is all about—the authorities were first entrapped and then virtually strangled for years as far as resources are concerned.

My own county has absorbed £6 million in cuts in the past three years by using up some of its reserves. The Secretary of State said that we should not worry about the increase in teachers' pay because the provision is enough to cover it. How can he say that before he knows what the teachers' pay increase will be? The provision was set long before he could even have had prior warning of what the increase would be—which no doubt he has now.

The Secretary of State has no accounting or statistical grounds to say that an increase of one fifth of the rate of inflation will enable local authorities to cover an unknown and significant—although most of us would say inadequate—increase in teachers' pay. I have to declare an interest as my wife is a teacher. We have to recognise that the consequence of today's announcement is either cuts in teaching staff or larger classes, leading to a reduction in the standards of education provision.

I caution hon. Members about the idea being pushed by one Conservative Member about lifting the cap. Let me make this cautionary point about what the Secretary of State has said about the 89 per cent. central provision. If the Government decided to fund the teachers' pay rise by lifting the cap, a 1 per cent. increase in local authority costs would mean a 9 per cent. increase in the council tax because of the ratchet effect, so councils would be blamed for the fact that the Government have under-provided.

I now come to another peculiar proposition that the Government have suddenly dug up. The Secretary of State has been thoroughly briefed. He mentioned reserves in addition to school reserves. His case was that the reserves will be the solution for this year. What is the Secretary of State actually saying about reserves? We know that the Government always say that to be in debt is wrong and will criticise those irresponsible councils which get into debt—of course, they are not Conservative councils according to the Government—yet the Minister stands at the Dispatch Box to announce increased borrowing powers to get councils deeper into debt.

What about the concept of reserves? Are they good or bad? The Secretary of State does not really know. He cannot make up his mind. Are the schools which have no reserves virtuous because they used them up to meet previous cuts in resources, or are the schools with big reserves being prudent? The Secretary of State will not give us any guidance. He depends on his concept of a prudent level of reserves, but he gives no indication of what it is.

We understand that there is a difference between certain reserves. We know that big reserves are good in grant-maintained schools because the right hon. Gentleman has told us so, but the Government will not tell us whether those reserves are good in other schools. We assume they cannot be good, because the Government are telling them to use them up. That is the illogicality of our position.

I made an intervention about information technology. Is it not anomalous that at Question Time the Secretary of State will stand up and say, "Look at what inward investment in information technology and electronic engineering has meant to Wales," but, at the same time as his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has announced a scheme in England to make extra information technology facilities and equipment available in English schools, he has flatly refused to do the same in Wales, which, according to him, will be hoisted by the boot laces by the electronics and information technology industries?

The Secretary of State is a mass of inconsistencies. He had the cheek to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly—I know that it was a jocular comment—that my hon. Friend leaves the shadow Cabinet to make the tea. We all know very well that the Government will not let the right hon. Gentleman leave the Cabinet to make the tea.

Dr. Howells: Because he would poison it.

Mr. Williams: No, because while he was outside he would sell the kettle. Is that not what they are advocating? They are telling schools to spend the money that they put aside to buy equipment. That is what the Secretary of State said. I have never heard such financial absurdity. I will go with relish into the Lobby to vote against it.

6.28 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): The consistent theme from the Opposition has been the dire straits into which the local government settlement has put local authorities in Wales. There is no doubt that all my hon. Friends have consistently made a plea for the Government to

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reconsider the settlement, which will result in a cut in the services which local authorities in Wales will be able to provide. We heard from the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) the novel suggestion that county councils could, as they go out of existence, run down their reserves with impunity. Has it not occurred to the right hon. Gentleman that immensely important education, social, highways and transportation services will have to be provided by the new unitary authorities? It will be prudent of county councils, as it will of district councils, to maintain balances that can be handed over to the new authorities.

The Secretary of State said today, as he did on ITN lunchtime news yesterday, that a lot of money is available. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) reminded us that the Secretary of State could not have included sufficient money to cover the pay review body's settlement for teachers, which will not be announced until later this week. It would have been impossible for the right hon. Gentleman to anticipate last December the fine-tuning in January and to know exactly the review body's recommendation. He does not know the figure any more than local education authorities, even though all have tried to make budgetary provision for that pay increase.

None of the education authorities in Wales has wholly provided for the anticipated 2·9 per cent. pay increase. All will have to dip into their balances to make up the shortfall. Some authorities have already told schools that they are expected to provide some of the extra funding. Other authorities may be able to do so out of the fabled, fabulous balances that they are supposed to hold.

When the Minister replies, I hope that he will say if he knows anything more about today's school balances compared with the figures thrown about at the start of this financial year. My bet is that most schools have already used their balances to purchase better equipment or more books and for other purposes. The consistent message from virtually every Welsh council is that the budget represents a cut over last year.

The Secretary of State was at pains to stress that one must compare like with like and the settlement for this and last year. Local authorities must consider the money that they had to spend this year and that which the right hon. Gentleman is making available for next year. Whichever indicator one uses—the TSS, AEI², SSA or other initials that come to mind in respect of local government spending—it is clear that there will be a real terms cut this year. Although there will be extra money, it will buy less. The same is true of education and housing authorities.

My hon. Friends the Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) and for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West pointed out that the message from north, south, east and west Wales is that more money is needed. The same is said beyond Wales—the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) brought the same message from the Liberal Democrats.

The Secretary of State can say as much as he likes about extra cash, but it will not buy the same in the current financial year that it did last year. Cuts have been made over several years. Over the past three years, Mid Glamorgan has had to make savings of £34 million. This year, authorities throughout Wales are being stretched on the rack and are falling apart.

Today I received two letters from Clwyd, over which the Secretary of State took so much time to salivate in his criticisms. Mr. Edward Williams of ysgol Morgan Llwyd wrote:

"Teimlwn bod ein pobl ifanc wn haeddu gwell."

That means, "Our children deserve better." The Federation of Welsh Schools commented that teachers are fed up trying to hold together a system that is falling apart around them.

Pupil-teacher ratios are a good indicator of the economic climate in education. From 1979 until 1990, pupil-teacher ratios in secondary schools fell year on year—from 16.8 pupils per teacher to 15.3. In 1993, ratios began to creep up, to 15.7 pupils per teacher. In primary schools, the ratio was at its lowest in 1984, when it was 21.5 pupils per teacher. By 1993, it had increased to 22.1. The situation is worsening inexorably.

Judging from the cash available, there has been an increase in district budgets of 1.1 per cent., but when one considers what can be bought, that represents a reduction of 2.5 per cent.—£11 million less than what is needed for a standstill budget. Compared with district council spending last year, there will be an overall cut of nearly 6 per cent.

The number of homeless in Wales is increasing and the state of its housing stock is worsening. Current new builds are probably only half the number required. The Government signed up to the United Nations housing strategy—a declaration, as far as Wales was concerned, that there would be houses for all by the year 2000. The money given to local authorities or to Tai Cymru will probably allow only 40 per cent. of that target to be achieved. In the year that the Government signed that document, they have already admitted failure. There will be deeply damaging cuts in both industrial and rural Wales.

The Secretary of State was at pains also to stress that he had fully catered for improved technology, to help bring the new unitary authorities into being—and we applaud him for that. He has catered in full also for the shadow authorities' budget. However, when it comes to financing possible redundancies, the right hon. Gentleman has provided £3.5 million, which must be borrowed.

The Secretary of State is on record as saying that he expects very few workers to lose their jobs, even though at one time he talked about a 5 per cent. loss which he thought would mainly be accomplished by natural wastage. There are huge differences in the numbers who are likely to lose their jobs and the terms on which they will lose them.

The Government have chosen, in their arcane way, to interpret TUPE—the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981—in such a way as to exclude a large number of local government workers. As is often the case when the Government interpret the directive's demands, they have got it wrong. This is another instance in which they would be well advised to come to a new accommodation with local government workers to make sure that the redundancy scheme is properly financed. How many people's redundancies can be financed on a £3.5 million scheme? Very few, I would guess.

In addition to local government reorganisation, the Welsh Office is proposing that contracting out be reintroduced in Wales much sooner than in England, where the Department of the Environment is proposing a reasonable delay of 18 months to enable the new authorities to settle in before moving to compulsory competitive tendering. In Wales, however, some authorities have to begin the job six months after reorganisation, some a year after and many 18 months after. Bearing in mind the difficulties that local authorities will have with their budgets, will the Secretary of State extend the period before local authorities have to examine the problems that CCT will cause them?

Finally, I deal with efficiency. The Welsh Office's own expenditure plans showed efficiency savings of 2 per cent., 2 per cent., 1.5 per cent. and 1.7 per cent. for 1992-93. All of a sudden, in 1993-94, the planned efficiency saving was 5.6 per cent. Will the Minister tell us exactly what savings were achieved that year?

Let us examine staff numbers in local government and the Welsh Office. Whereas Welsh Office staff have declined in number by 82 since 1979—a reduction of just over 3 per cent.—local government staff have declined by nearly 14,000, or about 6 per cent., which is double the number of redundancies. By any measure, local government has already shown itself to be more efficient.

The settlement proves that the Welsh Office, by having 15 press officers and quadrupling its publicity expenditure, is trying to sell the impossible in Wales. We shall be left with crumbling and under-resourced schools, exhausted and over stretched teachers, frenzied fund-raising parents trying to get money for the basics in our schools, impoverished housing stock, houses unfit for habitation, growing repair lists, growing numbers of homeless, roads increasingly potholed and taking longer to repair and overstretched social services. The needs of children and the elderly will not be met, and it will all be down to a settlement that is wholly inadequate for the needs of the real world. We shall vote against the settlement proposals.

6.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): We have heard the traditional claims that this or that is going wrong and that we are heading for disaster or crisis. One need only turn to the previous year's debate or that of the previous year or the one before to realise that the same claim has been made again.

Let us analyse today's debate. It is clear that it has been a low-key, even-tempered debate about how local government in Wales is proceeding in the final year before our popular reorganisation. The only thing that we have not heard is a positive alternative from Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), whom I can at least congratulate on broadening the debate more than any of his colleagues, either today or in previous debates on Welsh affairs. However, the hon. Gentleman will have to pay more attention to the facts. I assure him that we have given careful consideration to compensation for local government reorganisation and have included appropriate funding for the costs that are likely to arise in the coming financial year.

Nor has the hon. Gentleman studied his housing brief. He certainly has not read the interim house condition survey, which was published last year and which outlined the continuing improvement in housing in Wales. No doubt he will examine it more closely in future.

The settlement gives local government in Wales an additional £87 million to spend—a total of more than £950 for every man, woman and child in Wales. It provides more money for the police—a fact widely welcomed by police authorities—and for care in the community. In addition, there is £43 million to fund the costs of local government reorganisation and a generous increase in the local government settlement for the forthcoming year.

Welsh local authorities are responsible for very large budgets. All but one county council have budgets of more than £150 million. They have flexibility to manage their budgets as they see fit and will be setting their budgets at a time of low inflation, which means that their money will go much further than last year or previous years. They can use accumulated reserves to fund expenditure if they consider it prudent to do so.

In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out that there is always room for efficiency savings in large-scale organisations. Given the discretion available to them, I cannot accept Opposition Members' argument that the settlement will not enable local authorities to protect the front line or, most important, functions. They can protect those functions if they have the will to do so.

Central Government support will account for about 89 per cent. of total standard spending. Local authorities will have increased scope for raising revenue locally, which they have sought in the past. At the same time, Welsh council tax payers will pay considerably less for their council than their counterparts in England and Scotland. Those on income support or low incomes can qualify for benefit up to 100 per cent. of their council tax bill.

I am not prepared to speculate on council tax levels for 1995-96; that is a matter for individual local authorities. Council tax levels will depend on local authorities' budget decisions and their success in collection and changes in their tax base. Welsh billing authorities have an excellent record on collection, for which I commend them. I understand that they estimate a surplus of £15 million on collection funds at 31 March this year. That is very good news for council tax payers in Wales as it means that they will benefit from lower bills—a reduction of about £15 at band D in the coming financial year. Indeed, press reports suggest that at least one Welsh local authority is planning to reduce its council tax.

None the less, I must tell the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) that it is essential for the Government to have power to protect local taxpayers from unreasonable council tax increases, especially at times when it is necessary to restrain public expenditure.

Opposition Members have voiced their concern for local taxpayers in speculating on the council tax increase that will result from the settlement proposals. It seems inconsistent for them to argue for the removal of capping, which would almost certainly result in a considerable increase. They cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Hanson: Will the Minister explain why the Welsh Office knows better than the people of Clwyd, who elected 32 Labour councillors out of a total of 66 in the

[Mr. Hanson]

most recent election and who have previously delivered a Labour majority? The Minister's party has six councillors. Is not local democracy about letting local people decide on the local services that they want?

Mr. Jones: Capping is now a well accepted and appreciated protection. Local electors know that they have that protection in addition to the accountability that they should expect to come directly from their councillors.

Welsh local authorities have established an excellent record for prudent budgeting in recent years, and I trust that that will continue. The criteria for capping are provisional, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take all relevant considerations into account before making his final decisions.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) reminded us that he has no policies on this matter, just as he has no policies on anything else. The proposal to abolish capping is only a consultative proposal. We all know how thin Labour's policies are; it was understandable that the hon. Gentleman should appeal to my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) to write to him and offer anything that he could possibly set up as a policy—so desperate is the hon. Gentleman to find something positive to say.

The police settlement is excellent, and is consistent with the new funding formula arrangements. It will be welcomed by the public and the new police authorities, if not by Opposition Members. It is essential for the new authorities to have a sound financial base in their first year, so that they can provide the high quality of policing that the public have a right to expect. As single-service authorities, they will have less flexibility than counties and districts in making budgetary decisions; they may also wish to build a prudent level of reserves to meet contingencies in future years.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Caerphilly welcomed the police settlement. I can well appreciate the condemnation that he implied about past spending decisions and policing levels, not least in the constituency of Islwyn. The electorate of that constituency will note the disapproval expressed by the shadow Secretary of State for Wales. The spending decisions of the police forces in Gwent and South Wales were made by Labour county councillors, and the electorate should consider Labour county councillors' priorities when deciding whether to give their traditional vote to the Labour candidate yet again.

Much of today's debate has been about education, especially the speeches of the hon. Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), for Delyn, for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams). Their comments were very much in line with the emphasis that we who come from Wales have always placed, and will continue to place, on that important subject.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jones: I am short of time, but I will take one last intervention.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I thank the Minister, because he has made an important point. He said that the police authorities' spending decisions were made by Labour councillors. Is he telling us that the spending decisions that led to the difficulties experienced by South Wales police authority were made by Labour councillors? That is not the impression that I have gained from the press; nor is it the impression gained by the police.

Mr. Jones: I cannot imagine where the hon. Gentleman gets his impressions from, impressionable young man though he may be. The fact is that Labour county councillors kept the South Wales constabulary desperately short of money. I know what the current impression is among the hon. Gentleman's electorate and mine in Cardiff: they welcome a 15 per cent. increase in spending for the South Wales constabulary, which will right the wrong perpetrated by Labour councillors.

Inevitably, there have been many complaints about alleged cuts in education by one or more of the eight county councils in Wales. In theory they come of age this year, but I do not think that that will be celebrated as much as their conclusion next year. What the apologists in the Opposition say confirms that those councils appear to be incapable of making their own decisions, which are forced on them by someone else every time—usually the Government.

The hon. Member for Delyn asked me about prudent balances. The district auditor and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy recommend that authorities should have reasonable balances; what is reasonable in any particular case is a matter for the individual authority and its auditor. I realise that that is not in line with the hon. Gentleman's centralising tendency: amazingly, in an early intervention, he appeared to be asking for the power to decide education spending to be taken away from Clwyd county council. That must have been his local concern.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that some balances are needed for prudent management, and that it is a good idea for schools to save up for new equipment. He has also said something that is plain common sense: how can schools with £47 million in balances say that they cannot afford to pay their teachers when they have so much in the bank?

The hon. Member for Pontypridd asked me about education capital spending. The constituency example that he gave is a matter for Mid Glamorgan county council. In the current financial year, counties have received credit approvals amounting to £42.5 million for education capital spending—a rise of 11.6 per cent. on last year. Next year will see a further increase of 7 per cent., to £45.3 million. I hope that authorities will hear what the hon. Gentleman says and what we say, and will make the best possible use of the resources and capital receipts that are available. I hope that they will renovate and replace classrooms like that featured on the front page of today's *Western Mail*.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, county councils certainly have the financial ability to make education a priority—to provide for the pupils of tomorrow, and to provide more rather than fewer teachers. But they choose other priorities: they choose to spend the money elsewhere. My right hon. Friend reminded us that Clwyd allows only 68p in every £1 of the school budget to reach schools, and rightly contrasted that with the position of Powys, where the figure is as high as 78p. The sums that Welsh county councils are keeping back from

schools are not small. In Clywd, the total is more than £17.5 million, in Gwent it is nearly £22 million, in South Glamorgan it is nearly £16 million and in West Glamorgan it is nearly £14 million.

I am sure that parents will wish to consider how much money is being kept from their schools. They will want to decide who they trust more to make spending decisions—their local schools, or remote education committees. I think that many will believe that their schools are almost certainly better placed to make the right decisions, and will decide, for instance, to provide more teachers rather than adopting the scare tactic of slashing numbers that is so beloved of Labour education committees.

For too long, Labour has regarded Wales as largely a collection of rotten boroughs. Not long ago, an article was published in which someone said of Welsh Labour councillors that the "we know best" attitude must change. He called for Labour councillors to treat people as potential converts rather than eternal enemies, and demanded a new type of considerate councillor. Who was that far-seeing individual? It was the hon. Member for Caerphilly, in an article entitled "Call to end 'Cult of Arrogance'". There is testimony from the expert himself about the way in which the Labour party has treated the people of Wales.

We have new councils this year—new, popular councils that will be close to the people. Here is the opportunity for the people of Wales to take control of those councils, and to cast away the tide of arrogance that has dominated local government in Wales for so long. This is the opportunity for councillors, who are responsive to the people of Wales, to run efficient councils and provide value for money with attractive council tax. Already, one council in Wales is talking about cutting its council tax. That could be followed by so many councils in Wales, which could ensure that priorities were right and that money went, in particular, to education so that we could have more teachers rather than fewer.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 269.

Division No. 68] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cllthorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre Forst)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'byshr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm Edg'b)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick

Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'th S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman, and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'cle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry

Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lewin E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warsing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Byers, and
Mr. Joe Benton.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 140), which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

It being after Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Questions necessary to dispose of the other motions relating to local government finance in Wales, pursuant to Order [3 February].*

Resolved,

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (Wales) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 141), which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (Wales) 1995 (House of Commons Paper No. 142), which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.—[*Mr. Conway.*]

Points of Order

7.14 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have given the Minister prior notice of what I am about to say. Tonight on Channel 4, Eastern Electricity is being exposed as having perpetrated a disgraceful scam on 3 million customers by billing them three weeks in advance and virtually embezzling the interest. What I should like to see—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. What I should like to know is what is the point of order for the Chair? There has been none so far, although I shall listen a little longer to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Griffiths: Is it in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that to happen without a statement being made by the President of the Board of Trade so that he can take action tonight to ensure that that money is returned to all the customers?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the same point of order?

Mr. Mackinlay: Not absolutely, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that point of order.

Children (Northern Ireland)

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): I beg to move,

That the draft Children (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 12th January, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motion:

That the draft Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 12th January, be approved.

Mr. Moss: The draft Children (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1995 has been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, so I will confine myself to commenting on the substantive provisions of the draft Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 itself.

First, I shall draw the attention of the House to the general purpose of the order. I shall also say something about the consultation that has taken place and the changes made following publication of the proposal for a draft Children Order in July 1993. As I wish to afford hon. Members who wish to speak as much time as possible, I shall try to be brief.

The order is designed to bring together most of the public and private law relating to children in Northern Ireland in a single statutory framework along the lines of the Children Act 1989, which has been in operation in England and Wales since October 1991.

The order is based on a clear and consistent set of principles designed with the common aim of promoting the welfare of children. It will uphold the view that, wherever possible, children should be brought up and cared for within their own families.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Minister's giving way to me, especially as he wishes to be brief. As he said that the order followed the Children Act 1989, which applies to England and Wales, will he tell us what lessons have been learnt from the working of that Act and how they have been incorporated in the draft order?

Mr. Moss: I will deal with some of those points later, but if I do not cover them all in this speech I will certainly address the issues that hon. Members have raised when I wind up the debate.

The order makes it clear that the welfare of the child is paramount where a court has to make a decision affecting his or her future, and that children should be protected by effective intervention if they are in danger.

The order will give practical effect to those principles by setting out the services to be provided to support the upbringing of children in need, including disabled children, within their own families. The new concept of parental responsibility that will be introduced will also help to maintain the integrity of the family by ensuring that such responsibilities will continue even when it becomes necessary for a child to be taken into care.

Where the courts intervene in family life the new legislation will provide a clear checklist of matters which must be considered in any family proceedings involving a child. In particular, the court must ensure that the needs of the child are addressed when decisions are made regarding his or her future.

The order also paves the way for the creation of a guardian at litem service which will ensure that, wherever practicable, the voice of the child is heard in a wide range of care-related proceedings. As regards child protection, the introduction of new powers for the courts to make child assessment and emergency protection orders will provide for effective intervention where necessary, while ensuring that the intervention is open to challenge. A proper balance will thus be struck between the rights of parents and the duty of authorities to intervene where the child's welfare requires action to be taken.

Extensive provision is made for those cases where it is not desirable or practicable for a child to be brought up within his or her own family. Where children are looked after in accommodation provided by a health and social services board or trust, a voluntary organisation or any other type of home, the order will ensure that their welfare is promoted and protected through effective registration and inspection. Similar safeguards will be in place for children who are fostered, and detailed provisions are included to ensure that those providing child minding and day care services are subject to effective registration and inspection procedures.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): With regard to the Minister's last statement, it has been widely canvassed in Northern Ireland that the order could carry great weight in relation to church work and Sunday schools, and could also affect the work of various youth groups with boys and girls. Will the Minister comment on that?

Mr. Moss: I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising that point. There was some concern about the implications of the registration and child minding measures included in the original draft. As a result of the consultation that my noble Friend Baroness Denton undertook in the middle of last year, it was decided to introduce article 121 (6), which now includes the power to exempt specified supervised activities from registration. Boards will now have the power to proscribe activities such as scout and church activities.

I have mentioned that the proposal for a draft order was published for public consultation in July 1993. During the extended consultation period, in excess of 100 organisations and individuals responded. This was followed by a debate in the Northern Ireland Committee in February of last year. My noble Friend Baroness Denton, who then had responsibility for the Department of Health and Social Services, invited members of the Committee to discuss the issues. The outcome of that was an announcement by my noble Friend in July 1994 of the changes to be incorporated in the draft order to be laid before Parliament.

Before I detail those changes, I must take the opportunity to thank all of those who commented during the consultation period. I also thank hon. Members who participated in the debate in the Northern Ireland Committee for the consideration that the Committee has given to the issues.

A significant number of changes have been made to the draft order since the publication of the proposal. I will draw attention to the substantive matters. One of the issues which gave rise to concern was that the proposal included a requirement for those providing child minding

day care to be registered only where the children concerned were under the age of eight. Many considered the age limit in the proposals to be too low. The order will now require registration where the children concerned are under 12.

Concern was expressed that by requiring registration for anyone providing child minding services for more than two hours in any day the order would require registration in circumstances where it would be inappropriate—for example, where a child was looked after for a short period by a neighbour. The order will now require only those providing child minding services for reward to register.

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): I understand that problems have arisen with the operation of the Children Act 1989. Has the Minister made sure that those problems have been dealt with in relation to this order?

Mr. Moss: That is a similar question to the one asked by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), which I answered by saying that if I did not cover the points in my initial speech I would certainly do so in winding up the debate. If the order goes through today—I am led to believe that there is all-party support for it—I would expect a period of consultation lasting about a year to build up the regulations. Any difficulties which have occurred in the implementation of the Children Act in England and Wales will certainly be addressed in the way in which we formulate the regulations in Northern Ireland.

Concern was also expressed that by requiring all those providing supervised activity to be registered the proposal would place an unreasonable burden on some organisations. This point was raised by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). The order will now enable the Department of Health and Social Services to make regulations exempting certain supervised activities from registration requirements.

The Government recognise the importance of voluntary organisations in the provision of services to children in Northern Ireland. While we wish to ensure, through regulation and inspection, that voluntary homes for children maintain a high standard, we have decided that the imposition of registration and inspection fees would place an undesirable burden on voluntary organisations. We have therefore dropped those provisions from the draft order. The provision for fees to be imposed on those providing child minding and day care services has also been dropped.

In response to the concerns raised in Committee that a children's home for fewer than four children would not be required to register, a change has been made to ensure that all children's homes will be subject to registration, regardless of the number of children. A change has also been made to article 21 to ensure that where a health and social services board or trust provides accommodation for a child, this should be in a proper care setting.

A large number of drafting and technical changes have been made since the publication of the proposal. Many of them relate to changes brought about by the Health and Personal Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which provided that the statutory functions of health and social services boards may be discharged by trusts. The remaining substantive changes include changes to the jurisdictional arrangements designed primarily to ensure that appeals from magistrates courts will lie to the county court rather than to the High Court, and additional provision to allow for the establishment of care units within existing training school complexes.

One final and most important addition to the order has been made in recognition of the fact that hon. Members and others will have a continuing interest in the new legislation. The order will now provide for an annual report to be published by the Department of Health and Social Services in consultation with the Lord Chancellor, the Department of Education and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The order is the first step towards providing Northern Ireland with a modern framework of child care law. Much remains to be done to give effect to the new legislation, and we are keen to see that process under way. I look forward to hearing the views of hon. Members. I am confident that the order will have widespread support and that the changes to which I have referred will be welcomed. I commend the order to the House.

7.27 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): The House will welcome the comments of the Minister and also, of course, the changes that have been made. Hon. Members will also welcome the fact that—at last—the order is before the House.

During the past few months, Northern Ireland has dominated the news and this House so far as the peace process is concerned, and it is inevitable and natural that that should be so. But sometimes in talking about that we tend to forget that in Northern Ireland—as in Wales, England and Scotland—the quality of life of the people has to be discussed. That has been forgotten as far as Northern Ireland is concerned.

Life goes on. Children have to be educated. Hospitals have to be built. Jobs have to be provided. There is no question but that the vast majority of people living in these islands believe that the quality of children's lives, the need to stop exploitation and prevent abuse, and the need to educate and prepare children for the future must lie at the basis of our beliefs.

We welcome the order, but we wonder why it has taken so long to appear. After all, six years have intervened between the Children Act 1989 and the order for Northern Ireland today. Indeed, there have been 16 years of discussion since the matters were originally discussed on various professional committees. The Minister said that there would be yet another year of consultation. I hope that that consultation does not mean that implementation of the legislation will be held up. That is very important.

I understand that the United Nations committee on the rights of the child has already said that the delay has disadvantaged children in Northern Ireland especially in view of the levels of poverty in the Province. I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is important to put on record our congratulations to all the people and bodies in Northern Ireland who have badgered the Government and pushed the importance of the order. Child care professionals and members of the voluntary sector have worked so long in a statutory vacuum. The children's organisations in Northern Ireland have influenced the shape of the order. The Children Order Group, which was formed by people from the public and voluntary sectors of child care to work on the drafting and shadowing of

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the legislation, deserves the particular thanks of all Members of the House of Commons and especially those who represent Northern Ireland.

I put on record the special thanks of the Labour party to my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), who spoke on Northern Irish matters until recently. He was instrumental in ensuring that small private children's homes of four children or fewer would be required to be registered. I am delighted that the Minister made reference to that this evening. We also welcome the removal of the registration fee, which the Minister has stated will be further changed.

We are worried about the lack of a common strategy in implementing the order, especially when so many bodies and agencies in Northern Ireland, including social services, education, housing and leisure services, have to work together. It is important that joint planning by relevant Government Departments in Northern Ireland and those agencies, local authorities and bodies should be a matter of priority for the Government.

We are worried about trusts and their lack of accountability. We often hear about the quango state. In my constituency in Wales and in the rest of Britain there is great disquiet about the growing number of quangos and the non-elected members of those boards. There are four health and social services boards in Northern Ireland, with 12 community units. Six trusts have already been established. I am given to understand that the Government are insisting that the other six must now apply for trust status. That is a mistake. Nowhere else in the United Kingdom are social services administered by trusts. They are generally administered by people who are elected by the people. It would be a bad move.

In a sense, Northern Ireland has been treated as a guinea pig on trusts. We had the poll tax in Scotland and local government reform in Wales. Now we have social services trusts in Northern Ireland. I hope that the areas on the fringe of the United Kingdom will not be used as testing grounds for Government philosophy. I would be disappointed if that were the case. We do not want to see the fragmentation of the child care system in Northern Ireland. A single Northern Ireland body, not the number of bodies that the Minister suggests, should look after child care.

The Minister did not say much about resources. So often in the past decade or so Acts of Parliament have been passed with all the good intentions in the world but the money has not been there to service them. It is wholly pointless to pass legislation setting up a plethora of bodies if the money does not come from central Government, in this case to Northern Ireland, to implement the legislation.

There is one advantage in looking at what has occurred under the Children Act 1989 in Britain. We can see what it has cost local authorities. There is not a shadow of doubt that the costs of social services departments in local authorities throughout Britain have increased. They have rightly done so as a result of the imposition of new legislation by the House. I hope that the Minister will tell us precisely what money is being made available to ensure that aspects of the order which are to be implemented as soon as it is passed by the House are properly resourced.

It is absolutely necessary that family support services, family centres, pre-school and after-school care, holidays, support from social workers and health visitors, preventive work, and so on are properly resourced if only because, like many parts of Britain, Northern Ireland—especially its children and young people—is severely socially deprived. I will not go through all the statistics, but I will give a few. In Northern Ireland, 27 per cent. of the population is under 18 years of age. That is a higher proportion than in Britain. There is a high birth rate in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, 19 per cent. of families are headed by a lone parent and 95,000 children live in lone-parent families. Some 62,000 households with dependent children were in receipt of income support in 1992. Northern Ireland has the highest level of unemployment and the lowest level of average growth in disposable weekly household income. Poverty is possibly worse in Northern Ireland than in any other part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland certainly has the lowest level of state provision of pre-school places in Britain.

If we take all those factors into account, it is clear that the need for family support in Northern Ireland must be greater than in any other part of Britain. It has been estimated that at least £20 million extra must be spent in Northern Ireland on that aspect of child provision alone. When we add to that a further £6 million for children with disabilities and another £3 million for other aspects of the legislation, a total of £45 million is needed. That is the estimate of the professionals who work on the ground, so to speak, in Northern Ireland. That is what it will cost for the legislation to be implemented properly.

We can give figures because we have the experience of Britain. In one London borough with a population of just under 200,000, a 51 per cent. increase in the budget was needed to deal with the Children Act 1989. That amounted to about £4 million in one London borough alone. In that borough, there was a 36 per cent. increase in social work time, a 114 per cent. increase in home and day care support and a 45 per cent. increase in substitute care. Those are the figures that we have to consider.

We talk about a peace dividend. Money will be saved because, happily, the peace process is continuing in Northern Ireland. Surely that money should go back into the Province to ensure that children are looked after properly. I am sure that everyone would agree that there is no better place for money from the peace dividend to go than into the protection of children.

The professionals in Northern Ireland have also expressed worries about court organisation, exclusion orders and emergency protection orders. I hope that the Minister will refer to those matters and give assurances to those who have to deal with those problems. I am glad that he said that there would be a proper annual report to the House of Commons. That is excellent. It was missing from the original legislation. There is a case for some monitoring to take place in Northern Ireland. I hope that that will be taken into account in the consultation process in the next few months.

Northern Ireland has had 25 years of misery with all the troubles. In all that time, the people who have worked in the care and protection of children must have had the worst and hardest time of child care professionals in any part of the United Kingdom. Their morale will be boosted

by the passing of the order, but only if it is passed with consequential increases in the resources necessary to make it work properly.

We welcome all that is included in the order. Work still needs to be done. Changing needs and circumstances should be reflected both in the resources and, if necessary, in further legislation. At least this is a start. Even though years have passed, the Minister can be assured that he has the good will and support of the Opposition in the legislation before us today.

7.38 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for bringing the order to the House tonight. It has been awaited for a long time and with keen interest by all bodies involved in the care of children. I also put on record our deep appreciation of the courtesy shown by Baroness Denton when she received the elected representatives and our deep appreciation of her personal interest in this need of the Province. I am sure that the Minister will ensure that our thanks are passed on to his noble Friend.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Children Order Group which represents various organisations with a wide range of experience and expertise. Its constructive comments were a tremendous help not only to me, but to other health spokesmen of the parties represented in the House. These organisations did the children of the Province a signal service in gelling together their comments and presenting a cohesive argument for action by the Minister.

All those involved in the care of children, from both the voluntary and statutory sectors in Northern Ireland, broadly welcome the order. They acknowledge that many of their recommendations have been accepted and are included in the order. However, they regret that other key matters have been left out. It is felt, for example, that the opportunity to learn lessons from the implementation of the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales has not been fully taken. It is hoped, however, that any relevant and appropriate amendments made to that Act will also be made to this important order without delay.

One of the recommendations made by the Children Order Group was that there should be provision for an exclusion order to oust from the home a parent or caretaker who is suspected of abusing a child. That recommendation was not accepted by the Minister although it had the support of the Children Act advisory committee in its 1992-93 annual report. As this opportunity has been missed, can the Minister assure me that if the law in England and Wales is amended, a similar amendment will immediately apply to the Province?

Displeasure was also felt at the failure by the Department to make a change in the definition of disability. The definition in the order uses the term "deaf and dumb". Surely it was not beyond the Department's ability to use other terms. It is hoped that more acceptable terms will be used in the regulations and the guidance.

Two major issues arising from the order will be vital to its success or failure. An order is not, in itself, the end of the matter; rather, it is a very important beginning. It has taken many years and much lobbying to get to this important juncture; we are glad that we have arrived. To ensure success, the Department must give vibrant leadership in carrying forth the vision contained in the legislation and in putting it into action. Such detailed and complex legislation will not implement itself. It requires proper co-ordination by the Department and it demands effective planning from the beginning. The Department must display initiative and leadership skills. Those within the Department who front the implementation of the order will carry a heavy responsibility in ensuring its success. Half-hearted leadership will make the community resentful because those people will have been filled with expectations without having them realised.

Some people in the statutory and voluntary sectors have serious doubts about the Department's approach as they fail to see a strategy for implementing the order. Surely it is appropriate that statutory agencies work to a common agenda. Social services, education, housing and leisure services all have a range of responsibilities under the order. Only by joint planning within Government Departments can operational effectiveness be achieved. I trust that the Minister can assure the House tonight that the order will be put into operation with determination and that no effort will be spared in making it work effectively and efficiently.

The various Departments have had knowledge of the progress of this legislation; they are not starting from tonight. We expect, therefore, that much of the groundwork has been done in terms of co-ordination and planning so that it is ready for smooth implementation. When did this co-ordinated departmental planning begin? Can the Minister assure me that all the Departments are ready for action? I was a little concerned when I heard the Minister mention another year. That has caused me concern and will worry interested bodies and those who are keen to move forward because we have waited so long to get this legislation. We expected that the Departments involved would want to move forward. Urgent implementation is essential.

The second area of concern, the resources issue, is vital to the order's success. The provisions in the order, especially those relating to children in need, must not be hampered from the outset by a lack of resources. Indeed, having studied documents relating to the matter, I am certain that considerable resources will be needed to finance the order because of the low baseline of the preventive services being operated in Northern Ireland.

I am sure that the Minister can understand the hopes raised for children and families by the order. Those hopes cannot become a reality without essential investment from Government. This point is vital. The present level of funding is inadequate. We dare not rob Peter to pay Paul in this operation. The demand is clearly for a commitment from the Minister.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The hon. Gentleman talks about robbing Peter to pay Paul. Does he agree that it is a mistake to think that under our combined health and social services system, money can be moved around more easily? The reality is that the big battalions gather a greater percentage of the money. In view of the recent news of the money needed to develop the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast, is he fearful that not only other hospital services, but the social services budget could suffer?

Rev. William McCrea: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. What he says causes grave concern. I know that there will be a scrabble for resources and that there will be in-fighting to try to win resources. The order

[Rev. William McCrea]

is something above the resources already allocated. It is vital that we get additional resources because without them, it will not take the House or the Province long to realise that the order is pie in the sky. We shall have an order, but we shall not be able to put it into effect. It is vital that the Minister gives tonight a commitment that there will be extra money to implement the order.

The order emphasises supporting families who care for their children in the home; that is not a soft and easy financial option. The order endeavours to develop a preventive framework for families rather than relying solely on child protection. Unfortunately, during the past year, family support, day care and after care services have been poorly developed and underfunded, and have been provided in the main by the voluntary sector.

I put on record that the people of the Province owe a tremendous debt to the voluntary sector for all its efforts over the years. It has made those efforts with few resources at its disposal. If we are really to support and strengthen families, new funding is an urgent must. Family support services are in urgent need of development in Northern Ireland.

I make no apology for relying on the expertise of the Children Order Group to advise me on the details that need attention. I genuinely feel that it is evident to all in society that, over the years, preventive work with families has been neglected in Northern Ireland and that the high rates of poverty and deprivation experienced by many in the Province make the need more pressing than any other matter within the United Kingdom.

The population of Northern Ireland has a higher proportion of children than any other region of the United Kingdom. Statistics provided for me amply express the need. For example, 19 per cent. of families in Northern Ireland are headed by a lone parent; 95,000 children live in lone-parent families; 33,000 lone parents receive lone parent support; and at least 62,000 households with dependent children receive income support. Northern Ireland has the highest unemployment and the lowest average growth in disposable weekly household income, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy). Northern Ireland has the lowest state pre-school provision in Europe.

When all those and many other adverse factors are considered, it is not surprising that the odds on a child coming into care are one in 10 compared with one in 7,000 if those factors are not present. Resources, therefore, will be an essential ingredient in the success of the action proposed in the legislation. The House welcomes the legislation that has been brought before it but resources are required to enable many aspects of it to be implemented, for example the registration and inspection of day care centres, child minders and children's homes, as outlined in the order. There are already long waiting lists for registration.

Another area requiring resources is the accommodation necessary to meet the needs of young people within the community and those leaving care. The order requires health and social services boards to provide for such, if they feel that the young people's welfare is likely to be seriously prejudiced by failure to provide accommodation. The number of people in that category is greatly increasing year by year, and the budget to cover that must be adequately financed if the order is not to remain meaningless.

The order regards children with disabilities as children in need and sets out statutory obligations towards them, not only in service provision but in the promotion of opportunities for such children to lead as normal a life as possible. To take steps to fulfil the obligations under that part of the order will cost some £6 million, covering day care and after-school care. It is essential that such provision for the disabled is properly co-ordinated across the Province lest we are left with the current patchy, haphazard approach.

Taken as a whole, the order is complex and deserves the closest possible scrutiny. I am glad that, in Committee and now on the Floor of the House, we can comment on it. I have no doubt that it covers a wide remit concerning both collective and individual responsibilities for children. It therefore requires a partnership approach between parents and statutory and voluntary bodies.

The order demands a proactive role by the courts, with legal representations for parents as well as children. It also requires the appointment of a guardian ad litem for the child to deal with all those and other relevant matters. If this legislation is to be carried through, an important area is the appropriate and proper training of staff. Boards will be faced with tremendous costs in addition to all other previous burdens. That begs an important question: will the Minister assure the House that additional money will be made available and earmarked to enable boards to make the order a success?

Resources need to be stable for the foreseeable future. We need not just initial funding but consistent finance linked to careful and detailed long-term planning for the service. I am concerned that, while we may be given some initial funding to prime the pump, the boards may be left to find funding in years to come. We shall then return to patchy provision throughout the Province.

It is important to put on record tonight that the health and social services boards have estimated that they require approximately £45 million to implement the Children (Northern Ireland) Order fully. When I saw that, I thought that it was a lot of money. But I was present during the previous debate on local government finance in Wales. I listened carefully to the Minister's reply, when he stated that £43 million had been set aside in the Welsh budget to finance local government reorganisation, which is one of the Government's pet subjects. If £43 million can be set aside to fulfil Government policy on reorganising local government in Wales, there will be little problem for the Secretary of State in getting £45 million—if he can get only £43 million I suppose that I could be pushed to accept it—for Northern Ireland.

There is no reason why the Minister cannot make a clear commitment properly to implement the order. Funding is essential not only for health and social services boards but for Departments inter-related in the order's operation, such as the Department of Education, which also needs additional funding to ensure that the measure is meaningful.

What recognition has the Minister given to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which has expressed concern that there is no effective independent co-ordination mechanism for ensuring the convention's

implementation in United Kingdom law, policy and practice? Has he recommendations to make to the House on that matter?

The order is important and I seek to take nothing away from the broad welcome that many hon. Members have given it, or from the Minister in presenting it to the House tonight. Two key issues have been raised in the debate: first, leadership in implementation; and secondly, resources to make implementation possible. How the Government react to those will reflect overall Government policy towards our most precious investment—our children. I earnestly trust that this golden opportunity to make a vital difference will be grasped willingly and prove to the world that we cherish our children whom the scriptures tell us are the heritage of the Lord.

I have already told the Minister that, unfortunately, an urgent constituency matter has arisen and I must return to my constituency as soon as possible. I therefore mean no discourtesy to the House by leaving. I shall read carefully every response that the Minister makes. Even though I shall not be present, I trust that the Minister will carefully take matters I have raised on board, because they will make all the difference for the children of our Province.

7.59 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): This is an historic occasion in many ways. It takes us back through the history of child care in the United Kingdom to the Children Act 1908, which was the starting point for the care of children. It was a landmark in the development of policy in the United Kingdom. It is significant that it remained the principal Act in Northern Ireland until 1950, so it cannot be said that we rush things too much. The pattern of developing child care legislation is still continuing. It is interesting to note that under the 1908 Act the interests of the child were not the most important; rather parents could not be deprived of their rights unless they were found guilty in some sense. I believe that the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 is a new landmark because the emphasis is placed on the child rather than the adult, who has certain responsibilities.

The order is historic for other reasons, not least because it has had a long gestation. The children and young people review group, known as the Black committee, which was established in 1976, published its findings in December 1979. It is 12 years since I came to the House, so we have been pressing for almost 13 years for the implementation of the Black committee recommendations.

We had a fair bit of discussion on the order in the Northern Ireland Committee and subsequent discussions with Baroness Denton, who proved not only to be a listening Minister, but a heeding one. The reaction to those discussions was welcome. I welcome without hesitation the changes that have been made to the order as a result. In Committee, however, we pressed that we should take on board some of the lessons learnt from the implementation of the Children Act 1989 of England and Wales. I hope that before the end of the debate the Minister will gain further inspiration and tell us what lessons have been learnt from England, or whether no lessons can be learnt. If that is the perception of advisers, it does not match that of professionals. It is important that we do not wait too long before the order is implemented.

Today's debate is historic, because although the debate in Committee was on the original draft proposals, we could have had today's debate in Committee as well. That debate would have been noted by a few enthusiasts, but by recording today's debate in *Hansard*, people will learn much more easily about some of our concerns. That is the best that we can do with this type of legislation.

We should have had the opportunity to examine the order in Committee, line by line, clause by clause, so that we could have amended it. All that we can do tonight is stupidly vote down the order. Since the Government introduced it and we have waited for it for such a long time, we would not want to do that, not least because the Government have a majority and would get it through in any case. In any case, if there was a Division, and I doubt that there will be, my party would vote in favour. We have waited far too long for the order, but to suggest that the order is perfect would imply that it is the only piece of perfect legislation ever to go through any Parliament. Even during my sojourn in the House I have been amazed at how Government Bills have been amended by hundreds of Government amendments, never mind by Opposition pressure to table yet more amendments. The tragedy is we have been unable to scrutinise the order, so a degree of unaccountability has slipped into the machinery of government in Northern Ireland.

I thank the Government for meeting our request to have a debate on the Floor of the House and I welcome the modifications that have already been incorporated into the order. It is proposed that registration will be required governing the supervision of paid staff. I hope, however, that because church volunteers are normally unpaid that does not mean that they do not require supervision. I recognise the tremendous work done by those groups and acknowledge that the standard of it is remarkably high. I welcome the fact that they are not required to be subject to the same registration, but I am sure that the Minister and others would agree that even in such quarters we must watch carefully those who have been entrusted with the care of our young people.

In several areas the views of professionals have been ignored and the Government must take note of that. How will the great changes in the Province be co-ordinated? The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) has already alluded to that. Who will steer the order's implementation through? I am not thinking about the Minister but about those behind-the-scenes co-ordinators. As I understand it, and unless something has happened recently among those who know more about this than some of us, no proper consultation has occurred between the court services, the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. I understand that little effort has been made up to now to educate the various Government Departments and boards, which all have a part to play in the successful introduction of the order. I admit that members of one of the trusts under the control of the Department of Health and Social Services recently gave a talk on what might be involved. That lack of co-ordination is reflected in the fact that it will take a year to introduce the regulations, whereas we believe that, by now, it should have been possible to implement the order.

The concept of co-ordination, to which the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster referred, relates to links between social services, education, housing and leisure services. Each has responsibilities under the order. Within the Departments, however, there appears to be little understanding of what will be involved and certainly little visible enthusiasm. Social workers responsible for child

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care are already stretched to breaking point and they are short-staffed. Because of the lack of co-ordination—I can put it no other way—things are done at one level that have no relevance to those working on the ground. For example, the joint protocol system on child abuse involves the police, social workers and others. They are trained together, yet one trained person from social services was also supposed to be responsible for Kidscape, a vital element in child care. She could not undertake her work on Kidscape for months. She had to look after the joint protocol outwith her area because there were not enough trained folk in the service to undertake that protocol work. I urge the Minister to, as we would say in Ulster, "gee up" such Departments a little and ensure that a system for co-ordinating efforts is introduced.

Some hon. Members have mentioned resources. I would sound one caveat. I am glad that the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson, has returned to his place. He referred to Northern Ireland being the poorest part of the United Kingdom. It might be the poorest region according to some calculations, but, if one examines the statistics of social surveys, we are not the worst. The hon. Gentleman may have alluded to another poor part of the UK when he referred to the London boroughs problem. However, I believe that the level of deprivation on Merseyside would cause some of us to be thankful that we live in Northern Ireland.

We must be careful when we make comparisons, because sometimes we do not compare like with like. That is not to say that I would argue with the hon. Member for Torfaen about his anxiety about resources, which was echoed by the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster. I noticed that the Minister was using his calculator at that moment. We may find out before the end of the debate whether he has come up with an offer or whether he has sent messages to the Treasury so that he may tell us how we might reach the target.

We are all familiar nowadays with tight budgets and the need for effective and efficient use of public money, and few people would disagree with that requirement. However, there is genuine anxiety that the effective implementation of the order will be hampered by a lack of available resources.

That is one reason why we ask wnat lessons have been learnt from the implementation of the Children Act 1989 in England, and which parts of that Act have not been implemented; for I do not want the House to go down the road of our Italian colleagues in the European Union, who have an art of passing legislation but not implementing it. When they are asked, "What do you do about this?" they reply, "We have it!" but the folk who require it have not had it. The legislation has not been implemented. We do not want to go down that road. We want to go down the road where there is implementation.

The emphasis in the order is on supporting families to care for their children at home—developing a preventive framework for families rather than relying solely on child protection. We have heard that, in Northern Ireland, family support day care and after-care services are poorly developed, underfunded and provided mainly by the voluntary sector. Indeed, much of those services continue to be provided in places by the extended family. That level of community care is to be welcomed, but it is not an excuse for society to abrogate its responsibilities.

We ask, not rhetorically but factually, how can that requirement in the order be fulfilled without appropriate and adequate resources—resources not provided in the current plan? That might be the reason why the regulations will not come into force for a year; it might enable us to reach the next financial year.

The euphemism of a three-year start-up is but a euphemism. It highlights the problem. The early years development scheme has been promised £310,000 for three years, which appears to be a sizeable amount, but there were already 180 applicants to that scheme alone in response to a public advertisement in a newspaper.

The order brings in the much-welcomed registration and inspection of day care, child minders and children's homes. There are already long waiting lists for registration, as the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster said, and adequate funds to support the measure are not provided.

Under the order, health and social services boards are required for the first time to provide accommodation if children's welfare is likely to be seriously prejudiced by a failure to provide accommodation. That is not simply accommodation in Housing Executive property but accommodation with care; yet evidence from England and Wales demonstrates that 96 per cent. of social services departments considered that they had inadequate resources to comply with that aspect of the Children Act 1989.

If the measures in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order are to function in the way in which they are intended to, adequate funding must be made available. Stable resources and strategic long-term planning are needed.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster referred to the concept of a lack of definition of disability. Surely the Government and those who have advised them should by now be aware of the reaction among those who are disabled and their supporters when we use such outdated terminology. It is a patronising approach to people with disabilities.

I ask that Ministers make a commitment tonight that the terminology will be amended, not simply when the amendments are made to the Children Act 1989, but as soon as possible. That commitment was given earlier, when the Government were pressed from the Ulster Unionist Bench about the Wildlife and Countryside (Registration and Ringing of Certain Captive Birds) (Amendment) Regulations 1984, when they were caught with their pants down, if I might use that metaphor, not having done their homework properly. They gave us that commitment on that occasion.

The exclusion orders are there, and many child care organisations have emphasised the importance of introducing them, but to introduce them so that the abuser, rather than the victim, is removed from the home environment. The Minister referred to the fact that the child would be removed only as a last resort, but sometimes we forget the links between children and parents.

I remember speaking to a colleague who had a problem with a father who was not the best type of father. I asked him, to help me in my pastoral work, "By the way, how did you react to your father's death?" I shall never forget his words. He said, "He was my father." To take a child from home, or, for that matter, to move a mother and child from home into a hostel, with all the degradation that that can be

associated with, is not the way, in the 20th century, to care for children who are being abused. I believe that the abuser, whether it be father or mother, should be removed from the home, even temporarily, until things can be sorted out rather than uprooting a child from its roots, from the environment that it knows so well.

I know that those of us who travel become used to strange places, but I think that you will agree with me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, even for those of us who travel, no matter where we roam, there is no place like home. If it is true for us, how much truer it is for a child. I regret that the Government have ignored the wisdom of that key measure.

As I draw to a close, I consider several other matters, especially the concept of guardian ad litem. The Black committee recommended that a guardian ad litem be appointed to safeguard the children's interests. That has emerged repeatedly. Even in 1987, the Northern Ireland Adoption Order, which was implemented in 1989, did not make the guardian ad litem role independent of the agencies. One area board can still be the placement agency and provide the guardian ad litem report. Admittedly, the boards try to ensure that the guardian ad litem is not an officer for the same placement district. That at least is an attempt to do something about it.

However, we live in a small world. The people work in the same services. They might even be wanting promotion. The human reaction is not to trample over people when trying to climb up, so as to avoid problems with them when falling down. It is equally true that one should not start arguing with the boss who might be on the interviewing panel for promotion. There is not the degree of independence required of somebody who is there to protect the child's interests.

I regret that the recommendation does not seem to have been taken up. Admittedly, there has been a limited introduction of the guardian ad litem system. It seems unfair that, where a parental dispute has gone to private law, the rights of a child to independent representation are not recognised. Will the Minister reconsider the decision not to extend the guardian ad litem system to cover private law cases?

I understand that the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee has kept reviewing the implementation of the Children Act 1989. But up to now there has been little evidence that the lessons learnt from that Act have been applied. At the British Association of Social Workers conference in Northern Ireland on the subject not long ago, it was suggested that there was no strong sense of leadership in that area. I understand that the management executive was represented on the co-ordinating body, which also included the chief social services inspector and the deputy director of court services, but there was no education representative. The question was asked: how do the professionals in that sector feed into the organisation?

On 22 November there was, apparently, a stab at setting up an implementation group, but its functions and membership are not yet clear. I believe that it has met once and that working groups in different sectors are being set up to provide guidance and regulation. That might explain why it will be a year before we get anything.

The four boards are now invited to participate, but where do the voluntary groups fit in? At a time when the provision of child care is increasingly coming from the voluntary and private sectors, surely voluntary groups should be involved in the discussions at an earlier stage. In east Belfast it is proposed to close Firbreck children's home—a statutory home with places for 12. The figures show that the statutory home costs about £500 per child. The voluntary home costs about £1,000 per child. The voluntary home is large, taking 30 or 32 people, but only half its places are filled and the costs are much higher. Why is it that a statutory home, which provides a useful and excellent service, is being closed? At Christmas, its 12 spaces were occupied by 14 people. Nobody can deny that there is a need for such care and, when the order is implemented, the need to co-ordinate it effectively will be even greater.

8.23 pm

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): I thank the Minister for introducing this important legislation. I was delighted that he used a calculator earlier. I hope that that is a good omen for the finances involved in the implementation of the order. Naturally, I am delighted to support the order. I wish to congratulate all those organisations in Northern Ireland which have made such a significant contribution to the debate over the past couple of years. They include the Children Order Group, which has already been mentioned, Child Care, Gingerbread and the Save the Children Fund.

I have been in medical practice in Northern Ireland for more than 30 years and I should like to think that I have first-hand experience of the deprivation of my constituents and patients. That deprivation extends not merely to west Belfast, but to sections of north, south and east Belfast, as well as other parts of Northern Ireland. The deprivation is concentrated in west and north Belfast where, according to the registrar general's classification, most of the population comes from social class groups 4 and 5. By any criteria of social deprivation, west and north Belfast have suffered greatly.

The debate is about family poverty—children, their needs and how they have been treated in various ways over the years. In west and north Belfast, more people have died through violence over the past 20 years than anywhere else in western Europe, excluding the terrible conflict in Bosnia. There are more people on social security benefits, and there are probably more people with alcohol problems and illnesses.

Unfortunately, I do not have the figures in front of me, but childhood illness, even asthma, occurs more among those in deprived areas than elsewhere. There are also more children coming under the influence of paramilitary organisations. All those factors have an important effect on children, especially when they reach 12 or 13 years of age.

The Save the Children Fund has done great work over the years in highlighting the problems involved in the care of children. Both the voluntary and statutory sectors in Northern Ireland have broadly welcomed the order and will be pleased for it to pass on to the statute book. But the Save the Children Fund believes that it is important that, rather than simply paralleling the Children Act, lessons should be learnt from its implementation in England and Wales and applied in Northern Ireland, through the regulations and guidance drawn up for the implementation of the order.

There are two main issues: the success of the order in practice and ensuring that the outstanding issues raised by the United Nations committee on the rights of the child

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are monitored and considered in future. There is a need for resources—about which much has rightly been said—and the need to extend the philosophy and principles underpinning the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and the order to other areas of law, policy and practice affecting children. There is concern that the effect of implementing the order will be hampered by lack of available resources. Further resources will be required to enable the registration and inspection of day care, child minders and children's homes as outlined in the order.

I believe that the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) mentioned the accommodation needs of young people in the community and of those leaving care. Those needs must be seriously considered.

In its concluding observations following the examination of the UK Government's first report on the implementation of the convention in the UK, the UN committee on the rights of the child raised a number of issues which are pertinent to the welfare of children. If left unaddressed, those issues could restrict the effectiveness of the order. The committee expressed concern that there was no effective independent co-ordinating mechanism for ensuring the implementation of the convention in UK law, policy and practice. The order is very much in keeping with the UN convention, particularly in its emphasis on seeking the core principles—ensuring that children's best interests are safeguarded and ensuring that children can express their views and have them taken into account.

The subject of co-ordination is so important that I have no doubt that all the public representatives involved in the debate—especially those of us in Northern Ireland—will consider it carefully. I appreciate that the Minister cannot do that himself, but I am sure that some organisation or person will co-ordinate all those services. We are concerned that children who are placed in care in Northern Ireland under the social welfare system may be sent to training schools which are institutions for the detention of children.

Much has been said about the Children Order Group. I am personally indebted to that group, which has done much work in this area and has provided us with valuable documentation. The group largely comprises social workers. The hon. Member for Belfast, South spoke forcefully about the physical and sexual abuse of children. I believe that social workers, not just in Northern Ireland but across the United Kingdom, have performed outstanding work in that area. Unfortunately, sometimes chances must be taken in allowing children to return to the home or to visit a particular relative and, when things go wrong, social workers seem to take most of the blame. In my experience—which has been gained over many years—social workers, health visitors, nurses and all those who work with children through the statutory and voluntary services do an outstanding job.

The Children Order Group pointed out that a lack of commitment by Government in implementing the legislation is evidenced by continual delays in bringing forward the order. I understand there may be a further delay of one year, but perhaps it cannot be helped.

The United Kingdom Government have been criticised by the United Nations committee on the rights of the child. The delay of more than five years between the Children Act 1989 for England and Wales and the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order has disadvantaged children in Northern Ireland. Despite strenuous complaints by statutory and voluntary bodies, the Government have no apparent strategy for implementing the order. I know that the Minister will address those important points.

Successful implementation of the order will depend upon a number of statutory agencies working to a common strategy. Social services, education, housing and leisure services will all have responsibilities under the order. However, at present there is no evidence of joint planning by the Government Departments which are responsible for those services.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) made the point about additional funding. We are aware of the funding problems within the trusts and health boards, especially the Eastern health board. I am also aware of the financial problems within the west and north Belfast trusts. I do not criticise the executives or the staff who work for those bodies, but funding levels are very important. Other hon. Members have already emphasised that point.

We will be watching for co-ordination among the bodies responsible for implementing the order. At the end of the day, the Minister must use his calculator and, together with his colleagues, ensure that there is enough funding to implement this extremely important piece of legislation.

8.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I apologise for missing most of the speech of the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) and some of the speech of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). What I did hear, I fully endorse and wish to be associated with.

I suspect that this important debate will not be reported in the press because the subject does not make news headlines. As an English Member of Parliament, I will use this occasion to acknowledge the diligent work of all 17 Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland. They perform the same duties as other hon. Members, while addressing and accommodating additional constitutional and security problems. I hope that I do not sound patronising as I wish to acknowledge their role. I do not think that it is often commented on or properly understood by the media.

I believe that the order is a farce in law-making terms. I am interested in scrutiny in this place, and this process is a charade. We would be taking the mickey to suggest that we are performing a proper law-making role this evening. It is a nonsense and I am not prepared to acquiesce, by my silence, to this charade.

In every other context, an order of this size would constitute an Act of Parliament. It is a nonsense to suggest that we are paying adequate attention to the contents of the document, or indeed to the people who will, we hope, benefit from it. Regardless of whether there is a devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland, so long as we are responsible for making orders in this place that affect Northern Ireland we must ensure that they are examined properly and on the same basis as legislation for England, Wales and Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) referred to "Great Britain" legislation, but I think that he meant legislation for England and Wales. At present, the House of Commons is considering the Children (Scotland) Bill in Committee. That legislation parallels this order and it is being dealt with line by line. Hon. Members are able to probe every detail, and that is the correct procedure. However, that process is not followed for Northern Ireland legislation. That example underlines the nonsense of the situation to which I have referred.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way because I meant to refer to that point in my speech. Does he accept that the Scottish legislation is a separate corpus of legislation which the House is able to handle well? I do not understand why it is claimed that it cannot handle legislation for Northern Ireland in the same way.

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman and I are as one on that point. I hope that the time will come when Northern Ireland legislation is treated in the same way as legislation for Scotland and for other parts of the United Kingdom.

Naturally, hon. Members want to see this order on the statute book. However, I urge them to hang on because I believe there are a few omissions. I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that I have read every page, but I have certainly done my best to scrutinise the document. Unfortunately, it is a vast volume with no pictures, so it takes some time to read.

The document is flawed because it does not take account of the fact that we share a land border with the Irish Republic. Christian denomination and voluntary organisations, as well as statutory organisations, perform many social work duties in Northern Ireland, and I do not think that the document fully takes account of that or the interface with the Republic.

People who have abused children have in the past absconded to the Republic to avoid justice. The Attorney-General recently complained that I had tabled 25 questions about Father Brendan Smyth. I make no apology for that, because it goes to the heart of the Government's stewardship of children's services.

I am critical of the Government on that issue, among many others. I do not think that they ensure good stewardship of social services in Northern Ireland. Not many people lie awake at night worrying about it—except for hon. Members from Northern Ireland and my friends on the Opposition Front Bench—but the Government's stewardship, as represented by the Northern Ireland Office and the Attorney-General, has been shown to be flawed. I think that the Attorney-General has been dilatory in his handling of the celebrated case of Father Brendan Smyth. He has refused to acknowledge that he and the Church have failed the victims of Father Brendan Smyth and their families. It is time to look at why that has occurred. I believe that the legislation should be beefed up to take account of those circumstances.

I am indebted to Ulster Television, which produced the documentary "Suffer Little Children" as part of its Counterpoint series. It was broadcast on 6 October 1994 and it showed how Church and state had failed to ensure justice for children and their families in Northern Ireland. I regret that, so far, the other independent television companies have failed to network this important programme elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I have tabled an early-day motion suggesting that they should do so. If they did, it would alert other hon. Members to the fact that the justice and social work regimes in Northern Ireland are not satisfactory. I urge hon. Members not only to study that programme, if they have not already seen it, but to support me in the suggestion to independent television companies that it is networked.

The House will be aware that Father Brendan Smyth is now in prison having been found guilty on child sex abuse charges—there is therefore no question of sub judice—of which he had a long history, yet for some time he was able to escape justice by going to the Irish Republic.

I recently asked the Attorney-General a question, but it has not been answered satisfactorily. I asked him to

"explain why Cardinal Cahal Daly, in his detailed statement, reported that Brendan Smyth had been interviewed by the Royal Ulster Constabulary early in 1990 in connection with child abuse complaints, that the priest had admitted wrongdoing, but was not arrested".—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 447.]

The words "admitted wrongdoing" are taken from the cardinal's statement. I therefore want to know why the RUC did not arrest that priest early in 1990. Why did it take from then until 1994 for that man to face trial? We know that he did not abscond to the Irish Republic for many months after that interview. No adequate explanation has been given of the stewardship of this matter by the RUC or the Attorney-General.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is perfectly proper for the hon. Gentleman to allude to certain cases. This is not the primary cause of this evening's debate, so I hope that he will only make allusions to it rather than further develop any particular case.

Mr. Mackinlay: I always obey everything that you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I very much appreciate your wise counsel and guidance.

The measure is voluminous. If it were English or Scots legislation, the matter to which I am alluding probably would require an entire morning in Committee. I appeal to you to consider my point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I promise that I shall not labour it too long, but this matter probably would have been discussed in Committee and alluded to in consideration of many of the articles. It goes to the heart of whether there is adequate social work support. The hon. Members for Belfast, South and for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) referred to measures to protect children from abuse. The matter has to be aired.

I take your point Mr. Deputy Speaker, but if I can demonstrate that the matter is relevant, I might consider dividing the House because the order is deficient. The parent of one of the victims of Brendan Smyth has raised with me whether the order should, as the lid has been lifted on Brendan Smyth's activities—he is only one example; there are probably others—allow the RUC and the social work authorities that are subject to the order to investigate matters that are some years old. That certainly is the view of the aggrieved parents who feel that the authorities, the Attorney-General, the RUC and, to some extent, the Northern Ireland Office want to keep the matter under drapes and do not want to go back too far. If the order were a Bill, I would move amendments to that effect in Committee.

My second point concerns the Northern Ireland Secretary. I addressed it to him recently in a written parliamentary question. There has been inordinate pressure

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from some members of religious communities to prevail upon aggrieved parents of children who have been abused to withdraw their complaints.

My written question referred the Northern Ireland Secretary to the specific case of the parents of one of the victims of Father Brendan Smyth, who were approached by a member of the Norbertine order to see whether they would withdraw their complaint. In fairness to the Northern Ireland Secretary, he wrote back to say that the matter continues to be investigated to see whether there has been an attempt to pervert the course of justice.

Will the Minister give us a progress report on that matter, as it is extremely important in view of the failure of Church and state to protect the interests of those families?

It is documented that the Church knew about the activities of Brendan Smyth, not for months but for years, and covered it up. I am of the Catholic faith, so there can be no suggestion in any sense of my demonstrating any spite. I am proud of my faith. The overwhelming majority of pastors are well-motivated people, but there have been one or two bad eggs and there has been a propensity to cover things up, which I very much regret. These matters need to be brought out into the open.

Obviously, it has been a difficult matter for my friends and colleagues from Northern Ireland to articulate, but I have at all stages kept in touch with my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker), whose constituency was primarily affected by the matter that I have raised. He and I have worked in concert and I know how concerned he has been about it. In view of the sensitivities in the Province, it is probably better that a lad from Essex raises it rather than one of my colleagues from Northern Ireland, and in that spirit I have done so tonight. The Secretary of State and the Minister really have to address what is happening.

In conclusion, let me endorse the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen made. We hope that there will be a considerable peace dividend. There is much ground for optimism. I believe that we should talk up Northern Ireland. It is a tremendous place to visit, the quality of life there is first class and the hospitality is superb, but it is battered and bruised after 25 years of strife. Children, in particular, have suffered indoctrination as well as the pain and anxiety of the troubles.

Generally, Northern Ireland needs to enjoy the dividend that will come from a reduction in the security services. Those resources need to be reallocated in Northern Ireland, particularly to the national health service and social work. It would be appropriate, prudent and fair if a large amount of those resources were channelled into promoting the welfare of children in the cities, particularly in the constituency of my Labour colleague and hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, West and other colleagues, who have many inner-city problems and who, in my view, would be Labour Members if they represented other parts of the United Kingdom. I am aware of the problems faced by children in their constituencies.

The Government have an obligation to take advantage of the new atmosphere, to build up cross-community relationships between children—which already exist thanks to the tremendous work that has been started—and to ensure that children who have suffered as a result of the troubles, poverty or unemployment and everything that flows from them should be the subject of positive discrimination in respect of the distribution of resources now available as a result of the peace dividend.

8.49 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Paragraph 4(5) of schedule 3 to the order states:

"In this paragraph and paragraph 5 'hospital' does not include special accommodation within the meaning of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986."

That set me thinking, because I recently received correspondence from constituents about a child with mental illness. I support the measures in the order, in that it will give greater protection for children and consider their needs. However, in the Northern health and social services board area, children under 18 suffering from acute mental illness such as schizophrenia are not provided with proper accommodation in which to undergo psychiatric treatment.

The hospital in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) covers my area, and I make it clear that I make no criticism of the professionalism of the staff who care for people who suffer from mental illness and require psychiatric treatment and care. Their devotion and dedication to patients, young and old, are appreciated by patients later and, during the period of their illness, by patients' parents and relatives.

A 14-year-old constituent of mine had to be placed in Holywell hospital's adult acute admission ward, and later spent one month in the adult male intensive care ward because no alternative in-patient facilities designed and staffed to manage the degree of disturbance presented by seriously ill young persons were available in Northern Ireland.

Skilled and qualified psychiatric nurses should not be expected to treat seriously ill children in wards designed for seriously mentally ill adult patients. I ask the Minister to seek to provide for the children of Northern Ireland special and appropriate accommodation for their medical and psychiatric care. That could be done on an all-Northern Ireland basis, which would be more conducive to early recovery of children suffering from mental illness and undergoing treatment.

I invite the Minister to bring together officials of all health boards in Northern Ireland, to seek funding for specific accommodation in the treatment of mentally ill children. Provision of discrete areas within an adult hospital may be feasible, but it is not considered desirable or best practice. I trust that the Minister will not forget my brief comments but will endeavour to make even better provision.

8.53 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Some years ago, I spent a memorable holiday in that beautiful country of Ireland. As often happens, there was an Irish promotion week. One shop I visited had labelled everything that one could imagine. There was Irish cheese, Irish butter, Irish cream, local bread, Irish potatoes and shamrocks all over the shop. They had tried desperately to label everything. Some wag had put up an enormous notice, which read, "Think Irish. Buy French beans."

The order reminds me of that notice, because the Government thought about Irish children, but when it came to drawing up the order, they failed to consider the special needs and difficulties facing the Irish people, believing that a rehash of English and Welsh legislation would do.

Northern Ireland's population has a larger proportion of children than any other part of the United Kingdom. It urgently needs concerted help and support, and has been waiting far too long for the order. The Government have rightly been criticised for the delay of five years since the implementation of the Children Act 1989. The stresses and strains of family life in Northern Ireland are apparent for us all to see, yet there have been inexplicable delays and lack of Government commitment to presenting the order.

My hon. Friends the Members for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) and for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and the hon. Members for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs), for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) raised many concerns. I shall therefore deal with only a few issues, including several not yet mentioned.

The decision that the functions of health and social services boards may be discharged by trusts led many hon. Members to question who will be legally responsible when things go wrong, how consultation will be undertaken and who will be involved. There is obviously a need for accountability when dealing with complex legislation, and that is especially important when children's lives are at risk.

Why could not an article have been added to prevent all child minders or anyone paid to care for children having the right to smack children? The order offers the Government the opportunity to protect some children while they are busy, as the result of a recent court decision, producing guidelines that will allow child minders to smack. A National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children leaflet, recently distributed with Government approval, states that children should not be shaken or smacked. Perhaps the Minister will clarify the age at which a small child can be smacked by a paid child minder. Nothing in the order tells us that.

The lack of independence of guardians ad litem has been frequently raised with me. Clearer guidelines on their duties could have been issued. There is great concern for their independence as well as for an extension of their services and perhaps use in criminal courts.

The procedures for children to give evidence in courts are far from satisfactory. There is growing demand even from the judiciary to implement the recommendations in Judge Pigot's report on video evidence, and for children's evidence to be taken outside the realms of a court. The identifying of children in court should have been prevented by earlier legislation but continues. Stronger wording should be used, to prevent that happening in all courts.

The committee of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child strongly criticised the British Government's lack of social expenditure. It is estimated that 39 per cent. of children in Northern Ireland live in poverty—much higher than the average for the rest of the UK. Northern Ireland also has the highest level of unemployment and the lowest disposable household incomes. Are the Government prepared to put money into doing something about it?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen said, the health and social services boards have estimated that, to implement the order and provide the necessary training, they will need £20 million for child minders and day care, £6 million for children with disabilities, £3 million for child protection and £2 million for children leaving care—a total of £45 million. That sum does not take into account the changes in court services, which will also be very expensive. Will the Government provide all that money?

If the Government really want to do something to help, they should consider carefully the United Nations committee's report on the effect of the emergency legislation on the children of Northern Ireland and its criticism of the outrageous power to hold children as young as 10 for seven days without charge. The Government should also examine children's complete lack of confidence in that system.

The need for support for the teaching of the Irish language was also mentioned. So much has been done to keep alive the languages and traditions of Wales and Scotland; why has not the same been done in Northern Ireland?

The UN committee was also disturbed by reports of physical and sexual abuse of children, as has been mentioned. It was concerned about secure training orders and children placed in training schools in Northern Ireland. It also mentioned gipsy and travelling children, especially with regard to their access to basic services such as education. The report discussed the need to establish an independent mechanism for the monitoring of the Children Act 1989 and the convention on the rights of the child; the need for children to have a greater voice in decisions affecting them; and the need for urgent race relations legislation in Northern Ireland. Those are just a few of the matters mentioned in the UN committee report, which should have been considered when the order was finally drafted.

I have been brief to allow the Minister time to respond. Many things could have been done to improve the Children Act 1989. It is not good enough virtually to repeat the legislation that came into force more than five years ago. Times have changed and flaws in the legislation have been identified. The Government should have taken this opportunity to strengthen the Act and to think about the needs of the Irish people. My advice to the Minister when he embarks on his one-year consultation is, "Think Irish, not French beans."

9.1 pm

Mr. Moss: We have had a very good debate. Of course, this is the final debate on the order which, as was rightly pointed out, has been gestating for a considerable time. The order is lengthy and complex and its preparation has involved a great deal of work. The Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland, the Office of Law Reform, the Department of Education, the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland court service have also been involved.

The order was first published in July 1993, with a longer than usual consultation period of three months. We were then asked for an extension, which we gave, until the end of November 1993. The order was debated in

[Mr. Moss]

February last year in the Northern Ireland Committee by many hon. Members who have contributed to this evening's debate, and many changes were suggested. Baroness Denton invited all members of the Northern Ireland Committee to discuss amendments to the order with her. Some took her up on that invitation and, has been said several times, she listened carefully and suggested about 11 amendments.

One of the main issues raised this evening was that of resources. Among those who mentioned resources were the hon. Members for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron). We accept that implementation of the order will have resource implications for boards and trusts in Northern Ireland. It will replace the existing legislative framework and, of course, account needs to be taken of the resources already deployed and of the development of child care services already in hand.

It is recognised, nevertheless, that additional resources will need to be deployed in certain areas over a period, before and after the order comes into operation. Much of the expenditure involved will not begin to arise until the next financial year 1996-97, when we envisage the order coming into operation, and will be spread over a number of years as services develop in line with boards' and trusts' child care trusts plans. Even before that, however, a large number of staff in the health and social services boards and trusts will require training, a point raised by, among others, the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster. Those involved in the voluntary sector will also require training and the Department of Health and Social Services will provide support for that.

Resources will also be required in relation to the new requirement to appoint guardians ad litem in care and care-related proceedings. Additional funds of up to £2 million will be made available in the current year to cover training in the new legislation and the start-up costs for the guardian ad litem service.

Reference has been made to the fact that the Government have less than wholehearted support for resource provision in Northern Ireland in the sphere of health and personal social services. Resources are limited but, even in the face of competing priorities, the Government have increased resources for HPSS every year. Overall expenditure on HPSS in Northern Ireland will total £1,510 million in 1995-96, an increase of 5.4 per cent. in cash terms or 2 per cent. in real terms over the 1994-95 forecast outturn. Hon. Members who referred to my calculator now know what I was doing.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Did the Minister also calculate why, when it is Government policy to shift to care in the community, there have been cuts in the south and east trust area for Belfast?

Mr. Moss: The hon. Gentleman can write to me about any specific lack of resources in a particular trust and I shall certainly look into that. However, I can say in all honesty that I am not aware of a lack of resources for community care in any trust in Northern Ireland.

I was talking about overall expenditure. In Northern Ireland, it has increased an impressive 55 per cent. in real terms since 1979-80.

A number of hon. Members also mentioned the key issue of implementation.

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way before he finishes with the issue of resources. It is very important that we heard that £2 million is being made available for the setting up and implementation of the new legislation, but what about the figure suggested by those who work in social services in Northern Ireland? They believe that, in the years to come—perhaps three, four or five years ahead—and in view of the experience of England and Wales, on a pro rata basis more than £40 million extra will be required specifically to implement the order.

Mr. Moss: The hon. Gentleman gave some figures in his speech. I added them up, and they came to £29 million. A sentence later, the total had risen to £45 million. I have seen the same briefing from various parties as the hon. Gentleman, and it seems to me that the figure grows and grows, like Topsy.

The honest answer is that we do not know exactly how much the measure will cost to implement. What we are saying is that we are starting to spend the money now. The hon. Gentleman will know how Government spending is organised: each year, the public expenditure survey takes on board the bids from each Department for the necessary expenditure. We shall build into next year's HPSS public expenditure round sufficient bids to implement the policy during the intervening years, but it will take at least a year for many of the regulations to be published and consulted on. We already have a mound of paper which will be submitted for consultation fairly soon.

To those who ask for commitment, I can give the commitment that we intend to press on as quickly as possible to organise the regulations and ensure that the order is up and running in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Murphy: Although exact comparisons cannot be made between London boroughs and towns and cities in Northern Ireland, surely the Northern Ireland Office is taking account of what has happened in England and Wales over the past six years. Surely it can examine the figures and make a proper comparison. Clearly, the Minister cannot specify the cost of implementation to the nearest million, but surely some figures will emerge. There is no question of a "bid"; the order presumably has the backing of the Treasury and the entire Cabinet, and if it is to be implemented the money must go with it.

Mr. Moss: It does not work quite like that. We shall, as usual, be making our bids in the public expenditure survey round for next year and the year after; we shall make proper costings, and we shall take the experience of England and Wales into account in the implementation of the Children Act.

We also recognise that the implementation will have an impact on a wide range of agencies. That point has been raised by a number of hon. Members. It is intended that the implementation will be carried out under the overall direction of a project board comprising representatives from the Department of Health and Social Services, including the management executive, the chief inspector of social services and the Northern Ireland court service.

In addition, there will be a broadly based implementation steering group, which has already been set up to co-ordinate the plans of the wide range of

agencies with key roles in the order's implementation. That group includes representatives from the health and social services boards, the voluntary child care sector, the Department of Education, the police and the legal profession.

I remind hon. Members that it took about two years to bring the Children Act into operation here in England and Wales. We hope to proceed at a faster rate in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister mentioned the Department of Education. Is that Department not fairly remote from the work base? Should not the group include representatives of the education boards? There have been hold-ups in the provision of access to ordinary schooling for children in need.

Mr. Moss: That is an interesting point. I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a keen interest in these matters, and that many of his amendments have already been accepted by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State. We shall begin consultation on the regulations fairly soon; if he wishes to make his point to us then, we shall consider it in more detail.

The hon. Members for Mid-Ulster and for Belfast, South mentioned the exclusion of abusers from the family home. We accept that there is widespread support for the principle of a court order that would exclude an abuser, or an alleged abuser, but we pointed out in the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs that it would be difficult to ensure not only that the rights of a person against whom such an order might be made are protected but that the order achieves the desired outcome. Reference was made to the Children (Scotland) Bill, which is currently being debated. The Scottish Office issued a White Paper suggesting that a provision for the exclusion of abusers be included in that Bill.

The Scottish Office experienced extreme difficulty in drafting an appropriate clause, and that is now the subject of considerable discussion in Committee. It is unlikely that it will survive in its original form. We sympathise with the points that hon. Members have made, but it is extremely difficult to draft an appropriate measure while retaining a vestige of human rights for the person who may be excluded from the family home.

The hon. Members for Belfast, South, for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) and for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) asked whether we would learn lessons from the Children Act of England and Wales. The Government consider that the legislative base provided by that Act is sound. A number of issues, of course, have to be addressed during the implementation of the order in Northern Ireland, but, as I have said, we are confident that the primary legislation provides a sound basis and there are no plans to reform the fundamental principles of the Children Act. Work on the regulations and guidance which will flow from the order is proceeding in the Department. In carrying out that work, much regard will be taken of developments in England and Wales in the implementation of the Children Act.

The hon. Members for Mid-Ulster and for Belfast, South raised the definition of disability, which they felt was rather stigmatising. The definition provided in the order follows that used in the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 and is repeated in the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. Changing the definition may give rise to anomalies and it would be inappropriate to use a definition for disabled children that differs from that used in legislation affecting disabled people generally.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Moss: If I must.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister said in his opening speech that he would be brief to allow us to speak. He has plenty of time now to answer the points that have been raised. The Minister is, of course, acting on advice, but it is the same advice that the same Department tendered to his predecessor in 1989, when I was steering the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Bill through the House. If that Department has not learned anything from 1989, it is time that there was a shake-up.

Mr. Moss: My colleagues in the Department probably heard that as well as I did. *[Interruption.]* I am not blaming anybody.

The hon. Members for Belfast, South and for Newcastle-under-Lyme asked about guardians ad litem and what steps we were taking to ensure their independence. We recognise the key importance of those people and that there should be a representative of the child and his or her interests in certain proceedings under the order. The creation of an effective guardian ad litem service will be essential to the successful operation of the children order. Detailed arrangements have yet to finalised, but it is envisaged that the service will operate as an independent body, quite separate from the health and social services boards and trusts.

I shall also address one or two individual comments. The hon. Member for Torfaen asked how we will monitor the children order. I assure him that the management executive, assisted by the social services inspectorate, will monitor the implementation of the order. The hon. Gentleman also asked about trusts being less accountable for their actions than boards. The health and social services trusts are statutory bodies established by the Department of Health and Social Services and remain fully within the health and personal social services department. Trusts exercising delegated functions will be fully accountable for their actions to appropriate boards and, ultimately, to the Department and the Minister.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South raised two other issues—one about Kidscape. The regional strategy for 1992-97 contains a target that Kidscape, a self-protection programme for children, will be introduced in every primary school by 1997. The Department is confident that that target will be met. The hon. Gentleman also asked about waiting lists for the registration of child minders. It is true that in some places the processing of applications for registration is delayed, but, overall, that is not the case. Boards and trusts actively encourage people to apply for registration. In the past five years, for example, the number of registered child minders has risen by 57 per cent.

The hon. Member for Belfast, West asked about care units in training schools. The order makes provisions for the creation of separate care units in training schools. We emphasise that those care units will be quite separate from the parts of the complexes that accommodate children who have committed offences.

[Mr. Moss]

Last, but not least, the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) raised a specific point. It is true that a teenager was recently treated in Holywell hospital as the hon. Gentleman described, but that was a most unusual case. The circumstances will be reviewed to eliminate the likelihood of similar admissions in the future.

I commend the orders to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Children (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 12th January, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 12th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Northern Ireland (Loans) (Increase of Limit) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

Road Vehicles

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8958/94, relating to recording equipment in road vehicles; and supports the Government's view that, while there is a need for alternative recording equipment, further development work is needed to prove the security of any new system before any change can be agreed.

European Social Policy

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9069/94, relating to the future of European social policy; and shares the Government's view that future Community social policy must centre on the need to tackle unemployment and facilitate the creation of new jobs, taking account of the principle of subsidiarity, the need to respect the diversity of Member States' institutions and traditions, and the importance of enhancing the competitiveness of Community businesses; takes note of European Community Document No. 4075/94, relating to the application of the Agreement on Social Policy, of European Community Document No. 11115/94, relating to a Resolution on the future of social policy, and of European Community Document No. 6230/94, relating to European Works Councils; and welcomes the fact that that acts adopted under the Agreement on Social Policy are not applicable to the United Kingdom under the terms of the Maastricht Treaty.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Doveridge Bypass

9.20 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I beg leave to present a petition given to me by Councillor Percy Brindley on Monday. It is about the Department of Transport's decision to postpone its plans to build the Doveridge bypass. The petition reads:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of residents of Doveridge and the surrounding area declares that the decision to delay the construction of the A564 Stoke-Derby link road means that the failure to build it puts them in continuing danger and the Petitioners urge the House to press the Secretary of State for Transport to reinstate this road, otherwise known as the Doveridge Bypass, into the roads programme immediately.

And the Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Horticultural Colleges

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

9.21 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise matters connected with a subject rarely debated in the House—horticulture. It is a topic close to my heart, first because it is a major industry in my constituency, but secondly because I am aware of the problems associated with the industry through my work as chairman of the Conservative parliamentary horticulture and market sub-committee, as vice-president of the Capel Manor horticulture trust, as a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Gardeners, as an honorary member of the Institute of Horticulture, and, finally, as parliamentary consultant to the Horticultural Trades Association, which has, of course, been properly registered in the Register of Members' Interests.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to a matter that should be of concern to hon. Members: further education students training for a career in horticulture are at an unfair disadvantage compared with most students training for work in other industries.

Commercial horticultural production is an industry of great importance to the United Kingdom, with a total value of about £1.8 billion per year. There is also considerable scope for import substitution, especially in the provision of ornamental trees and shrubs used in landscaping schemes and in private gardens.

The British garden, park and rural landscape are part of our heritage, and contribute enormously to our tourist industry and to our leisure industries. Not only do our urban landscape schemes enhance the visual appearance of our towns and cities, but the trees that they contain improve air quality, filtering out dust and traffic pollution and reducing noise. The horticulture industry therefore makes an incalculable contribution to the British way of life, beyond what can be measured in purely financial terms.

This important industry relies upon a relatively small number of further education graduates—about 1,500 a year. A relatively modest slice of the UK's further education budget—a mere 0.32 per cent.—would sustain the education needs of an industry which makes a major contribution to the UK economy and to the environment.

It has long been recognised that horticulture is best taught in colleges with appropriate facilities, and excellent colleges do exist. The nature of the industry demands that such colleges, with their workshops, glasshouses and outside growing areas, should be located in rural areas. A relatively high proportion of students will also be attracted from rural areas, which inevitably means that most students either travel long distances to attend courses or seek residential accommodation.

Each horticultural college draws its students from a wide area, frequently from throughout the United Kingdom, and is equipped with extensive residential accommodation. That distinguishes the colleges from a typical further education establishment, which is situated at the centre of a public transport network in the centre of an urban area and draws upon day students who travel from home.

If the centres provided by horticulture colleges—modern horticultural units with the latest technology in keeping with the highly specialised nature of the industry—are expensive to install and run, the teaching methods employed are also costly. Small teaching groups are required because of the safety demands of the training. That those additional costs are inevitable has been recognised by the Further Education Funding Council tariff advisory committee, which recommended a higher level of funding for courses.

Despite that recognition, the facilities and the centres of excellence which contain them are in danger of being lost because the courses are hardly viable. That is due to a combination of two factors. The first is the small number of horticulture students, when taken over the country as a whole. I stated earlier that there were about 1,500 horticulture further education graduates a year. Within that number is an enormous diversity, with graduates in landscape construction, landscape maintenance and green-keeping, and a substantial number of general horticulture graduates.

The commercial production industry—which has the greatest potential for import substitution and export development—relies on about 200 graduates per year being supplied by a handful of courses.

The second, and more significant, point is that there is an increasing incidence of potential students being denied the resources to attend courses. Student fees and maintenance grants are part of local authority expenditure, and students in further education rely on discretionary awards. Although local authorities have an obligation to provide such awards in practice, funds are often not available for all who demand them.

In each successive year, there is an increase in the number of eligible students who are unable to obtain adequate awards. Statistics from 1992 show that nearly 7 per cent. of students eligible for discretionary awards were unable to take up courses in land-based subjects because grants were not available. In addition, the level of some awards was insufficient to allow the student to commence his or her chosen course. I do not have more recent statistics to hand, but all the evidence points to a deterioration of the situation since then.

Courses which are otherwise viable are therefore put in jeopardy. Discretionary awards can be denied to students for a variety of reasons, none of which relates to the education needs of the student. I shall cite a number of examples. First, despite their obligation to do so, some authorities do not make discretionary awards. Their justification for that is that their expenditure is fully allocated elsewhere.

Secondly, other authorities do not provide out-county awards where they consider that relevant courses are available in-county. That action demonstrates the local authorities' lack of appreciation of the diversity within the industry. Such authorities fail to recognise the need for the very specialised training facilities required for the various sectors of the industry. At present, different colleges specialise in different sectors. One might have excellent facilities for landscape construction. Another might have facilities for hardy ornamental stock production or garden centre operations. To combine groups of students into one general course is to destroy the excellence that currently exists.

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

Thirdly, other authorities will not fund land-based courses. Therefore, effective use cannot be made of existing resources, not because further education funding is inadequate but because students are denied access. That results in the available courses being undersubscribed and threatens the continued viability of such centres and the specialised courses that they provide for the needs of horticulture. That will result in valuable national resources going to waste. Also, students entering further education are discriminated against vis-à-vis students entering higher education, who are entitled to receive mandatory awards. That is unjust discrimination.

Students who enter horticultural further education are more likely to require accommodation or incur extensive travelling costs than more typical further education students. Thus there is inequality of opportunity between rural students who wish to train for a horticultural career and urban students who have easy access to local further education colleges. The current system of discretionary awards is seen to be unsatisfactory because it discriminates against students in the horticulture industry who wish to take up further education. The withholding of discretionary awards threatens the future of the excellent courses that are now available and the centres that provide them. The horticulture industry cannot tackle the problem alone. While the industry might in various ways help to support a limited number of centres of excellence, its efforts will be to no avail if students cannot obtain the grants that they need to attend those centres.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the considerable benefits of an efficient, well-run horticulture industry which provides well-trained staff and can hold its own against competition from any part of the world. Against that, he should consider the relatively modest cost of introducing mandatory further education awards for horticulture students in place of the current discretionary awards. I ask my hon. Friend to agree that such a change in the funding of students' awards in further education should be enacted. I look forward to his response.

9.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on her success in obtaining an Adjournment debate to raise this topic in the House. I thank her for her interesting, eloquent and informative speech. We would expect no less because we well understand her expertise in horticulture and we appreciate very much her work on behalf of the horticulture industry. In turn, she will know that my own family has been actively involved in horticulture for many years—indeed, for generations—and I can well appreciate personally the issues involved.

My hon. Friend's speech focused mainly on horticulture students in further education, but she also mentioned, to differentiate them, higher education students. Students on designated higher education courses, whatever the subject, will, of course, be eligible for mandatory awards and also for student loans. It is a matter of record that Britain's system of support for higher education students is one of the most generous in the world. For 1995-96, the total support available through grants and loans in this area will increase by 2.5 per cent., in line with forecast price increases.

With regard to further education, my hon. Friend is right to say that students depend to a large extent on discretionary awards from local education authorities. Although local education authorities are required to make grants to eligible students attending designated courses, they may make grants at their discretion to students who are not personally eligible to receive mandatory awards or who are attending non-designated courses. The decision whether to make such a grant lies entirely with the authority concerned, as does the rate of grant payable and the method of assessment.

Although authorities are entirely free to decide on the allocation of discretionary awards funding, they must make clear the basis on which their decisions are made. The public can, of course, try to influence the discretionary awards policies and budgets of individual authorities. The Audit Commission's arrangements for the publication of performance indicators for each authority's services, including discretionary awards, are promoting informed comparisons of local education authorities' effectiveness in responding to local needs.

There has been a good deal of concern recently about the supposed decline in the availability of discretionary awards. In fact, the evidence suggests that the system as a whole is holding up well. The Gulbenkian survey, published in April last year, found that the number of discretionary awards to further education students was forecast to rise by 32 per cent. between 1990-91 and 1993-94. Expenditure on those awards was also expected to rise by 14 per cent. in real terms over the same period. My Department's own statistics show that in 1992-93, local authorities in England and Wales spent almost £170 million on further education discretionary awards.

Within that overall picture, I accept that there are wide variations in local authorities' practices. To some extent, that is a response to local needs and priorities; that is inevitable and should, indeed, be welcomed. But there is evidence that potential students' chances of obtaining an award are increasingly dependent on where they happen to live and that some authorities are effectively throwing in the towel on discretionary awards, as my hon. Friend has mentioned.

The Government are concerned by this evidence and are keeping the situation under review. However, unless there is evidence that a local education authority is in breach of its statutory duty—for example, by operating a policy of saying, "No awards, come what may"—it is not open to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education to intervene in an individual authority's policies. It must be for the local authorities themselves in the first instance to respond as necessary to concerns about the availability of awards. I understand that the local authority associations are currently working on a voluntary code of practice, and I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming that development.

My hon. Friend's particular concern is with the position of residential horticultural colleges. I am certainly aware of the particular difficulties faced by students wishing to attend residential colleges because of the relatively high cost to local authorities of supporting them. She will appreciate that a similar problem arises in relation to the agricultural colleges. She may like to know that I am to meet two delegations soon to hear their views on the issue.

My hon. Friend's proposed solution is simply to make mandatory awards available for students at those colleges. There are two difficulties with her proposal. First, it would require primary legislation, because the 1962 Act provides for mandatory awards to be made only to students on higher education courses. Secondly, it would be expensive. Even to extend mandatory awards only to full-time students at residential horticultural and agricultural colleges—I doubt whether my hon. Friend would argue that the two should be treated differently—would cost an estimated £30 million a year. To extend the student loans scheme, which would be the natural corollary, would cost another £8 million a year initially. More importantly, any such move would open the floodgates to other further education students who felt that they had an equally strong claim to mandatory funding. That could be enormously expensive and in the current public expenditure climate it is simply not a realistic option.

Of course, colleges need to ensure that students are aware of other sources of finance—notably access funds and career development loans. In 1994-95, the further education access fund will give more than £5.7 million to students in financial difficulties, which is a rise of almost 20 per cent. on the previous year. In 1993-94, 118 agricultural or horticultural trainees paid for their courses themselves using a career development loan. I also welcome the support for students provided by the industry.

In the main, the horticultural sector is holding up well. I am sure that my hon. Friend will also be pleased to know the promising trend in enrolments. Between 1992-93 and 1993-94—it is always difficult to get bang up-to-date statistics, especially at this time of year before the returns come in—full-time equivalent enrolments in agriculture and horticulture colleges rose by 6 per cent., which is slightly higher than those for the further education sector as a whole, which were 5 per cent. College strategic plans show that enrolments in these colleges are expected to rise over the period to 1996-97 by slightly more than FE colleges as a whole. For full-time students, 39 per cent. in agriculture and horticulture compared with 23 per cent. in other further education.

Thirty-four colleges in England offer horticulture and there is evidence of a growth in demand for the newer courses. Pershore college of horticulture in Worcestershire reports that it now fully expects to meet its present target numbers. Moulton college in my home county of Northamptonshire is an example of effective linkage between horticultural provision and industry. Many other land-based colleges have diversified their horticultural provision to reflect new market demands. They have successfully developed flexible provision related to garden centre management and management of the countryside.

The Further Education Funding Council is sensitive to the costs of such courses and gives a higher weighting to them in its funding mechanism. In 1995-96, the council will increase the relative cost weighting factor accorded to such courses by 25 per cent.

Furthermore, in its work to develop the new funding methodology, on which it has consulted widely, the funding council found that considerable variations had existed between LEAs in the level of funding for FE colleges. The FEFC is addressing that by gradually converging its average funding per unit of activity. That means that institutions with historically low funding for their type of provision can expect to get more in future, and to flourish from it.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising those topics, which are of great importance to the industry. I hope that she appreciates that, in turn, we continue to review the position. We are grateful for the evidence that she has given today. I hope that she will report back to those in the industry that we are aware of the importance of their work and are doing what we can to help. In the meantime, by way of exhortation, I encourage colleges to build on their effective liaison with the industry, and to continue to develop training to meet its needs. I am sure that my hon. Friend and the House will join me in stressing the importance of a well-trained work force, both for the individual and the industry that it serves.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 9 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 16 February.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL (*By Order*)
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 16 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Prevention, Portsmouth

1. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority he attaches to crime prevention in Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I regard crime prevention as a matter of the highest priority. I am delighted that Portsmouth, with its excellent record of encouraging crime prevention initiatives through partnership, is to have one of the new safer cities projects to help tackle crime and the fear of crime in the area.

Mr. Martin: May I make my hon. Friend aware of the concern of many people in Portsmouth who are particularly sensitive about crimes of drunken, late-night violence and vandalism associated with clubs similar to the one in Aldershot? This week, four men in Winchester were given grossly inadequate sentences for a serious and mindless assault. Does that not sum up the lack of confidence in law and order enforcement that many people feel? They are worried about the failure of the courts to back up the efforts of the police and the clubs themselves to stamp out this behaviour. Will my hon. Friend support my asking our right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to refer this case to the Court of Appeal for a proper sentence?

Mr. Maclean: That case is not in the referrable category, but I congratulate Hampshire police on their excellent crime prevention initiatives. Last year, crime fell in Hampshire by 7 per cent.; burglaries were down by 14 per cent.; and robberies were down by 14 per cent. I accept my hon. Friend's point, however, that the criminal justice system is a seamless robe and that all parts of it must work in harmony if the public and our constituents are to be assured that there is justice.

The House has given the courts powers to impose sentences of up to 14 years for burglary, 10 years for killing someone while drink-driving, five years for inflicting bodily injury and life imprisonment for unlawful wounding. I suggest that any public indignation at a perceived failure to use the extensive powers that the House has granted should be directed at those responsible for sentencing.

Parkhurst Prison

2. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who gave instructions to the Director of Custody (Prisons) with regard to the removal from office of the governor of Parkhurst prison on 10 January.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): The decision to move the then governor of Parkhurst to other duties was taken by the Director General of the Prison Service after consulting the directors of custody, security and personnel.

Mr. Hanson: Is the Home Secretary aware that there is a strong suspicion among the press, the public and prison staff that the governor was removed directly on his orders as a sacrifice to the House on 10 January? Does he further agree that, however the matter was resolved, it has had a detrimental effect on prison governors' morale and on the morale of the Prison Service? The right hon. and learned Gentleman should face up to his responsibilities by accepting that he had a hand in the removal.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the minutes—available to everyone—of the evidence that I gave to the Home Affairs Select Committee just two weeks ago, in which I dealt with this and similar questions in great detail. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the record of my answers, he will find that the suspicions to which he referred are quite without foundation.

Mr. Barry Field: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm yet again that none of the staff moved from Parkhurst prison was dismissed, and that people were moved for their own safety pending the outcome of the inquiry into the escapes?

Mr. Howard: I made it absolutely clear, as I told the House on that occasion, that the movement of those concerned was pending the outcome of disciplinary investigations and any subsequent proceedings. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to that fact.

Mr. George Howarth: Is it not precisely because of the evidence in the minutes to which the Home Secretary referred that suspicion remains? Is not the clear truth of the matter that, in his desperation to retrieve his damaged political reputation, the Secretary of State was determined to come to the House on 10 January with Mr. Marriott's head on a platter? The manner in which Mr. Marriott has been scapegoated brings credit on neither the Home Secretary nor the Prison Service. It is a downright disgrace.

Mr. Howard: I notice that neither the hon. Gentleman nor other Opposition Members have seen fit to suggest how they would have acted in similar circumstances. It was essential that the management of that prison, with the number of high-risk category A prisoners still there, should be carried out efficiently and effectively in all the circumstances. It was made absolutely clear at the time

that that was why the director general made his decision. If we are to have the kind of criticism that we have just heard from Opposition Members, they should tell us what they would do, or would have done, in similar circumstances.

Mr. Brazier: I have a prison in my constituency. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, while we cannot prejudge the outcome of the disciplinary proceedings, if the events at that prison were substantially as they have been reported, it is right that people should be held accountable for them?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend and the House will understand that I cannot and will not prejudge the outcome of those disciplinary proceedings. It has been made absolutely clear time after time why the director general took the action that he took on that day. We shall have to await the outcome of the disciplinary proceedings in due course.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

3. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of awards for criminal injuries compensation which will be reassessed if the tariff scheme is withdrawn.

Mr. Howard: If the tariff scheme has to be withdrawn, all applications lodged since 1 April 1994 will have to be reassessed. Up to the end of January, some 51,400 applications had been lodged.

Mrs. Kennedy: Will those 51,000 victims of violent crime be further disadvantaged by having to wait another period before receiving payment in compensation? Exactly how much public money will be spent on the reassessment of those cases if the tariff scheme is withdrawn? That money could have been spent on the victims of violent crime.

Mr. Howard: I think that the hon. Lady is under a misapprehension. The whole purpose of taking action under the tariff scheme was to ensure that people did not have to wait for payment of compensation and that they had those payments before the ultimate judgment of the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords in this matter. The whole purpose of making payments under the tariff scheme during the interim judgment while we await the ultimate judgment is to ensure that people do not have to wait longer than necessary for their money.

Mr. Michael: Will the Home Secretary explain why there has been a slowdown in the flow of paperwork from the Home Office on claims under the criminal injury compensation scheme? Leaving aside the dubious legality of how he sought to change the scheme, which still hangs in the balance, will he now admit the obvious: that victims of the most serious crimes of violence will not gain under his scheme and that compensation for those who suffer the most horrendous attacks and therefore need that compensation most, including police and fire officers injured in the course of duty, will be slashed?

Mr. Howard: Time after time, it has been made clear that 60 per cent. of the victims of crime will gain by way of compensation under the tariff scheme at least as much as, if not more than, under the old scheme. Time after time, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench have failed to give an undertaking that they would restore the old scheme. Unless and until they give such an undertaking, all questions of the kind which the hon. Gentleman asked are the hottest of hot air.

Convicted Murderers (Release)

4. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to release prisoners who have been convicted of murder.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): My right hon. and learned Friend has the power to release on licence a prisoner convicted of murder provided that the parole board has recommended release, and after consulting the Lord Chief Justice and the trial judge, if available.

My right hon. and learned Friend also has the power, in exceptional circumstances, to release a life sentence prisoner on compassionate grounds and may recommend the exercise of prerogative powers in respect of any convicted prisoner.

Mr. Riddick: Will the Home Secretary use the powers at his disposal to free Private Lee Clegg at the earliest opportunity? Is he aware that I have received many more letters about the plight of Private Clegg than I have received, for example, about veal crates, because my constituents are outraged at the fact that that British soldier is serving a life sentence for murder, having become entangled in that terrible situation simply because he was doing his duty?

Mr. Forsyth: Questions relating to the detention or release of Private Clegg are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bermingham: Is it not a fact that if the Home Secretary relinquished his powers to interfere in judicial decisions and got rid of mandatory life sentences, the problem concerning Private Clegg would never have arisen, because the judge would have been able to sentence him appropriately?

Mr. Forsyth: As I have already said, the issue of Private Clegg is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the mandatory life sentence enables my right hon. and learned Friend, on an individual basis, to decide on the basis of risk whether a life prisoner may be released and on the basis of appropriate retribution and deterrence the length of sentence that should be set as a minimum as part of the tariff-setting procedure.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Does my right hon. Friend share the view that the public expect that the most heinous of all crimes should be visited by the most serious of all punishments; that life imprisonment is the substitute for capital punishment, which the House gave to the country in 1965; and that, if that is right, those who seek to require that judges decide how long a prisoner shall serve for the crime of murder have a difficult case to prove?

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with everything that my hon. and learned Friend has just said.

Obviously, it was part of the arrangements made following the abolition of the death penalty for murder that the Home Secretary should have a role in deciding the length of sentence that would be served as part of the tariff-setting procedure. It is important that that ability to set a tariff, on the advice of the judiciary, and to assess whether a prisoner will be released on licence, should take account of risk to the whole community, and that that power should rest with the Home Secretary.

Asylum Seekers

5. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for refugee status are currently outstanding; and what is the average time from application to decision.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): An estimated 55,255 applications for asylum were outstanding at the end of last year. For applications received since the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 and decided in the period between 1 October and 31 December 1994, the estimated average time between the receipt of a completed asylum application and the decision was seven months.

Mr. Banks: Is it not a fact that that appalling backlog and the long time taken for consideration are caused by the immigration service being overstretched and underfunded? Is the Minister aware that there are more than 5,000 of those cases in my borough of Newham alone? That is 10 per cent. of all applications. Is he aware of how much pressure that puts on the people who are waiting for a decision, and how much pressure it puts on the hard-pressed services of Newham in terms of housing, social services and education? Will he give further resources to the immigration service and speak to his comrades—friends—in other Departments, so that boroughs such as Newham can be given additional resources to tackle the problem?

Mr. Baker: Perhaps I could point out to the hon. Gentleman that before the 1993 Act, the average time taken on those cases was 18 months, so seven months is an improvement on that. I share the anxiety expressed by the hon. Gentleman about the time that is being taken, and am urgently considering, in conjunction with the Lord Chancellor's Department, ways in which we may reduce those times, precisely to deal with the problems that the hon. Gentleman describes.

Mr. Brooke: Does my hon. Friend, whatever the delay, encourage applicants for refugee status to spend the time learning English, which is in their direct interest and also in the interest of the community into which they are seeking to integrate?

Mr. Baker: I am sure that that must be sensible advice, although I fancy that that question might be better directed at my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education.

Dr. Howells: The Minister has placed in the Library a copy of the report that he commissioned from KPMG Peat Marwick on the workings of the refugee asylum appeals procedure. Has he read that report? If so, how can he explain the huge overload in existing work and the shambles that has resulted from 15 years of Government administration of that department? What will he do to clean up the mess in order to introduce common decency and efficiency into the entire procedure?

Mr. Baker: That report is in the Library. I urge anyone who is interested to look at it and to let me have their comments. We are, of course, studying it carefully. It makes a number of radical proposals, as well as sensible ones. We are looking urgently to see how we can improve the system in the light of those proposals.

Mr. Evennett: I congratulate my hon. Friend and his officials on the work that they have done in that difficult area and on shortening the time during which asylum seekers have to wait before their cases are processed. Will he assure me and my hon. Friends, however, that bogus applicants are sent back as quickly as possible?

Mr. Baker: One of the purposes of speeding up the appeals system set up in the 1993 Act is to deal quickly with appeals so that those genuine asylum seekers are given that right of asylum and those bogus asylum seekers to whom my hon. Friend referred are expelled as quickly as possible.

Drug-related Crime

6. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase resources to fight drug-related crime.

Mr. Maclean: Police forces will receive an extra £180 million in 1995-96. The allocation of those resources within each force is a matter for the chief constable. He must decide on the most effective use of his resources, taking account of local priorities and needs.

Mr. Miller: I wonder whether the Minister has seen the letter sent to the Home Secretary by the local section of Parents Against Drug Abuse in my constituency in which those parents expressed their concern at the closure of the Customs and Excise operations at Ellesmere Port and the fact that no police officers are dedicated solely to the task of policing the drugs problem. Does he not understand that that failure to monitor that port leaves the door wide open for drugs? Does he not believe that children in my constituency and right across the country deserve better protection than that?

Mr. Maclean: They are getting it. The Government's comprehensive drugs strategy commands expenditure of more than £500 million throughout Departments. The hon. Gentleman should not misrepresent the proposed changes to Customs and Excise. They will not detract from the effectiveness of the customs response to drug smuggling. The proposals are designed to enhance and develop existing strategies, and to provide better flexibility and better targeting for customs operations against drug smuggling. Customs and Excise assures me that there will be no customs-free port or airport in the United Kingdom. It will be able to make flexible use of regionally based, mobile, anti-smuggling teams and that represents a good response to the problem.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my hon. Friend confirm to the House that the Government have no plans to legalise any drugs that are currently banned in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Maclean: I can give my hon. Friend that categorical assurance. I do not think that those who

advocate the legalisation of so-called "soft" drugs understand the nature of the problem with which we are dealing. The signal that would be given to our young people, to the effect that some drugs are okay to mess about with while others are not, would be disastrous. That is the view of the police force and Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Beith: Is the Minister aware of newspaper reports that the Security Service, MI5, is seeking a role in dealing with drug-related crime? Although it may have the capacity to assist in dealing with drug trafficking and money laundering, will Ministers bear it in mind that much of the work to combat drug-related crime depends on working closely with communities? Many police forces are doing just that and are accountable for that work to local communities in a way that the Security Service cannot be.

Mr. Maclean: Although I agree with the last part of the right hon. Gentleman's question that, of course, there is a role for various agencies, the 43 police forces in England and Wales and those in Scotland have a continuing and complete role to carry out in relation to drugs. I was slightly surprised that when we are discussing the legalisation of drugs the right hon. Gentleman from the Liberal party should rise on cue, as the Liberal party is one of those ridiculous organisations that believe in the liberalisation of some soft drugs.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fight against drug-related crime can be enhanced by a proper public understanding of drugs? Is he aware that there are now certain varieties of cannabis which cause hallucinations and can exacerbate conditions such as phobias and even schizophrenia? In those circumstances, does my hon. Friend share my view that those who regard some drugs as only recreational and safe send out entirely the wrong signal in the fight against drug-related crime?

Mr. Maclean: I have read some articles in some trendy newspapers which were given to me suggesting that some champagne socialists can pass the pot around at dinner parties quite safely. No doubt, some people can safely handle some drugs and know when to stop, but many more do not. The signal that legalisation would give young people in particular—that it is safe and trendy to participate in drugs—would be absolutely disastrous. It would lead to the use of harder drugs and would make the task of the police infinitely worse. The police are totally opposed to it, as are all right-thinking people. The Government remain totally opposed to legalisation.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) made clear to the Minister our opposition to the legalisation of cannabis, and that remains the case. On the alarming decision this morning by the European Court of Human Rights to declare unlawful certain aspects of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986, let me make it clear to the Minister that we fully supported those provisions—including the retrospective provisions—when they came before the House in January 1986, and that remains our position. I believe that the court made a bad decision that the British public will find almost impossible to understand. It is entirely right that those who profit from drugs should be hit in their pockets.

Does the Minister also accept the view of the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee, that the problem might have been avoided had the European convention been incorporated into English and Scots law? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That was the hon. and learned Gentleman's view on television at lunchtime, and it is what the Opposition have consistently argued.

Mr. Maclean: I fail to see the consistency. The hon. Gentleman has just pointed out the incorrectness or daftness of the decision which has come from a European organisation on legislation which was passed with the full support of the House. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern that there should be an attempt to make us remove those powers. We shall need to reflect carefully on the judgment.

The hon. Gentleman then said that the problem could be solved by incorporating the European convention into British law, but I do not see how that could be achieved. I shall debate it with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. The hon. Gentleman has lifted what my right hon. and learned Friend said and is apparently proposing it as Labour party policy. It does not make sense of the judgment to attempt to incorporate it into English law. We shall look carefully at the judgment, but the whole House shares the indignation at the decision that those jurists have reached. It is not the view of the British Government. We have robustly defended our corner; we shall reflect on it, but we remain convinced that the laws are appropriate for dealing with drug dealers.

Offensive Material

7. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the law concerning the publication of racially offensive and anti-semitic material.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government share the disgust of all hon. Members for racially offensive and anti-semitic material. That is why we introduced in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 a new power of immediate arrest to deal with the publication or distribution of written material intended or likely to stir up racial hatred. This will significantly improve the enforcement agencies' investigative powers to take swift and effective action against those engaged in the dissemination of such offensive literature.

Mr. Gapes: Will the Minister go further and take up all the proposals of the Home Affairs Select Committee and the Labour party to strengthen the law in that area? Is he aware that I wrote to the Home Secretary on 1 November and forwarded to him material which was sent to me by Lady Birdwood and her racist organisation? I have received a reply from the Director of Public Prosecutions saying that he is not prepared to prosecute in that instance.

Is the Minister also aware that Hizb ut-Tahrir, an extremist organisation, has been issuing leaflets in my constituency calling for death to Jews, and that the Radio Authority recently gave a broadcast licence to an organisation associated with Hizb ut-Tahrir? Will the Minister please do something to stop this?

Mr. Baker: We have made the publication or distribution of racist material which is intended or likely

to stir up racial hatred an arrestable offence. We have very strong laws in place and we hope that they will be enforced.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, we welcome the recommendations in the Home Affairs Select Committee report on racial attacks and harassment. We were not able to accept every recommendation, but much of the work called for in that report is already being carried forward by the interdepartmental racial attacks group.

On the question of Hizb ut-Tahrir, I am aware that the Jewish community is very concerned about the activities of extreme Islamic groups. If any group engages in illegal activities, it is liable to be dealt with using the full force of the law. I believe that the laws that we have in place are effective in dealing with precisely the kind of literature to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Dame Angela Rumbold: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to remind the House about the Government's consistent attack on racial discrimination? Will he remind the House that that has always been the Government's policy and that we shall continue to condemn racist attacks and any kind of racist or offensive material?

Mr. Baker: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The new law that we have introduced to deal with intentional harassment goes further in dealing with racial attacks which concern so many hon. Members.

Mr. Trimble: What steps have been taken to deal with the printing and distribution of racist and anti-semitic material in Dublin? Has the Minister made any representations to the Irish Government about that?

Mr. Baker: I am not aware of any such representations. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern only too well, but it is not a matter for which I can take responsibility.

Crime

8. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of current trends in the figures for recorded crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: For the 12 months to June 1994, the number of crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales decreased by 5.5 per cent. compared with the previous 12 months. This is the largest fall over 12 months for 40 years. This decrease in recorded crime is a welcome step in the right direction, but we must continue to do all we can to help the police make further progress in the fight against crime.

Mr. Booth: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept congratulations from Conservative Members on the fact that the figures represent a marked improvement on past figures? Can we also welcome a reduction in the number of recorded burglary offences? Will my right hon. and learned Friend challenge Labour Members to join Conservative Members in being tough on crime? Will he also challenge them to take a vow to stop the scaremongering about recorded crime statistics which so worries the elderly?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but his congratulations should be directed towards the police whose effective operations have been responsible for the fall in the recorded crime figures. I believe that we are seeing much more effective action by the police, and the credit for the fall in figures is theirs. So far as the Labour party is concerned, I am not prepared to wait as long as it would take to accept its co-operation on these matters.

Mr. Llwyd: When will the Government acknowledge that drug-related crimes are a direct threat to the fabric of society? Is the Secretary of State aware, for example, that, in some south Wales valleys, some vile and unspeakable people are giving heroin free to primary schoolchildren? What will he do about that?

Mr. Howard: Drugs-related crime is undoubtedly a very serious cause for concern. We have made that plain for a considerable period. We are taking effective action to deal with it. The hon. Gentleman will, I hope, be aware of the co-ordinated strategy that was announced towards the end of last year. We must take effective action to deal with what I entirely agree is a dreadful menace, not only in the south Wales valleys but elsewhere in this country.

Mr. Alexander: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the figure that he gave just now will be widely welcomed? But is he further aware that much of the crime is committed in rural areas and that many people who live in rural areas see a policeman only when a crime is committed and he comes to see what happened? Will my right hon. and learned Friend do something to ensure a greater police presence in our villages, our rural areas, the residents of which are deeply worried about the continuing crime figures?

Mr. Howard: We have taken a number of initiatives to help to deal with rural crime. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in reminding people in villages that there is much that they can do to help themselves, for example, through parish constables, neighbourhood constables and a number of other initiatives, which are having a considerable impact on the crime figures in many communities throughout the country.

Mr. Straw: Is the Secretary of State aware that his self-congratulation and complacency will go down very badly with the British public, and that although any reduction in crime is welcome, the British public know that, over the past 15 years, crime has doubled, that violent crime continues to rise and that robbery has gone up almost fourfold? Against a background of repeated election promises from the Government that they would act to cut crime, the public know the truth: the Tories can no more be trusted on law and order than on tax.

Mr. Howard: It would help if the hon. Gentleman was prepared just for once to listen to the answer that I have given. Far from self-congratulation, I specifically directed my hon. Friend's congratulations to the police, to whom the credit for the fall in the crime figures rightly belongs. We are prepared to give them that credit; the Labour party would deny them it.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my right hon. and learned Friend concede that the measures to deal with bail bandits and to lock up persistent offenders for longer are also having a big impact on the crime figures, and that if one locks up persistent offenders one keeps them out of people's homes and cars? That is what the Labour party will never accept.

Mr. Howard: There is, indeed, much in what my hon. Friend says and he is entirely right to say that that is a

truth that the Labour party has consistently denied. That is why it tried to wreck and undermine the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. That is why it fought and obstructed every measure that we have taken to deal effectively with crime. That is why it will never have the confidence of the British people on those matters.

Fire Authorities

9. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the ability of fire authorities to carry out their statutory duties.

Mr. Howard: It is for each authority to set a budget that would allow it to comply with its duties under the Fire Services Act 1947.

Mr. Wareing: In response to that fully complacent reply, the Home Secretary should study the situation on Merseyside and throughout the country. On Merseyside, the shortfall in the Government's assessment of our needs is £2.9 million, even to stand still. If the authority were to carry out the Government's statutory growth requirements, the shortfall would be £4.7 million. How can the Government justify that? The Merseyside chief fire officer is saying that he cannot make cuts other than in pumping appliances and closing stations. When will the Government put people's lives before tax reductions and electoral bribes?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman refers to my original answer, he will find that it was entirely factual, but if he disagrees with any part of it I shall be pleased to hear from him.

It is for the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority to set a budget for 1995-96, in the light of the criteria for council tax capping. That budget should allow it to comply with its statutory duties to provide fire cover.

Sir Donald Thompson: When assessing the exact amount of cake that must be divided among the fire authorities, will my right hon. and learned Friend take more carefully into consideration the topography of an area and its special needs?

Mr. Howard: I am certainly prepared to consider the point raised by my hon. Friend when we plan next year's standard spending assessment for fire authorities. My hon. Friend will know that the Audit Commission has come up with a series of valuable recommendations of ways in which money can be saved in the fire service, and I am sure that all fire authorities will examine them carefully.

Police Funding

10. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from chief constables about inadequacies in their constabulary funding settlement for 1995-96.

Mr. Maclean: Twenty chief constables have made representations. These cover their allocations under the new funding formula, the burden of pay and pensions increases and connected matters.

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Minister accept that for many constabularies this has been a very harsh settlement? The Association of Chief Police Officers has said that 900 jobs may go, and the Police Federation has put the figure higher.

Many forces, such as Warwickshire, have particular problems. A continuing public order problem at Baginton airport will put great pressure on its funds. Is not it time that the Home Office provided special allocations for forces in areas with on-going public order problems, so that they are not hit by station closures at the end of the year and do not have to sack officers because insufficient funds are available to support our police properly?

Mr. Maclean: The Warwickshire constabulary can spend up to 2.5 per cent. more in the coming year than this year. It is possible, moreover, for police forces to ask the Home Office for funds in exceptional circumstances—to provide cover for special events—but not for on-going or regular policing.

As for police numbers, the House should be aware of the statistics. I have seen surveys carried out by some members of the police service that suggest that officer numbers may fall next year. If that is so, it is because of a decision by the police service. Overall it received about 4 per cent. more this year.

For me, the telling statistic is that 21 police forces are receiving over 5 per cent. more, and some are receiving increases of more than 10 per cent.; yet only four say that they will recruit more bobbies. If all those forces that are receiving a great deal more money choose to spend it on other matters, that is their decision and I will not criticise them, but the hon. Gentleman should not criticise me if chief officers do not retain the same number of police officers.

Mr. Brandreth: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Chester we are funding not only more effective policing, but more policemen? In 1979 there were 158 police officers in Chester; today there are 227. That is a 38 per cent. increase. Is my hon. Friend aware that the only fall in the number of police officers in the city of Chester in the past 20 years took place under the last Labour Government?

Mr. Maclean: Yes. I find it rather strange to hear certain Opposition spokesmen quibble about 50 officers here or there, or a few hundred officers out of 127,000. They should remind the House that, in its last year of office, Labour left a devastated police service, 8,000 officers short of its establishment. We need not look into the crystal ball; we can look at the record. We put in those 8,000 officers, and 8,000 more, and 16,000 more civilians to help.

Overseas Visitors

11. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review procedures on controls of overseas visitors.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Our immigration procedures are kept under review, and I see no need for a special review of controls on visitors.

Mr. Hughes: Is the Minister aware of the anxiety and anguish caused to many people in this country when visitors whom they wish to sponsor are refused entry? Is he aware that many of those people, including some of my constituents, are law-abiding people for whose integrity I

would gladly vouch? Instead of simply examining the visitor's application, should not the Minister also take into account the bona fides and the standing of the sponsor who wishes to be that visitor's host?

Mr. Baker: I understand the concern expressed by the hon. Gentleman, but I disagree that, on examining visitor applications, we should not look primarily at the visitor. Sponsorship is, of course, important and relevant, but visitors must show that they have sufficient funds to support themselves, that they are genuine visitors, that they intend to leave at the end of their visit, and that they do not intend to take employment, among other things. When considering such applications, we could not properly shift the test from visitors to sponsors.

Private Lee Clegg

12. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the security implications on the British mainland of the Private Clegg case.

Mr. Howard: I do not consider that the case has any security implications on the British mainland.

Mr. Dalyell: As a former national service man, may I inquire how it can possibly be right that a soldier does the business of the state, which he is legitimately asked to do, and that, two seconds later, by taking the same action, he can find himself had up on charges of murder?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman will know that his point has given rise to widespread concern, that I am reviewing that part of the law of murder following comments made by the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords, and that his point will certainly be taken into account in the course of that review.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further meetings later today.

Mrs. Roche: Given the news that Eastern Electricity has made millions of pounds by billing its customers up to three weeks early, that seven of its directors now have share options of £3 million, and that the salary of its chairman has more than doubled since privatisation, is not it about time that the Prime Minister intervened, or will he just let them get away with daylight robbery?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with what has been said about the undesirability of early billing, and no one should have the slightest shred of doubt that I do not approve of that particular mechanism. I understand that the company has indicated that it will not occur again, and I am delighted that that is the case.

We have debated extravagant awards in the House on previous occasions. I have made it clear that that is a question for peer pressure in the private sector. I look forward to the recommendations of the Greenbury committee and to examining them, but it is best dealt with in that manner.

Mr. King: Does my right hon. Friend recall the attack on Tuesday by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) about being forced to sack teachers? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the right hon. Gentleman is, at this moment, supporting the Liberal Democrat leadership in Somerset, which is insisting on sacking teachers, even though Conservative councillors have put forward proposals so that those jobs need not be lost, and for ways in which the education in the county can be protected? Is not that symptomatic of the Liberal Democrat party, which is more interested in scoring political points than in genuinely seeing how the education of children can be protected?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the point about the Liberal Democrat council to which my right hon. Friend refers, and, frankly, I wish that I had been aware of that when the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) asked his question on Tuesday. It is important that, in the question of priorities in all local authority budgets, and particularly in education budgets, education authorities look carefully at the right education priorities for the children in our schools. That may well apply to Somerset county council, to which my right hon. Friend refers. It applies equally to many other education authorities.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister accept it as a responsibility of Government to reduce inequality?

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr. Blair: Then, if the right hon. Gentleman accepts that—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Blair: If he accepts that, is not it a matter of shame that Britain is today more unequal than at any point in time since the second world war?

The Prime Minister: If people were relatively less well off, then I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. The primary concern of all Governments must be to ensure that those people who are most vulnerable and those who are most in need are not ignored by the legislation of the day and that special care is taken to look at their particular interests. If the right hon. Gentleman examines the record, he will find that that is what we have continually done. It is the right way to proceed and it is the way in which people develop policies, not just through the social security system, but right the way through the whole gamut of Government responsibilities. That is persistently what we have done and will do.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. Gentleman has not contradicted the fact that inequality is greater than at any point in time since the second world war. Now, if the Prime Minister wants a fact, let me give him one. Is not the most telling fact of this week that, at the same time as the Government are doing nothing about the head of a privatised utility awarding himself 70 times as much as a teacher and 100 times as much as a nurse, the Cabinet has today devised a strategy that may see teachers sacked and classroom sizes rising? Is not it the case that, far from

reducing inequality or creating a nation at ease with itself, after 16 years the Government have created a Britain that is divided, inefficient and unjust?

The Prime Minister: That is an extremely good soundbite, but it is not true. There are two ways in which one can deal with the sort of people about whom the right hon. Gentleman and I are concerned. One is by ensuring that their chances and opportunities are greater so inequality falls; that is the right way and that is what the Government are doing. The other way is to try to restrain success and that is what the right hon. Gentleman strives to do; that is the wrong way. What must concern people is that action is taken to improve the opportunities and living standards of the people who face the greatest difficulties. That is consistently what we have done and I believe that, in respect of that, we deserve not the kind of carping comments that the right hon. Gentleman has just made, but his support and that of every other Member of the House.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. Friend accept that thousands of women agree with my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London? When they travel on public transport and happen to sit beside a drunk, someone high on drugs, or young thugs, they feel intimidated. They feel much safer in their motor cars and they will not give up those cars purely as a gesture of environmental tokenism.

The Prime Minister: I believe that the need to ensure that everyone, whether a lady or anyone who is vulnerable, can travel on public transport or on the streets with proper protection, is a point that everyone will readily understand. The point made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London yesterday, which was widely misinterpreted by some, was that motorists' attitudes need to be changed and few will disagree with that.

Q2. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell: The Prime Minister will be aware that Trafalgar House is making a bid to take over Northern Electric plc. Is he also aware that if that bid takes place, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury stand to lose £223 million—the equivalent of £8 in every taxpayer's pocket? Will the Prime Minister assure me that he will stop that merger and stop ripping off the taxpayer?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that I am not remotely likely to respond to something of that sort happening in the private sector. I am not likely to respond to it now, but if he wishes to discuss the matter with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, he should contact him.

Mr. Tracey: Has my right hon. Friend caught sight of the letter in today's edition of *The Times*, signed by 17 of Britain's senior business men, in which they say that their firms would see no discernable benefits from a single European currency? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that gives great force to the policies of Her Majesty's Government—now and in the foreseeable future?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I have taken the view that we ought not to contemplate a single currency until and unless we are convinced that that would be right for the country. That is the only basis on which we can make that judgment. We need to know the circumstances of the day and they cannot possibly be known now. What is in the interest of this country must be paramount.

Q3. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Michie: Following the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the Prime Minister's reply, how can the Prime Minister reconcile supporting a financial policy which is depriving our children of a good education, taking away remedial help and cramming children into overcrowded classrooms, with waving the flag in Europe and saying that he is defending the future of this country? The future of this country is with our children.

The Prime Minister: I cannot imagine anyone possibly disagreeing with the hon. Gentleman about that. Of course, that is the reason why funding for education has dramatically increased over the years; it is the reason why more of our children are getting O and A-levels than ever before; it is the reason why one in three of our children now go on to further and higher education, rather than one in eight when the Labour party was in power; it is the reason why we have introduced new vocational qualifications; it is the reason why we are extending nursery education; it is the reason why I abolished the binary divide. If the hon. Gentleman looks, he will see the greatest revolution for good in education in the past five years that we have known for generations.

Q4. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that to govern effectively in the long-term, the Prime Minister and the Government of the day must understand and reflect the concerns of the people of the country? Following the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), is not my right hon. Friend increasingly encouraged by the fact that his robust and realistic stand on a single currency and his opposition to any further political integration in Europe is increasingly supported by the people—in business and elsewhere—of this country?

The Prime Minister: There comes a moment when consensus becomes unanimity.

Mr. Soley: Why does the Prime Minister think that a free market operating between countries that has got rid of all our trade barriers will not inevitably lead to a single currency?

The Prime Minister: I see no reason to suppose that it should. *[Interruption.]* We have had free markets in many parts of the world for a very large number of years. I see no evidence that a single currency is inevitable as a result of that, nor do I share the view of the hon. Gentleman, which he clearly holds as it becomes more apparent that the Labour party is already wedded to a single currency, whatever the economic circumstances may be. That is the only implication which can possibly be drawn from the hon. Gentleman's question. I simply have to say to him that I disagree with him.

Q5. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: Has my right hon. Friend had time to read the all-party Eurim group's report on wealth creation through technology? Will he lend his name— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must calm down. This is using up our precious time.

Mr. Bruce: Has my right hon. Friend read the all-party Eurim group—*[Interruption.]*—of which many hon. Members are members—*[Interruption.]*—they might not know it, but they are—report on wealth creation through technology? Will he lend his name, as Al Gore and Jacques Delors have, to promoting information superhighway technology projects such as SuperJANET, the cable network and Internet, and make sure that the Government become a major customer of those technologies?

The Prime Minister: The direct answer to my hon. Friend is no, I have not read it, but I have to say that it sounds irresistible. I will make it an early priority over this weekend to read it and discover the information contained therein about superJANET and other aspects of broad-band networks.

Madam Speaker: An excellent question on which to end.

Business of the House

3.33 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 13 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (5th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled "Europe and a Referendum" on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats.

TUESDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (6th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled "A Divided Britain—The Problems of Poverty and Long-term Unemployment" on an Opposition motion.

WEDNESDAY 15 FEBRUARY—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Until about 7 o'clock, Second Reading of the Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill.

Motions on the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order, the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order and the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 16 FEBRUARY—Debate on the Royal Navy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 17 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 20 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (7th allotted day). There will be a debate on a Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet on Wednesday 15 February to consider the unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 9 December 1994 relating to the Euro-Mediterranean Association agreement with Israel.

In the following week, I expect Monday 20 February to be an Opposition Day, and Thursday 23 February to be a debate on the Army, on a motion for the Adjournment.

Looking a week further ahead than that, the House may also like to know that I hope to provide for the annual debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment on Thursday 3 March.

[Wednesday 15 February:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 70-iii (1994-95).

Scotland Revenue Support Grant Reports. The documents are as follows:

Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1995; the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995.]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information, and for the advance notice of future business.

The Leader of the House will be aware that, last week, I raised with him the Government's attitude to the private Member's Bill that we will debate tomorrow, and he referred me to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. The right hon. Gentleman is aware that I wrote to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People about the Government's attitude, and that, shortly before Question Time today, the Minister faxed me a reply saying that the Government would not ask the House to support the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

Is the Leader of the House aware that the lobby taking place at the moment—the thousands of people who have come here to lobby Members of Parliament—will be extremely concerned by that reply from the Minister? Will he clarify the situation now, and tell us whether that means that the Government will actively block the measure tomorrow?

Secondly, in view of the significant public concern about the lack of places in psychiatric units, and about the miraculous discovery of such places when the Secretary of State for Health is summoned to appear in court, can we have a debate in Government time about the scandal of the shortage of such provision? Health debates usually occur only in Opposition time.

Thirdly, in connection with public sector pay and this morning's Cabinet decision, is the Leader of the House aware that in the debate in Opposition time on Tuesday, the Secretary of State for Education said that she could not comment on the consequences of the pay award until final decisions had been made?

As the Cabinet has now made decisions that will mean that school governors all over the country face the impossible task of balancing their budgets and maintaining standards, will the Leader of the House find time for the Secretary of State for Education to make a statement in the House about the impact of the loss of teachers' jobs on class sizes and on the quality of education for our children?

Mr. Newton: There were three questions there. The first concerned proceedings on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill tomorrow. I have indeed seen a copy of my hon. Friend's letter to the hon. Lady, which does little more than repeat what he said in the debate—and I said as much last week. What my hon. Friend said was that he could not ask the House to support the Bill. I am sure that he will seek to explain the whole position more fully in his speech tomorrow, and I shall not seek to anticipate that.

The second question, which was about psychiatric units, also ranged wider into some more tendentious areas. I simply draw attention to the fact that the Secretary of State for Health is due to answer questions in the House next week, which may provide an opportunity for those points to be raised. There is also health service legislation now before the House, which will no doubt provide further opportunities for debate in due course.

Finally, I do not think that I would be revealing any great state secrets by acknowledging that the Cabinet discussed public sector pay this morning. All will be made clear to the hon. Lady and others within the next half hour, so I shall not try to pre-empt that, either.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the parliamentary ombudsman yesterday published his report on the channel tunnel rail link and blight, and found that the Department of Transport had been responsible for maladministration? Will he take an early opportunity to ensure that that important report is debated in the House, to give the Secretary of State for Transport an opportunity to respond to it and to tell us how he intends to remedy the grave injustices done to my constituents and to those of other Members on both sides of the House representing constituencies along the line of the channel tunnel rail link?

Mr. Newton: I am aware of that report, and my right hon. Friend probably needs no reassurance from me, but I understand why he has raised the matter. I think that he will also understand—certainly I understand—that the first step is for the Department to explain its position further before the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will wish to do that, and it would not be right for me to comment further in advance of the Select Committee's deliberations.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): May I respectfully suggest that the Leader of the House may have meant that the Welsh debate would take place on 2 March, as that is the date of the Thursday two weeks from now?

On more important matters, now that the right hon. Gentleman has told us the business for next week, we see that, over the next six working days, there are three Supply days for the Opposition, which are welcome enough, one Adjournment debate on the Navy and one day for private Members' Bills, but only half a day for Government legislation—and even that was the legislation that the Prime Minister thought up the other day.

Does not that timetable confirm that the Government programme this year is, as we all said in November, somewhat light, to put it generously? In that case, can we not use some of the time available for a Government motion to allow the House to debate the subject being investigated by the Nolan committee—standards in public life—so that not only will the views of the Government and of the Opposition parties be known, but views from all corners of the House will be heard before the Nolan committee finishes its initial deliberations?

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, I am not sure what view would be taken were the House to give any impression of pre-empting the Nolan committee's work, but I will note the hon Gentleman's suggestion. Having given evidence to the committee and tried to keep up with reading the voluminous amounts of evidence that others have given, I have found that it appears to have been generous in taking evidence from anyone who wishes to give it. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman wishes to do so.

I heard on some grapevine or other that the Liberal party was finding it difficult to decide what evidence it should give. Perhaps that difficulty has informed these matters—*[Interruption.]* It may well be very short—

Mr. Hughes: No, it would be long.

Mr. Newton: Well, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be very welcome, if and when he cares to unveil the Liberal approach to these matters, and the rest of us will read it with proper fascination.

On the earlier parts of his question, although I may inadvertently have said 3 March instead of 2 March, whatever date it is, it is the Thursday of that week.

Mr. Hughes: It is Thursday 2 March.

Mr. Newton: I am just telling the House that it is the Thursday. If I said that it is the third and it is the second, whatever it is, it is the Thursday. As to the legislative programme, it is going very smoothly, thanks.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will my right hon. Friend consider the possibility later in the parliamentary timetable of providing a full day's debate on the Government's research and development programme and their science policy? There was considerable pressure on time during the three-hour debate last week, and six of the eight Members who were fortunate enough to speak had to shorten their speeches. In the light of the Foresight programme, will my right hon. Friend consider this an early request for a full day's debate on a very important subject, which concerns both sides of the House?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will realise that I am not in a position to make an off-the-cuff commitment, but the very fact that we recently had the half-day debate is a sign of my willingness to listen to representations asking for time on that important matter, and I will certainly bear in mind what she said.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Since we have been treated to the views of the Minister for Transport in London on the general public and public transport, perhaps the Leader of the House would ask him to come here next week to make a statement on the reasons for getting rid of vast numbers of vehicle examination inspectors just when there is clear evidence that more and more lorries are travelling the roads with defects that lead directly to many deaths and injuries. It is essential that the Government take action on enforcement on more occasions, not fewer.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. and hon. Friends are aware of the concerns being expressed in the House. I drew those to their attention after I had been asked questions on the subject three times at business questions last Thursday. I cannot promise an early dedicated debate, but my right hon. and hon. Friends are looking very carefully at the points that have been made.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, under European Community legislation, we have undertaken to implement EC directives by way of statutory instruments, which are not amendable, are barely debatable and, at the hour that we deal with such matters, do not always command the total attention of the House? As a result, certain measures are likely to be imposed on this country—in particular, a change in the regime for halal and kosher meat and some other undesirable matters, such as the extension of the Data Protection Acts to handwriting.

We ought seriously to consider whether those changes are acceptable to the British nation. Will my right hon. Friend look closely at what we can do to safeguard the interests of this House and the nation against that sort of undesirable legislation, which will otherwise be rammed down our throats?

Mr. Newton: If I have heard my hon. and learned Friend aright, he is referring to provisions that exist, for which the House voted under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, which provide for some things to be done through secondary legislation in the way that he described. I should assure the House, however, that the Government always consider the most appropriate way to proceed on each and every one of those matters.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): May I ask the Leader of the House to undertake an investigation into the sound system on the Committee Corridor of the House of Commons? He will appreciate, as all hon. Members do,

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

that it is very important that all questions and answers be effectively recorded in our proceedings. In that context, I draw to his attention column 47 of the report of yesterday's Scottish Grand Committee, where, right at the end of proceedings, responding to a point of order raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), the Scottish Office Minister clearly said that, yes, there would be formal consultation under the Railways Act 1993 as it affected railway services in Scotland—yet that is not recorded in the *Official Report*.

Obviously, we are not condemning the *Hansard* reporters, but the statement is on the recorded version—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has been here long enough to know that that is not at all a matter for the Leader of the House. I caution hon. Members that they should raise only matters that concern the Leader of the House. This is an administrative matter that does not concern him—although, if he is generous enough to comment briefly on it, I shall hear what he has to say.

Mr. Newton: I hope that I am always generous, and I shall seek to be courteous to the hon. Lady. You, Madam Speaker, are right to say that this is a matter for the Administration Committee or for the Accommodation and Works Committee, but certainly not for me. I shall make sure that those representations are drawn to their attention.

I am well aware of the comment made by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland. I should make it clear that he was referring to formal consultations about passenger service requirements, which are going on now and which have already led to some results in some cases. Any decision to withdraw services in advance of consultation on passenger service requirements would, of course, be a commercial decision for British Rail.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): The Leader of the House will be aware that, for almost 30 years, this House has refused to give the people a decision they want—the restoration of capital punishment. Will he provide for an urgent and early debate on the need for a national referendum on its reintroduction?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I should make it clear, if my hon. Friend does not already know it, that I have on a number of occasions voted on that matter in a way of which my hon. Friend would not approve. I hope, however, that he will not think that that influences the answer I am about to give, which is that I do not think that it would be appropriate to arrange such a debate. We have already had an opportunity in this Parliament—as in every other Parliament since I became a Member—to debate and decide these issues, and the House once again made its position very clear.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Is the Lord President aware of the report in *The Daily Telegraph* today on yesterday's proceedings in the Nolan committee? The National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts said that it believed that the Secretary of State for Health was appointing people on the basis of croneyism.

Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that Sir William Utting, a member of that committee, said that thousands of people are being appointed under unacceptable procedures? Given those remarks, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is high time that the Secretary of State for Health came before the House to justify her appointments, especially as the Health Authorities Bill is now in Committee and Health Ministers are unable to make any changes because of the Secretary of State's position?

Mr. Newton: I have already adverted to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is due to be answering questions next Tuesday. I shall give her warning of some of the points that the hon. Lady may raise.

I have not yet had an opportunity to read the transcript of yesterday's proceedings in the Nolan committee, although I rather doubt whether Sir William Utting, whom I know well as a former social services official, put his question in quite the terms that the hon. Lady suggests.

Madam Speaker: Mr. John Greenway—I am sorry, Mr. Harry Greenway.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Thank you, Madam Speaker—we are different.

Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate next week on special educational needs, so that I can bring before the House the complete failure of Ealing's Labour council to make proper provision for children with special educational needs in Ealing? That was the subject of an important street meeting which I addressed in Ealing this afternoon, and the House should hear about it. There should be a response from the Government, and pressure should be brought to bear on Ealing council to improve its behaviour.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my right hon. Friends responsible for those matters will look carefully at my hon. Friend's remarks and consider what they might do. I say wryly, rather than in an aggressive manner, that, on the basis of my hon. Friend's account, I sometimes think that we could spend all our time debating the inequities of the London borough of Ealing.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Leader of the House bear it in mind that, now that the Jopling report has been implemented and, on a few occasions, the sittings of the House have not lasted until 10 o'clock at night, we should avoid debating Bills of an emergency nature on Fridays, when they get mixed up with Bills drawn in the first six? Would it not be a good idea to allow them to be brought forward by the Government, with Government support, so that they can get through the House without being subject to the vagaries of Fridays when the competition is so strong?

In that respect, would it not be a good idea if the Government would back the Cheltenham and Gloucester Building Societies Bill—*[Interruption.]*—so that it can get approval in time?

Mr. Newton: I hear some sedentary interventions behind me of a not unhelpful kind. I can assume only that this is an attempt to explain and justify the blocking of that Bill, which will help many tens of thousands of mainly widows throughout the country. I hope that those who blocked it will not do so next time.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Further to early-day motion 557, will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on efficiency in the construction industry?

[*That this House notes that the construction industry produces almost 10 per cent. of gross national product and is made up of more than 200,000 companies and a workforce of over one and a quarter million people; welcomes the proposals put forward by the Latham Report to improve the relationship between clients, contractors and subcontractors in the construction industry and improve value for money by an estimated 30 per cent. over the next five years and so encourage an increase in construction activity; notes the crucial role that a Construction Contracts Act would play in the implementation of the report's findings, recognising that it will reduce commercial red tape, and improve payment security by reducing payment abuse, introduce trust funds, and provide for a system of speedy and inexpensive dispute resolution; and therefore requests that Her Majesty's Government considers the introduction of a Construction Contracts Bill during the next Parliamentary session, as recommended in the Report.*]

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Latham report shows the potential for a 30 per cent. improvement in productivity?

Mr. Newton: I am indeed aware of the Latham report, and pay further tribute to the work that our former colleague has done in that report, and to the support that it has gained throughout the industry. I am certainly willing to consider ways in which I might contribute to advancing sensible and necessary proposals.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): For a specific and compelling reason which I have given to the private secretary to the Foreign Secretary and which emerged since the Foreign Secretary courteously answered the Adjournment debate last Wednesday, may I request that the Foreign Secretary, in the light of the information that he has been given, makes another statement on Lockerbie?

Mr. Newton: I understand that the current position is that the hon. Gentleman, as he says, wrote to the Foreign Secretary a couple of days ago. I understand also that he will receive a reply shortly. Further consideration of the matter should depend on the outcome of all that.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): May we have an early debate on the common fisheries policy, so that we can find out whether the Liberals support a review, as promoted by their fisheries spokesman; are totally disinterested, as evidenced by the fact that their leader could not even be bothered to vote last time; or support complete withdrawal, as advocated by the East Sussex county councillor of the Liberal Democrat party in my constituency?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has, with her usual ingenuity, put some useful points on the record. I cannot promise a debate, not least because of my inner conviction that, however many debates we have, Liberal policy will never become clear.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): May we have a debate in the House, if not next week then as soon as possible, on overseas domestic servants who are brought to this country? This week, hon. Members heard reports from those people of the conditions under which they work, which are little short of slavery.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman has a particular concern and evidence of aspects of that concern which should be looked into, I hope that he will bring the evidence to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary or whoever else may be appropriate.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): May I draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the work undertaken by Mr. Harold Doyne-Ditmass and his staff in the security division of the Department of Transport? Is he aware of the widespread concern about a directive circulated last week relating to redundancies and other staff cuts in the security division?

Given that inspectors working in that division are responsible for security inspections at airports and the channel tunnel, will my right hon. Friend give an assurance, and perhaps invite the Secretary of State for Transport to come to the House next week to confirm, that there will be no compromise of passenger safety whatever cuts are made in the security division of the Department of Transport?

Mr. Newton: I think my hon. Friend knows that, after there had been a certain amount of reporting in the newspapers of anxieties of that type a week or so ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport commissioned urgent reports about channel tunnel security. He will decide what further action needs to be taken when he has considered those reports and any further security advice that he receives, but I am sure that he would wish to take security no less seriously than does my hon. Friend.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for the Foreign Secretary to come to the House and make a statement about the reported loss of £900,000 of taxpayers' money by an Overseas Development Administration procurement agent, which the National Audit Office has just brought to our attention, especially as it appears that the Foreign Office knew two years before the company collapsed that it was financially insecure, yet did nothing?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise to bring my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the House for that purpose at the moment, but I can undertake to bring the hon. Lady's question to his attention, and I am sure that he would wish to consider it.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the recent Audit Commission report, which suggested that over-staffing by local authorities has cost the country £1 billion a year? Does he agree that the House should examine which local authorities have entered the sphere of politically correct advisers, rather than spending money on social services and, frankly, teachers' pay?

Mr. Newton: In the past fortnight, as I am sure that my hon. Friend would acknowledge, the House has had a full day's debate about local government matters in respect of the English revenue support grant, a further half-day of opportunity in the debate about the Welsh revenue support grant yesterday, and a half-day debate on education earlier this week. There are opportunities next Wednesday in respect of the same matters in Scotland. If

[Mr. Newton]

my hon. Friend dares to take part in a debate on Scotland, with all the risks that that might entail, that may give her an opportunity.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): I wonder whether the Leader of the House could give time in order to discuss the merits and demerits of regional selective assistance. Last week, I had to grab the Minister half-way through his lunch in order to save an eleventh-hour situation in my constituency. It would have meant the loss of 130 jobs and a firm that had invested millions of pounds during a five-year period, and the application considered that it was a crisis. It is time that we realised the importance of giving help to firms, as many firms in Scotland are going bankrupt that could be given help from regional selective assistance.

Mr. Newton: There are many examples of cases in which regional selective assistance, with which I was concerned as a Department of Trade and Industry Minister about six years ago, has been very helpful, including several recent examples, so I will certainly bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my hon. Friends.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on the printing facilities of the House, during which we could discuss the document that I have in my hand, which has been produced in many hundreds of copies on a photocopier of the House? It is a suggested answer to a questionnaire, under the title:

"A Model Reply to the NEC".

The House will be interested to know that it discusses ethnic and sexual struggles, condemns the choice of schooling made by some senior Labour politicians, supports clause IV and says:

"Whether or not you think . . . write to"

the address of the Inverkeithing constituency office of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Newton: I think that I need to digest all that intelligence before commenting.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I reiterate the demand for the Minister for Transport in London, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), to make a statement to the House, so that he can apologise for his insulting remarks about sitting beside dreadful human beings who travel by bus or by train.

Is the Leader of the House aware that the travelling public are appalled by the Government's transport policy, and especially by the rail privatisation proposals that have been dreamed up by the dreadful sub-human beings who sit beside him at Cabinet meetings?

Mr. Newton: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already said during rather more crowded exchanges not so long ago, it is plain that the remarks of my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London and the whole thrust of his speech have been misinterpreted. His purpose was to suggest that we want motorists to understand more fully the desirability of using public transport. Frankly, our rail privatisation policy is designed to make public transport more desirable for people to use. We shall stick to that policy.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 581, entitled "The United Kingdom and the Single Currency", which has attracted 97 signatures from our right hon. and hon. Friends, including those of at least four former Cabinet colleagues of my right hon. Friend?

[That this House congratulates the Prime Minister for making it clear on 8th January that it is not in the United Kingdom's interest to join a single currency in 1997 and for his confirmation that there are no proposals for legislation necessary for the purpose nor for the United Kingdom to accept any changes at the Inter-Governmental Conference which will impact on the constitution of the United Kingdom; and notes his rejections of the support for the principle of a single currency by the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition and M. Jacques Santer.]

On the basis of that motion, which now makes Government policy and the support for it quite clear, will my right hon. Friend draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister? Will he arrange for a debate on that matter at the earliest possible opportunity, because it is clearly time that we discovered Opposition policy on the matter?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will have heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister advert to that matter at least three times during Prime Minister's questions, so I shall not attempt to add to what he said. Like everyone else, however, I am waiting with bated breath to know the policy of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I press the Leader of the House on the need for an urgent debate on bed shortages in the national health service? He will be aware that, recently, both a judge and a magistrate have issued summonses against the Secretary of State for Health. He will also know that the Government's own study into the provision of intensive care beds found that a considerable number of patients were denied the possibility of intensive care because those intensive care units were full. The shortage of beds in the NHS is reaching crisis point, and it is not good enough to suggest that we can debate that properly during questions next week to the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Newton: Of course I understand that questions do not provide the same kind of opportunity as a debate, but they certainly provide an opportunity to make points such as those raised by the hon. Lady. As I have said twice, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be here on Tuesday. I should add only that the number of intensive care beds has risen from just over 2,500 to just over 2,600 in the past six years.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Is the Leader of the House aware of the concerns that are being expressed by the people of Coventry, particularly in the Willenhall area, about the situation at Baginton airport, bearing in mind the fact that, for a number of years, small airports have not been subject to any regulation?

Will the right hon. Gentleman also undertake to talk to the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, who has said that a report known as "Aviation Regulations" is ready for publication, but that it is a matter of parliamentary time as to when he can bring it before the House? Will he

arrange for that report to be brought before the House urgently, so that it can be debated and the people of Willenhall and the surrounding areas can be reassured?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly draw those representations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Has the Leader of the House read the remarks made yesterday by the chief executive of Channel 4, who attacked the Government's policy and that of the Secretary of State for National Heritage of diverting the profits of Channel 4 to the shareholders of the ITV companies? Will the Leader of the House make time for us to have a debate on the need for policies promoting investment in British programme making?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will note that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage has heard his representations direct. It is a matter on which I have also been lobbied, if I dare use that word, by Channel 4, so I am aware of the arguments. The funding formula and the associated risk were the basis on which the companies bid for their licences and, to put it mildly, it would be difficult to move the goalposts in the light of that.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

HILL LIVESTOCK (COMPENSATORY ALLOWANCES)

That the Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) (Amendment) Regulations 1995 (S.I. 1995, No. 100) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Points of Order

4.3 pm

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have heard the Leader of the House say that a statement is being made this afternoon by way of a written answer concerning the public sector pay awards. It is clearly a matter of considerable public interest, especially as thousands of jobs in education, the health service and other public services are in doubt. As *Hansard* may not report such questions until tomorrow or possibly Monday, what papers are being made available in the Vote Office this afternoon giving a full explanation of the Government's public sector pay awards?

Madam Speaker: Those questions should be put to the Ministers concerned: they are not for me. I have noticed that the three Members who are rising are those who were not called during business questions. I hope that they are raising points of order and not points of frustration that they might have made during business questions.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I did rise during business questions, and you were kind enough to call me.

Madam Speaker: I was referring to the three others.

Mr. Arnold: I referred to a document entitled "Clause IV: A Model Reply to the NEC". It has obviously been printed in vast quantities on photocopiers in the House where this particular copy was found. It also says:

"printed and published by the Campaign for Socialism"

at an address in Glasgow, but clearly it was printed in the House at the expense of the taxpayer.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is making allegations that it was printed in the House. He must therefore have evidence of that. If he has, I hope he will pass the evidence and the material to the Sergeant at Arms' Office, so that proper inquiries can be made.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order. I am sure that you remain as confused as I am, Madam Speaker, because the Government seem to have got the calendar of saints in the same confused order as the rest of the country. Do you know whether the St. David's day debate will take place on St. Winwaloe's day, as announced, or on some other day, but it certainly will not take place on St. David's day?

It is important, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) once remarked to the House, because our daffodils will have wilted by St. Winwaloe's day, and it is crucial that we have the debate on the same day. After listening to the confused statement by the Leader of the House, I have no idea when the debate is taking place.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have in his top pocket a calendar. I do not have one, but I understand that Wednesday 1 March is St. David's day. I am not sure whether or not the debate is to take place on St. David's day, but as for daffodils, the hon.

[Madam Speaker]

Gentleman should not despair. I have about a hundredweight of daffodils in my garden, and if he is short of them, I shall see that he gets a few from me.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know that disabled people suffer from a wide range of difficulties, including hearing difficulties and problems with wheelchairs in crowds. Therefore, when there is a lobby of Parliament such as the mass lobby of disabled people that is taking place today, there are difficulties in organising meeting facilities in Methodist Central hall because of the lack of access.

When a lobby takes place in Parliament, would it not be appropriate for there to be facilities enabling Members to communicate with a wider group of disabled people and for microphones to be available in Westminster Hall, instead of their being removed by the authorities of the House, as they were today, when masses of people were there to make representations on tomorrow's Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill?

Madam Speaker: The best possible facilities have been made available by the House and its authorities for the use of Westminster Hall, which holds more than 1,500 people. It is a large hall, and the authorities and the police have done their best to make it available for those who might be disabled and who wish to lobby their Members of Parliament.

Loudspeaker equipment is available in Westminster Hall only to the House authorities for crowd regulation. There are many people there. The idea is that, when Members of Parliament go to Westminster Hall to see their constituents, the House authorities can let the lobbyists know that Members of Parliament are present and which part of the hall they will be in, so that they can lobby their Members of Parliament. Everything possible is being done to see that those lobbying can reach their Members of Parliament and that they can meet them in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): With regard to what you said to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), Madam Speaker, about the statement which Ministers will make at some point on the vexed question of pay for millions of people—nurses, teachers and others—do you agree that that matter will exercise the minds of every Member of Parliament, and that we all need to know exactly what the Government will do?

On many previous occasions you have deplored the fact that Ministers make statements outside the House when they should make them in the Chamber. On what is probably the most important question of the week, which will affect millions of our constituents, the Government refuse to make a statement so that my hon. Friend and other hon. Members can ask vital questions. Do you agree, Madam Speaker, that the Chancellor should make a statement about that very important question?

Madam Speaker: I have no authority to bring the Chancellor or any other member of the Government to the Chamber to make a statement. It is for Ministers themselves to decide whether they will make a statement orally at the Dispatch Box, or will provide a written answer to a question. The Government have chosen to respond in this case by way of a written answer, which should be available now in the Vote Office and in the Library of the House of Commons.

BBC

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

[Relevant documents: The White Paper entitled 'The future of the BBC: serving the nation, competing world-wide' (Cm 2621) and the Second Report of Session 1993-94 from the National Heritage Committee on the Future of the BBC (HC 77).]

4.10 pm

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): This Adjournment debate is an opportunity for the House to comment on the contents of the White Paper, "The Future of the BBC", which my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) brought forward in July last year.

The White Paper set out a very clear view about the future of the corporation. It announced the Government's intention to renew the BBC's charter for a 10-year period to the end of 2006. It set out how the Government intended the BBC to develop through that period and how the BBC's accountability mechanisms should evolve in the changed world in which the corporation would be operating.

I think that it is fair to say that the White Paper was well received, both in the House and outside, and this debate constitutes an opportunity for hon. Members—who have had a chance both to read the White Paper and to hear people's reactions to it—to set out their considered views about the contents of the document.

I have said that the White Paper contains a very clear view about the future of the BBC and that is, of course, summarised in its title and its two subtitles. The aims of the BBC through the next charter period are encapsulated by the subtitles, "Serving the nation" and "Competing world-wide". I shall examine both those themes because they are important to the future of the BBC and to the future opportunities of British broadcasting.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Minister referred to the subtitle "Serving the nation", and he will be aware of the arguments in Wales and Scotland about securing adequate services and the need to ensure that there is strategic input into decision making at the BBC. Does he accept that, since the White Paper was drawn up, technology has changed so quickly that the advent of more television channels is imminent? Wales needs another national English language television channel that is comparable to the existing Welsh language channel. Will he take that point on board in his considerations today and in the outcome of the debate?

Mr. Dorrell: Later in my speech, I shall deal with regional and United Kingdom national input into BBC scheduling and the BBC's programme-making capacities.

On the comments that the hon. Gentleman made about changing technology in broadcasting, it is important to begin by considering that aspect of the broadcasting market. Any plans for the future of the BBC have to be made against a background of recognition that the marketplace is changing quickly. Like all changes that are technology driven, their precise speed and direction are difficult to predict. It is important that the future structure of the BBC is tailored to a reasonable projection of where those technology changes are likely to lead us.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): While I agree with the Minister in part, would not it be better if the Government were prepared to tailor technology to suit the future of the BBC rather than the other way round? Is not it time that the Government gave British Telecommunications plc—our biggest telecommunications company—the right to broadcast, link in and work with the BBC, rather than allowing a mass of American companies to broadcast in this country?

Mr. Dorrell: With respect, I am not sure that the regulation of BT reflects the Government moulding the future of technology. Certainly, the future of technology is not within the Government's gift, and nor should it be. What is, however, is to ensure that the cabling of Britain is undertaken by more than one company—

Mr. Maxton: Why?

Mr. Dorrell: To provide the consumer with choice in a competitive marketplace, with the likelihood of consumer wishes being more effectively met. The reason why it has been the Government's policy from the beginning to restrict the development of the existing BT cable network into the cable television market has been made clear by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. He has also made clear the reasons why that policy will be sustained.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): If there is to be competition between companies to provide cable, how do the Government envisage that we avoid having our streets dug up more than once? Does not he think that there should be a statutory control to ensure that the same ducts are used?

Mr. Dorrell: With respect, the Government got to that question at least five years before the hon. Gentleman, because there is, of course, precisely such a statutory regulation. That is the precise purpose of the licensing system operated through the cable authority. The purpose of the regulatory system is to ensure that there is—as the hon. Gentleman put in the conditional—a competitive marketplace.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is not happening.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. Some 80 per cent. of households in Britain are covered by an issued cable television licence as a result of the technology changes that have taken place.

Mr. Skinner: But why does not the Minister understand that just because the cable companies said something in the House a few years ago about what they wanted to do, it does not follow that it is happening underground? They will continue to dig up the roads. The trouble with the Minister is that he does not know what is happening in the real world. He should see more films, then he might find out.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that you are

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

listening to the debate, but so far I have not heard, at least for the past five minutes, the word "BBC" or anything to do with the BBC.

Madam Speaker: The Minister is responsible for his own remarks. Perhaps if he was allowed to make some progress, we would hear about the BBC.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful for the opportunity to return to the subject of the BBC, but not, if I may, before observing that it might have been with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in mind that I went to see Bufiuel's film "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie". I am not sure that it was precisely directed at the hon. Gentleman.

That exchange illustrates the extent and pace of technological change that is driving the broadcasting market. That is important as a context for the debate, because it demonstrates clearly that the BBC is operating in a fast-growing sector and one that contains within it major opportunities for all broadcasters in Britain, including the BBC. It is important that any plans for the future of the corporation are made against that background.

It is important to bear something else in mind when considering the future of the BBC: we are not starting, in the development of this fast-changing marketplace, with a clean sheet of paper. We are starting substantially better off than that, because, during its 70 years, the BBC has established an enviable reputation as a quality broadcaster and contributor to our national heritage and national life. That reputation is based on a broad-based expertise in the making and scheduling of programmes and the development of public esteem, both in this country and abroad.

Many hon. Members will have admired the BBC's drama, light entertainment and education programmes and its programmes for children. Earlier this week I was in Bristol, and was able to admire a specific example of the BBC's expertise—its natural history programmes.

Hon. Members occasionally comment on the BBC's skilful current affairs coverage, and its ability to maintain a balance in news and current affairs programmes. There will always be debate about how those programmes can be improved further, but that does not alter the fact that the BBC has established an enviable reputation in regard to news and current affairs broadcasting.

In planning the corporation's future, we must recognise the opportunities created by a changing marketplace. We must build on the enviable reputation that the BBC has established during its 70-year history.

Mr. Fabricant: Of course I agree with my right hon. Friend. I heard Michael Grade, chief executive of Channel 4, describe the BBC as a national treasure; he was right.

My right hon. Friend mentioned news and current affairs, however. Will he join me in condemning a specific story in Friday's 6 pm and 9 pm news bulletins? The BBC's news and current affairs department went out of its way to mislead viewers about events in the Chamber earlier that day in connection with the veal debate.

Mr. Dorrell: I did not have the advantage of seeing those broadcasts. A characteristic of most politicians is their speed in commenting on programmes that they have not seen; I shall refrain from doing so myself.

Although we are all occasionally annoyed by material produced by the BBC, and indeed by all broadcasters, the unavoidable and welcome truth is that throughout its history the BBC has made a serious effort to maintain independence and has established a public reputation for doing so. We should build on that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the BBC has a more exceptional reputation than any other broadcasting organisation in the world? Does he accept that, while we must move with the times and the changing market, the Government should not do anything that might damage the BBC's opportunity to remain pre-eminent in broadcasting throughout the world?

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree; indeed, I shall go a step further. I do not content myself with merely not damaging the BBC's capacity to build on its reputation. The purpose of the debate surrounding the renewal of its charter was, rightly, to ensure not only that we did not damage that capacity, but that we could enhance it and give the BBC as many opportunities as possible.

Two themes are highlighted in the subtitles of the White Paper. First, there is the theme of serving the nation. Although the international exploitation of BBC material presents important opportunities, the BBC's primary role must be as a mainstream domestic broadcaster: that is its core activity, and that is where we should begin in considering its future evolution.

I have mentioned the fast-changing broadcasting marketplace, but the House should bear another element in mind. While we should take into account the technology-driven change that is affecting the marketplace, we should not overestimate the pace of that change or its implications. I sometimes hear people talk of technology-driven change in broadcasting as if they expected the broadcasting marketplace with which we have become familiar suddenly to crumble and disappear. That is not true. For the foreseeable future, the five terrestrial television channels will remain the main television market in Britain. The White Paper makes it clear that we intend that the BBC should continue to deliver two of them.

The radio market will also continue to change, but not at such a pace that it will be unrecognisable in 12 months' time. The BBC will remain a strong provider of broadcasting services in that changing, but not excessively fast-changing marketplace. It is important to remember that the BBC will, for the foreseeable future, remain a broad-based public service broadcaster which, at some time in the week or another, broadcasts to the great majority of the British population. That is likely to continue. I hope that it does continue. In the context of the White Paper, part of the Government's purpose is to ensure that it continues. That is important because it is the proper justification for the Government's decision, announced in the White Paper, to continue the licence fee as the financing mechanism for domestic broadcasting in Britain.

The White Paper makes it clear that the licence fee is an "oddity"—the word used in the White Paper. It is true that, if we were starting from scratch, we might not finance public service broadcasting in that way, but, as I emphasised to the House, we are not starting from scratch.

The BBC is a well-established and well-loved institution and the burden of proof lies firmly on those who want to change individual and important aspects of it.

It is important to establish where the burden of proof lies. The case for maintaining the licence fee is important. It rests on two principal legs. The first is that the BBC continues to have a large audience share and a very much larger reach in terms of domestic audience. At some time in the week or another, it is a main broadcasting provider to the great majority of the British listening and viewing public. The second key leg is, of course, that the licence fee gives the BBC an independent flow of revenue outside the direct political process. That was the basis on which the Government set out their continued commitment to the continuation of the licence fee for the first five years of the 10-year charter in the changing marketplace.

It is important not only to establish the reason why we remain, for the moment, committed to the licence fee, but to reflect that, if those fundamental circumstances change, the argument that delivers the licence fee as the main financing source starts to weaken.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I acknowledge and agree with what my right hon. Friend has just said, but will he confirm that he agrees with the statement in the White Paper that there should be no cross-subsidy from licence fee payers to the BBC's commercial activities? How will we relate that proviso to the BBC's transmission services if they are privatised? What is the cost of those services? The figure of some £24 million is being bandied about, but does not that already include a considerable element of cross-subsidy and hidden cost covered by other sectors of the BBC? Is not that unfair?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend raises two related subjects. The first is the extent of cross-subsidy from the home broadcasting business to the external business. I shall come to that subject later. Transmission services are left as an open question in the White Paper. We are in discussion with the BBC on the matter. I cannot tell the House yet what result those discussions are likely to produce. I am told that the cost to the BBC of the transmission services is not separately identified. That is one of the issues around which the discussions are taking place.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I am worried about what the Secretary of State has said. He referred to the core activity of being the major broadcaster in Britain. The BBC is also a programme maker. I was glad to hear the Secretary of State's confidence in the licence fee as a source of revenue which, presumably, will apply at least to part of the function as programme maker.

Does the Secretary of State recognise that the entertainments industry, the televisual and radio industry, is one of the largest in the world? The Americans calculate that that industry will be their largest overseas earner by the turn of the century. The BBC's great role may relate to the fact that it makes programmes of great excellence and that it is as important as any other industry in this country.

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. At the beginning of my comments, I tried to make it clear that I proposed to refer to the functions of the BBC under the two headings of serving the nation and exploiting the wider international market opportunities. At this stage of my speech, I am addressing the issues that arise from serving the nation.

With regard to serving the nation, it is true that domestic programme content is one of the glories of the BBC and, it must be said, of ITV. The key objective is to consider the functioning and accountability of the BBC as a domestic broadcaster. I want now to consider accountability.

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): With regard to one of the two premises on which my right hon. Friend is basing the continuation of the BBC, what proportion of the BBC's audience would have to be lost before the Government believed that circumstances had changed and things should be different?

Mr. Dorrell: I cannot attach a figure to that. The principle that I am describing is not unfamiliar to the House nor is it unwelcome to the BBC. It is important that it is understood that the basis on which the universal licence fee rests is the BBC's claim to be a mainstream broadcaster to every home in Britain. That is the basis on which the development of broadcasting policy within the BBC must rest if we are to continue to justify to the audience the proposition that paying for the BBC should be achieved through the licence fee.

I want now to consider the accountability of this public service broadcasting institution because that is at the heart of the issue of how we further improve—to take the theme of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)—the performance of the BBC in the years ahead. The White Paper clearly sets out three tiers of accountability or documentation surrounding accountability. The first tier is the document that will be very familiar to the House—the BBC's charter. Much of last year's debate took place under the heading of the charter's renewal.

In terms of accountability, there is a sense in which the charter is not the most important document. In effect, it constitutes a constitution for the BBC. It sets out the responsibilities of the different elements within the BBC. However, it does not seek to define precisely the output purpose of the different elements of the BBC. That is contained in two other tiers of accountability—the agreement which we envisage the corporation will sign with me as Secretary of State and which will run for the 10-year period of the new charter, and the promises that the BBC will make to define, for its audience, its interpretation of the public service broadcasting obligation imposed on it.

I want to refer to those two documents and to concentrate in particular on "Promises to Audiences", because that is the more flexible key element in the enforcement of the accountability of that great public corporation. I shall refer to the agreement first. The agreement will set out the range of services that the Government and the BBC agree that the BBC will provide. It will set out the assurance of independence of management and programme editorial staff from political intervention, and the responsibility of the BBC's governors for the way in which that independence is used. The agreement will set out the undertakings of the BBC on the standards of programming material that it will broadcast and it will also set out the principles that I have just described which surround the licence fee.

[Mr. Dorrell]

In "Promises to Audiences", as I said, the BBC will set out its clear understanding of the public service obligation placed on it. It is against the target set out in that document that not merely this House—although certainly this House—but the wider public, will want to test the delivery of the service for which the governors of the corporation will be responsible.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the constant diet, shown by the BBC and other television channels, of violence, pornography and bad language? Does he agree that the 9 o'clock watershed is a cop-out because children watch television after 9 o'clock and that in any event programmes of that kind coarsen and degrade everyone who watches them?

Mr. Dorrell: The White Paper, the agreement and the "Promises to Audiences" all make it clear that maintenance of standards of taste and decency must underlie any proper definition of the public service broadcasting obligation. However, all of us as individuals must recognise that when we are individually offended or angered by a programme, it does not necessarily mean that there has been a breach of the standards undertaken by the corporation. None the less, a serious commitment by the governors to deliver a proper, modern understanding of standards of taste and decency is expressed unambiguously in the White Paper, as it will be in the agreement between myself and the corporation.

Mr. Maxton: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that there is more than one audience in the United Kingdom? A variety of audiences is based largely around the regions and, especially, the nations that comprise the United Kingdom. How does he intend to ensure that the BBC is accountable to that diversity of audiences and not only to a single audience?

Mr. Dorrell: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. The accountability will be set out in the agreement and "Promises to Audiences", which I shall address precisely.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. Friend comment on impartiality and emphasise that the charter does not concern political impartiality, but impartiality on matters of public policy? Does he therefore agree that it is absolutely essential that, in matters of national interest, due weight is given to both sides of the argument in respect of the amount of time provided and the content of the matters raised?

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman has had his say.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is certainly right. Impartiality includes even—occasionally—accounting for the views of the hon. Member for Bolsover. We need to ensure that the responsibility for managing impartiality is clearly vested with the corporation and that there is an accountability mechanism by which we may test our collective view of its effectiveness in delivering that pledge. I shall describe that mechanism to the House.

I shall draw the attention of the House to what I think are the key passages in the White Paper, which set out clearly the contract that the BBC will offer as a public service broadcaster to its audience, as contained in its "Promises to Audiences" document. Paragraph 6.36 of the White Paper says:

> "The promises to audiences would include the BBC's objectives for its programmes and services as a whole . . . and would set out the role of each of the BBC's services in the United Kingdom funded from the licence fee."

That is clear and unambiguous. That paragraph also refers to paragraphs 3.25 and 3.26, which further clarify that principle. Paragraph 3.25 states:

> "the purpose of each of the main national television and radio network services should be clearly stated and there should be objectives for some of the main strands of BBC output, such as news and current affairs, education and drama."

Paragraph 3.26 states:

> "The availability of such objectives, approved by the Board of Governors, would provide a means of ensuring that the Governors and the BBC's senior managers, and ultimately Parliament and the public, would be able to assess how far the BBC had met the objectives, and so was fulfilling its role as a public service broadcaster. The Governors' assessment should be included in the BBC's Annual Report, which is presented to Parliament."

That contains the kernel of the approach to accountability, which is set out in the White Paper and which will be contained in the documents that will be presented to the House at the end of the consultation process. In that context, I want to comment on three specific elements of accountability which I know have been of concern to hon. Members and which I expect to see contained in the "Promises to Audiences" document.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hope that there is a strong commitment in the contract to the maintenance of high-quality British children's programming. So far, I have not heard that mentioned. If we consistently allow all our programmes to be bought-in cartoons, we shall not only underplay our commitment to the British culture and the British language, but sell our own children disastrously short.

Mr. Dorrell: I agree with the hon. Lady. If she checks the record, she will find that the development of expertise in children's programming was one of the points that I mentioned as a strength of the BBC. It is certainly contained within the BBC's wider commitment to the original commissioning of broadcasting, both within the corporation and from independent producers, for the United Kingdom domestic audience.

In terms of the key interests that will be covered by "Promises to Audiences", clearly the balance of different types of broadcasting material, as the quotations that I read out make clear, will be at the core of the promises that the BBC sets out in the document—that is, the balance between drama and children's programming and the balance between education programming and news and current affairs. That is part of the contractual document that the BBC will set out in "Promises to Audiences".

The second theme that the BBC will answer in the document is the subject that I debated with the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) this week—access for disabled people to different types of BBC broadcasting material. The third subject refers directly to regional balance within England, and national balance within the

United Kingdom. Paragraph 3.24—I assure the House that this is the last quotation from the White Paper—makes the point in unambiguous terms. It states:

"It is important that the BBC should make and commission a reasonable proportion and range of its national output, as well as programmes for local audiences, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and in the English regions. An undertaking to do this should be included in the new Agreement, and an analysis of hours and range of output made in different parts of the country for broadcasting locally and throughout the United Kingdom should be included in the BBC's Annual Report."

I expect that the BBC will want to include some precision about the nature of that understanding in "Promises to Audiences", so that there are yardsticks against which the audience and Parliament can test its delivery of the general principle that will be set out in the agreement signed between the Government and the corporation.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Taking paragraphs 3.24 and 6.22 together, what is the Government's view of the phrase "cultural patron"? What does the right hon. Gentleman regard as the BBC's responsibilities, particularly in Scotland, but doubtless in Wales and elsewhere, as a cultural patron? What does it mean in terms of finance?

Mr. Dorrell: I am not sure whether I warm to the term "cultural patron", but I warm to the term "public service broadcasting". Public service broadcasting should include a concept of local content, of local production, and of talking to a local audience in a language that the local audience talks, and doing that with material that reflects the quality standards to which some of my hon. Friends referred.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and then I must make progress. I have already detained the House for nearly 45 minutes.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Despite the assurance of the declaration of intent contained in paragraph 3.24, there is widespread concern in Scotland about what is regarded as the over-centralisation of the BBC in London, particularly in respect of drama and the production of drama. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure me that he will keep a tight weather eye on that matter?

Mr. Dorrell: I am happy to give not only the hon. Gentleman but the House that assurance. It was to give a tangible form that I suggested that I expect that the BBC will want, in its statement of "Promises to Audiences", to seek to tie down the undertaking in the agreement in a form that allows us to check year by year the delivery of the undertakings that it has given.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State said that he did not warm to the phrase "cultural patron". It was not my phrase; it was his phrase. It is in his own document, at line 5 of paragraph 3.24. It is—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair. It might be a point of substance, but it is not a point of order.

Mr. Dorrell: I accept the hon. Gentleman's correction. I was seeking to suggest that part of the public service obligation was to deliver the service that the hon. Gentleman was seeking to suggest should be—I agree—part of the core of the BBC's activity.

Mr. Wigley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No. I want to move on. I am very grateful, as ever, for the hon. Gentleman's help.

I have spent a fair amount of time talking about my understanding and view of how the BBC should develop its serving the nation mission. I want now to deal with its role as a worldwide competitor in the changing broadcasting marketplace that I talked about. I regard it as a major opportunity for the BBC and I also regard it more generally as a major opportunity for Britain.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: Let me develop the argument a little bit further.

That marketplace brings benefits to this country, because broadcasting and the consumption of broadcasting material are a fast-growing marketplace, for all the technological reasons that I quoted, not just in this country but all round the world. That this country is the home of the English language should give us a particular advantage and an opportunity to develop that marketplace. The BBC's strong presence in that marketplace already gives us a firm base on which to build. There is a clear opportunity for British broadcasting, and particularly for the BBC.

The other benefit in that context, of which we should also be aware and which we should welcome, is that the larger the audience who see a programme inside or outside the country, the greater the opportunity to defray the cost of making it over a larger base. It gives us a larger programme-making budget. In a like-for-like situation, it reduces the cost to a certain audience of seeing a certain programme. It is therefore strongly in the interests of the domestic audience and of Britain as a broadcasting base that that international marketplace is exploited.

If we are to do that through the BBC, it is important that the terms on which that opportunity is to be exploited are made clear. It is important that we safeguard the interests of domestic licence payers, who do not pay their licence fees as an investment in an international broadcasting business. They pay their licence fees to secure a domestic broadcasting service. That is one reason why it is important to be clear about the terms on which that exploitation takes place. The other reason is that there are other United Kingdom players in that international marketplace, and we should not use licence payers' money to give the BBC a distorted advantage in an international marketplace over other United Kingdom broadcast programme makers. That is why the Government set out in the White Paper clear proposals for ring-fencing the international competing function, and set terms requiring the partner in that function to take the commercial risk. That is the proper function of the private sector partner, not of the licence payer.

[Mr. Dorrell]

I hope that the framework set out in the White Paper will be accepted on both sides of the House as an example of the link between the public and the private sector that will allow us to deliver our objectives without prejudicing the interests of the licence payer.

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way, but this will be the last time.

Mr. Flynn: The whole House will rejoice over the sinner who repents. The Secretary of State is saying what many people in the House and elsewhere were saying a decade ago. If it were not for the stubbornness of the previous Prime Minister, who insisted that the BBC world television service should follow one pattern alone, that service could have built on the pre-eminent role of the BBC radio world service, and we could have been the No. 1 player instead of coming in late in the day, having allowed others to become pre-eminent. Will the Secretary of State say one word of remorse about that?

Mr. Dorrell: No I shall not, because the hon. Gentleman misunderstands the proposal made at that time. That was precisely that the licence payer should take the commercial risk. The argument in favour of the structure that we have now is that the commercial risk is borne by commercial interests. The licence payer benefits by defraying the cost over a larger audience, and therefore from the reduced price for individual programmes.

Finally, the process of renewing the BBC's charter will now continue and, having heard the views of the House today, the Government will produce draft documents. The agreement, in particular, will be for the House to approve and the other documents will be available, so the House will be able to see the total picture when it makes the decision on the agreement, and will have the opportunity to debate it before it comes into force.

The BBC has been through a time of substantial change and, as is always the case, change has been a bruising process. The BBC has changed and continues to change, and it now has a major opportunity to take advantage of the kind of marketplace that we have been discussing. I hope that the proposals in the White Paper will ensure that the BBC will be well placed to take advantage of that opportunity, and I commend them to the House.

4.51 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The Opposition, like many other people throughout the country, greeted the White Paper with considerable relief. Compared with what might have been, and with what the Government at one stage actively suggested, much of the White Paper is warmly welcomed, especially the commitment to the BBC as the linchpin of public service broadcasting in this country. We wholeheartedly endorse that commitment.

Before I turn to the detail, perhaps I may be permitted to say a word or two about the director-general's speech in Dublin last Friday. There is a vital need for robust, sometimes acerbic probing of what politicians say and what they mean. That testing process is part of the role of Parliament, and some aspects of our work here are evidence that we can carry out that role well, although others show us carrying it out rather less well.

That testing process is also part of the role of the media. I hope that John Humphrys and Jeremy Paxman will continue to lift a cynical eyebrow and ask adversarial questions. That process is an essential part of our democracy. If Mr. Birt was telling the "Today" programme in a not-very-coded fashion to be more gentle with the Secretary of State for Health, or indeed with me, I hope that it will take no notice whatever of him.

The director-general has a point, however, when he talks about the need to include in the media's consideration of politics a more in-depth considered analysis of some of the real issues. The clash of sharp question and prepared soundbite is all very well, and perhaps it is inevitable in a fast-paced news programme, but there must be room for something more; otherwise the output becomes gesture politics, and the electorate deserve and will appreciate something better than that. While the media are thinking along those lines, perhaps the Government should do so, too. The need for a proper freedom of information Act has never been more obvious.

With regard to the future of the BBC, the Opposition welcome much of the White Paper. We welcome its commitment to the public service remit and to the licence fee as the primary source of funding. The licence fee is, of course, an imperfect method of funding, but nothing that I have ever heard proposed is any better.

Why must there be a review of the principle before the end of the year 2001? Why put us through all that uncertainty again by putting a limit on the certainty that the Government are prepared to offer? Surely they could have given a longer perspective for the future of the licence fee. In that context, I noted with great interest that the Secretary of State said earlier that the burden of proof would rest with those who argued for change. If that is indeed the Government's position, and if it represents a slightly clearer commitment to the future of the licence fee than exists in the White Paper, I certainly welcome it.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that technological change is setting the pace to a large extent? Digital terrestrial television is on the horizon, and there could be 12 channels tomorrow if the Government gave the go-ahead. Two years ago, the technology was not there. Surely it is right for the Government to say that the pace increases and technology moves on, so the BBC and other broadcasting organisations may have to be reviewed in the light of the changes—changes brought about by technology, not by the Government.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that technology is moving on fast, but he would be a little pushed to provide digital terrestrial television tomorrow, because the transmission systems are not yet in place. He is certainly right that, within a couple of years, we could have 12 digital channels, and there are also the possibilities that open up with the provision of broad-band cable networks.

However, the key functions of the BBC as the public service broadcaster seem to me to be best guaranteed by the licence fee system, and I wish that the Government had been a little more forthright in saying that, rather than hedging their commitment with a time limit.

Sir John Gorst: I ask the hon. Gentleman the same question that I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary

of State earlier. Is one of his premises the need for the BBC to command a reasonably large audience to justify being financed by the licence fee? If his argument rests on that basis, will he tell the House at what level of audience he would find that the BBC had lost so much support that he would wish to revise his opinions? That possibility could be a justification for taking a second look—perhaps half way through the 10-year period.

Mr. Smith: The second part of the hon. Gentleman's question revealed the failings in the first. Although the maintenance of public support through a compulsory licence fee has to be justified by reaching a substantial audience, the precise definition of what qualifies as "substantial" will change in time. There is no evidence that the BBC is losing audience share—indeed, at Christmas it gained it. The two justifications for the licence fee are: first, audience reach, and secondly, equally and if not more importantly, the maintenance of quality standards. That must be taken into account.

The White Paper sounds an ominous note on transmission services. It shows that privatisation of BBC transmission is under active consideration. The Opposition totally oppose such a proposal.

Mr. Fabricant: Would the hon. Gentleman renationalise National Transcommunications Ltd.?

Mr. Smith: I shall come to that in a moment. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my argument, he may get the answer to his question.

I oppose privatisation for two main reasons. First, in such circumstances, the BBC would be at the mercy of prices for transmission that were determined entirely by others, which would almost certainly put up BBC costs.

Secondly, privatisation would bring progress towards digitalisation to a shuddering halt. The BBC already has a substantial technological lead in developing digital transmission. Digitisation, with all the exciting possibilities that the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) identified, is a process in which the BBC must remain at the forefront. If one put the BBC through the exercise of transmission privatisation, with all the uncertainties that that would probably generate for about two years, it would put all progress on digitalisation at risk. Some people in independent television argue—I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would follow their arguments—that the BBC transmission service needs to be privatised to provide competition for National Transcommunications Ltd. which, as a monopoly supplier, charges high prices to the ITV network. Problems arise because NTL is a monopoly supplier. Privatising the BBC, in the hope of providing competition, is not the answer. Why not free the BBC commercially to offer a competitive service? Then one would gain the benefits of competition without the uncertainties that would arise from privatisation.

While on the subject of digitalisation, when are the Government planning to produce the proposals set out in paragraphs 4.30 and 4.31 of the White Paper? Fundamental changes in the role of the regulators will be necessary as new digital channels become available, and how the new channels are made available will become crucial. I do not want the same process to be used for awarding digital channels as was used when the franchises for Channel 3 were recently awarded.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. It is very generous. Does he accept that NTL is at the forefront of the development of digital systems? Is he saying that he wants it renationalised for the same reasons that he gave for not privatising the BBC's engineering department? Why does he not accept that the BBC might well find it cheaper to be able to go, not merely to the duopoly of the NTL and a privatised BBC engineering department, but to other companies—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are becoming too long. If hon. Members persist in making long interventions, they may find it difficult to catch my eye when they want to make a speech.

Mr. Smith: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, too long and not especially enlightening. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is, no, I would not advocate renationalising NTL, but I would advocate providing good public sector competition, by putting the BBC's transmission network into play.

The White Paper contains a clear commitment to enhance the BBC's regional character, as some of my hon. Friends have already said. It is important that the voice of the regions and nations of the United Kingdom should become clearer and be heard more frequently, to counteract what many see as the BBC's metropolitan bias, and it is right for that aim to be established. So far, the BBC's response has been inadequate. It makes 85 per cent. of its network programmes in London and 97 per cent. in England. Only 3 per cent. are made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where about 17 per cent. of its audience live.

The BBC's radio network broadcasts 35,000 hours of programming a year. BBC Radio Wales contributes just 385 hours.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Surely the Secretary of State clearly accepted that argument.

Mr. Smith: He accepted the aim, but the reality is different. It is crucial that we insist that the BBC puts its practice where the principles of the White Paper already stand, and that is my argument.

Mr. Wigley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: For the last time.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful, because the hon. Gentleman's argument is right and that matter is critical for the future. Is he aware that we have slipped back in recent years? Between 1985 and 1989, BBC Wales produced 67 hours a year of programmes for the television network, but by 1993-94 it was down to only 41. We therefore need an effective monitoring system to ensure that any commitments are carried out. Any ideas along those lines will be welcome.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right. I shall deal with the monitoring mechanism. He might have added that English language programming in Wales has suffered. Indeed, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) might note that, out of six regional outside broadcast facilities, the BBC has recently closed or

[Mr. Smith]

drastically reduced three—Bristol, Birmingham and Belfast—with a proportional loss of jobs and equipment. He might also like to note that the Belfast design department has closed completely, leaving BBC Northern Ireland—a supposedly significant source of drama—to use facilities in the Irish Republic.

Mr. Maxton: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Smith: Yes, but this really is the last time.

Mr. Maxton: One of the dangers is that the BBC could fulfil its commitment simply by sending crews out from London to make programmes in the regions, rather than having them made by the BBC facilities in the nations and regions. I hope that the Minister who replies for the Government will deal with that.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. It is crucial that programme making is centred on the region or nation and that programmes are not merely made about a region, but made drawing on the skills of people who originate from it.

In response to the White Paper, the BBC said that it would move £75 million of network programmes from London to the English and national regions. Of course that would help, although it would raise the contribution from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only from 3 per cent. to 4.2 per cent. That, too, answers the point made by the hon. Member for Twickenham: fine words are all very well, but if the BBC programme production from those three nations amounts to only 4.2 per cent. of its total programme output, that is not good enough. Yet that is the aspiration put before us by the BBC in response to the White Paper. If it were fulfilled, it would move about six hours of television production a week out of London. The change proposed is minimal, but even that change has not yet been effected. We were told that an announcement was imminent in October, but it has still not been made.

The English regions are faring badly, as well. BBC Radio Cleveland recently announced that its chief engineer had been made redundant, along with 10 others in the northern region. Overall, BBC local radio reaches about 10 million listeners a week, yet Radio Cleveland will be left with only one engineer for the entire station. Such cuts damage the quality of service and fundamentally damage the local, regional and national character of programme making. We deserve better.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) asked about monitoring. A crucial monitoring function is performed by the broadcasting councils for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. They have an important role, but it is also important that they have a strategic, not just a day-by-day, monitoring function. It would help if those broadcasting councils made their minutes public so that we knew what they did on our behalf. Surely we also need an English regional council—not just the English forum which the BBC appears to want. That would be a much weakened body; we need a body to match, on behalf of the English regions, the work of the three national councils.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I have already given way generously and I want to make progress.

We also hear that the BBC wants to do away with the general advisory council. That must not be allowed to happen. It plays a vital role as a sounding board, offering advice—sometimes awkward advice—and identifying trends, not just responding to one-off events. The BBC appears to want an ad hoc arrangement, with consultation taking place only from time to time in respect of specific issues. That would not be good enough. We believe that there must be a continuing and consistent role for the general advisory council.

I come next to the role of the board of governors, who are of course the primary guardians of the public interest. Some have argued in recent days that the governors should be elected in some fashion. I suspect that that might be too cumbersome an arrangement, but there does need to be greater accountability.

The White Paper makes an astonishing statement on page 54, in response to the excellent report by the Select Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The Government say:

"the Government does not consider that the appointment process"—

for governors—

"should be made public, nor that the names of prospective Governors should be submitted to the Select Committee for possible interview before the nomination is confirmed"—

Mr. Jessel: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a smell of food in the Chamber which I have never noticed before in all my years here. As some of us are trying, with considerable effort, to concentrate on the hon. Gentleman's speech and the smell of food is distracting, could you ask the Serjeant at Arms to make inquiries and to try to have it stopped?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I know, from having sat in this Chair on many occasions, that this is not the first such instance. I shall, however, try to ensure that the matter is put right.

Mr. Smith: Whatever the BBC board of governors may be responsible for, it is not the preparation of food in the Palace of Westminster.

As I was saying, the Government, responding to the Select Committee, said that having the Select Committee interview candidates for governor before the nominations were confirmed

"risks deterring some candidates, and might make appointments more political."

I fail to understand the logic in that. If the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister make appointments, they are somehow non-political, but if the all-party Select Committee of the House interviews candidates and ratifies appointments, they become political. The very reverse is true. We would look sympathetically on a proposal to insist that candidates for governorship of the BBC be subject to interview and ratification by the Select Committee of the House of Commons.

Furthermore, as well as the BBC presenting its own report to Parliament each year I would argue that the governors should present a report on their work to the Select Committee, and that they should be subject to interview about it. That would at least introduce more accountability and transparency to all the important work of the governors.

The British Film Institute has raised a number of problems with the Department to do with the difficulties of film production at the BBC. I note from what the Secretary of State said today that he now appears to remember that the last film he went to see was "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie". Looking at those on the Government Front Bench, I am more reminded of that wonderful old film "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly"—although I do not think that the precise casting has yet been determined.

The BFI has pointed out that when a film produced by the BBC has a good run at the box office before being shown on television, the audience that it can attract on television is greatly enlarged, but that the financial rules governing the operations of the BBC make that difficult. I hope that the Secretary of State will examine those rules to see whether mechanisms for showing films at the cinema before they are shown on television can be explored as a way of raising interest in and increasing the audience for BBC-produced films.

The White Paper includes a proposal to merge the Broadcasting Standards Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. We welcome it: it makes sense. When, though, will it happen? Will the Secretary of State consider whether the new, merged body should also take on a proposal made by the National Consumer Council, for a broadcasting consumer council? Surely that much-needed function would provide a good fit with the work of the current two bodies, and it could be usefully folded into the work of the newly merged organisation.

We welcome the advent of BBC World and BBC Prime. They offer major opportunities around the world, some of which the right hon. Gentleman has identified. I share the chagrin of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) about the loss of such a wonderful opportunity to get ahead of the game some 12 years ago. Progress is now under way, which is welcome. However, there must be a one-way valve in relation to the funding of BBC World and BBC Prime. Funds from the licence fee must not be allowed to subsidise commercial operations abroad. Naturally, if those commercial operations are successful and, over time, profitable, those profits can usefully be used to enhance the BBC's domestic work and, perhaps even in the foreseeable future, to ensure a diminution in the licence fee.

The work of BBC World and BBC Prime is particularly important because, as far as I can establish, we have a trade deficit in television programmes. In 1983, Britain's television companies had an £8 million surplus with the rest of the world; in 1993, they had a £115 million deficit. We should take no pride in that, because we have creative skill and talent here and make some of the best programmes in the world. The BBC is a prime mover in that success. We must not allow the all-American import policy of others to take hold any more than it already has. The importance of protecting our British cultural identity and industries is part of that exercise. Successful world television activity from the BBC could, in time, help to put that deficit right.

I hope that the BBC will explore, as it is beginning to, opportunities opening up in education, linking up with the Open university and the British Council to provide English language teaching and education on a worldwide basis. Opportunities in that respect are substantial and I hope that the BBC will seize them.

I return to where I began and stress the extreme importance of ensuring that we maintain the quality of broadcasting. A strong BBC with a strong public service remit is our best possible guarantee of maintaining quality broadcasting. We must therefore cherish and nurture the BBC's work while acknowledging that there is scope for improvement. The history is admirable; the future can be even better.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier today, the arrangement for announcing the public sector pay award was discussed. At 4.10 pm the Vote Office had two written replies from the Prime Minister and two reports from the individual pay review bodies. I contacted the office of the Secretary of State for Education at 5 pm to be told by the person who answered the telephone that he had no knowledge of a teachers' pay award and no one was available to advise me about it. I was then referred to the press office, which told me that a press statement was to be made and should be available at 5.30 pm in the Lobby, but no assurances were given that that press release would be available in the Vote Office.

That is extraordinarily discourteous to hon. Members who are anxious to have guidance about increases in public pay awards, and an extraordinarily inefficient way for the Government to deal with those matters. I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are not responsible for the availability of papers, but I wondered whether some messages could be relayed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that any press releases issued this evening on those weighty documents are made easily available to hon. Members.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. It is the responsibility of the Minister concerned, not the Chair, although Madam Speaker always hopes that announcements that should be made to the House will be made there first. The hon. Gentleman's point will no doubt have been noted by hon. Members on the Treasury Bench.

5.24 pm

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): Although I understand that it is not necessary to do so in these diseased times I shall make doubly sure and declare an interest: these days, I present a few programmes on BBC radio, for which a modest remuneration is appropriate. In commenting on the BBC in a political capacity, I therefore feel rather like the horse in the opera conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. In a rather indifferent performance, the horse came on and, on arriving centre stage, lifted its tail and did what horses do—loudly and horribly all over the stage. At that point, Sir Thomas said, "Ah, gentlemen. Not just an artist but a critic as well." In the event that it is necessary to double up that role, may I say that there is little for us to criticise this afternoon.

The BBC is one of the successes of my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), whom I am delighted to see in his place. His White Paper has managed to make most people who look objectively at the BBC and recognise its fundamental importance in public service broadcasting in a free society accept that it is not a partisan document. It takes a commonsense view and recognises, chiefly, that the Government's role in reforming the BBC has been much diminished by the energy with which the BBC has

[Mr. David Mellor]

set about reforming itself. It is to be more Catholic than the Pope to endeavour to cap the extraordinary pace of change on which the present director-general has embarked.

It is a worthy sign of the learning curve, which even Ministers ascend, that the formulation of policy that led up to the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the reform of ITV pursued a different course. For a considerable time, a small group of Ministers pursued in private a range of proposals. They should have known that, the moment the proposals saw the light of day, they would have to beat a retreat from many of the points that had seemed so clear cut in a small room but would not appear so in the clear light of day before wider consultation.

I was asked with a few weeks' notice to pick up that Bill and take it through the House. The task of those presenting this White Paper to the House is considerably easier because lessons were learnt from that Bill. That is not to say that the Broadcasting Act 1990 was more flawed than one or two matters that have already been acknowledged. The ITV system needed reform, and many of those reforms are much better than their critics are prepared to admit.

Clearly, when dealing with a matter of such fundamental significance to a free society as the provision of information through the major medium of communication—the electronic media—it is crucial that it is done with substantial openness and a lively public debate. The provision of the Green Paper, the subsequent consideration of what was said, and the presentation of the White Paper entirely confirm the Government's wisdom in proceeding in that way.

I have a straightforward view about the BBC, which is that we need it now more than ever. I denigrate neither commercial radio nor commercial television and am delighted to see their expansion. I am pleased to see in their places a number of hon. Members who played a part in the last-minute alteration of the Broadcasting Act 1990, which permitted Classic FM to become a national radio station. They will be pleased to see that that has happened. The success of that station and many others proves that quality and commercialism are not inconsistent principles. An idea that seemed to be prevalent in certain quarters in the 1980s that, as commercial services developed, there would be less need for the BBC, has rightly died a death.

One of the benefits of reform of the BBC is that the BBC has regained its self-confidence. At one time, it seemed to want to compromise, first, by saying that it was minded to accept that as certain things were done by the commercial sector, it would be wise for the BBC to withdraw from them. It risked becoming a cultural ghetto for everything that other people did not want to do. That was an insecure basis on which to impose on everybody what, I suppose, was an early variant of the poll tax—the licence fee.

Secondly, there were agonised discussions about what should be rendered up to the enthusiasm of the privatisers—whether it should be Radio 1 only, or Radio 1 and Radio 2, and so on.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is good to hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman say that democracy needs the BBC; I have been reading some things in the newspaper about whether the BBC needs him. To save me phoning his estimable programme "606", which I never miss on a Saturday evening, will he tell us that he will remain firmly in that chair and continue to answer questions from Chelsea supporters, comme moi?

Mr. Mellor: I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman that, for want of anything better to do on a Saturday evening, that happy process will continue.

Mr. Maxton: Is that from one Chelsea supporter to another?

Mr. Mellor: To get back on track, as it were; in recent years we have managed to create a climate that is far more favourable to a sensible, objective discussion of those issues than it used to be. It is a recommendation, not a cause for criticism, that there is much common ground throughout the Chamber when we discuss them. In a free, pluralistic society such as ours, there is no merit in the fact that the future of major organisations such as the BBC should be the subject of deep and intense partisan debate.

If the BBC is to preserve its position as a broadcaster that is the recipient of a flow of public resources that no member of the public who owns a television set has any choice but to provide, and which bears harshly on certain members of the community who do not have a great deal of money, the BBC must not retreat into programmes that are thought to be unsuitable for commercial production. It must offer something to everyone; otherwise we are in the ridiculous position of the man in the Putney or Newham or Glasgow council house subsidising the cultural tastes of the dweller in Hampstead—or wherever else the literati and glitterati are supposed to live these days. That argument cannot be sustained.

It is not in the best interests of commercial radio and television that the BBC should privatise services, which then enter into competition for what remain, in radio at least, very limited funds. I am happy to note that the share of the pot taken by commercial radio from advertising is increasing, but the plain fact is that it remains a very limited pot. The last thing that commercial radio needs is a privatised Radio 1—even one with the somewhat decreasing audiences that have recently been contrived. That is the one station on which I do not feature, I am happy to say, so I cannot be blamed for that, irrespective of anything else.

I participated in debates about broadcasting in the House intermittently for the period of more than a decade when I was involved in broadcasting policy. There are always people searching for the holy grail, the alternative to the licence fee but, in my opinion, the alternative to the licence fee does not readily exist. All that talk about subscriptions ultimately founders on the rock of the recognition that often the people who are the most glued to the box are the least able to pay for it. We need not waste much energy on that.

I hope that the licence fee will continue, not least because it is indeed, as David Frost once memorably said, the great strength of British broadcasting that twin rivers of finance flow quite separately into it—from the licence fee and from advertising. One would throw that away at one's peril.

The case for the BBC, interestingly, has been extremely well argued in the Institute for Public Policy Research document that was published as recently as this week, which said—I hope that the House will agree that it sums up the argument very well—

"Through its output, the BBC provides an important benchmark of standards below which competitors' services sink at their own peril. In a multitude of ways, from technical standards to the development of innovative programme forms, the very existence of the BBC compels other broadcasters to maintain and improve the quality and character of their own services."

One might add that the contrary is also the case. The fact that there is an active, vibrant and dynamic commercial sector forces the BBC to look to its laurels. From that creative tension, rivalry and competition comes, one hopes, genuine choice for the consumer.

One can go to New York, as I did not so long ago, push one's way through 30 channels on the television and find nothing that remotely engages one's attention. That is not choice; that is the absence of choice. It is,

"Little boxes, all the same".

It is trash and rubbish from the archives, badly presented, thrown into a pot; it is not quality broadcasting of a type that we want to watch.

Mr. Maxton: Is not one of the great beauties of BBC programmes that they do not have any advertisements in them, and that therefore one's concentration is not interrupted by having to watch awful advertisements for awful products?

Mr. Mellor: I think that the advertisements are sometimes a blessed relief from the programme; but if one can fund a programme service without advertisements, why not? We should not find ourselves in a position of insisting that no programmes should have advertisements or that unless everything is commercial, it cannot be justified.

I unashamedly stand up for the things that the BBC stands for, which only the BBC can do. Mention was made of the phrase, "a cultural patron". That may sound emptily pompous, but it means that, for instance, millions of people in the country can go to the Royal Albert hall in the summer and, for next to nothing, become acquainted with the great works of symphonic literature. The BBC should be proud of doing that, and we should be proud that the BBC does so.

We should be proud of the fact that the BBC sustains the quality of musical life throughout the nation, notably in the regions. In Scotland and Wales, there are exceptional orchestras. In Manchester, the BBC Philharmonic is an orchestra of international class.

We should also be proud of the fact that, interestingly, 50 per cent. of Radio 3's production is of recordings, or live relays, of music that was produced specifically for Radio 3. There is a case for simply reaching out, taking down a compact disc and playing that—I do not knock that—but it would be awful if recorded music were played at the expense of live music. If music is not a living thing, it is merely a part of the heritage industry. That would be a bad thing.

I believe in the BBC as a cultural patron. However, obviously the BBC cannot be run in an inefficient, outmoded way merely because it receives the money from the licence fee. I do not suppose that anyone in the House would say seriously that they did not want a BBC. Nevertheless, if we all sat down today and tried to create a BBC, we would not have created the BBC as it was found by the present management—the BBC that employed 28,000 people.

I take no pleasure in witnessing jobs being destroyed, but that was necessary for a radical reform to prune the bureaucracy. It has had enormous benefits, and it is time that I paid tribute to them—the flow of resources from tail to teeth and the fact that, in the past two years alone, about £225 million of additional resources has been liberated by those reforms, to be spent on new programming.

It used to be sickening when, as we sat upstairs in debates on broadcasting, people groped around in their minds for examples of quality broadcasting. We said "The Jewel in the Crown", however old and fuzzy people's memories of it—perhaps they thought that it was of more value the less they could remember the detail of it. Once again, such programmes are being produced, and it is good that the BBC is producing them.

Interestingly, there is an audience for such programmes. If one considers "Middlemarch" or "Martin Chuzzlewit", those productions, which cost many millions of pounds, were possible only because the BBC had liberated resources from the bureaucracy. The fact that "Martin Chuzzlewit"—shown on BBC1, repeated on BBC2—attracted an audience of more than 8 million people, shows that, to misquote Milton, "the hungry sheep look up and are being fed by the BBC".

The series "The Buccaneers"—the Edith Wharton novel—which is on television at the moment, managed to attract an audience of 9 million people the other evening, in competition with the film "Home Alone". That is a sign, not only that the BBC is producing a quality product, but that, contrary to the denigrating and condescending way that people often talk about audiences, the truth is that audiences—the public whom we deserve—are not morons. They are people who, if they are given a quality product, will watch it, and in great numbers.

The budget for "Four Weddings and a Funeral" was £4.25 million. The budget for the new "Pride and Prejudice" that is being filmed at the moment is £5 million—in other words, a scale of budget that might usually be employed on a cinema film. We should be pleased that those resources can go into the BBC. Those are the benefits of the reforms.

The public owe a huge debt of gratitude to two people. First, to "Duke" Hussey, who has often been criticised. If it had not been for his leadership of the governors, it would not have been possible to have initiated those reforms or to have developed the confidence, crucial in the early stages, to make the changes to the BBC. That confidence was essential at the crucial point when the reforms were first introduced. I congratulate Mike Checkland on his role at that time, which was then carried on by John Birt. John Birt is now being lauded to the skies by those who see from the White Paper the benefits of his work. It was not always so, but it needed firm control of the governors that it should be so.

John is, by his own decision, a controversial character. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his Dublin speech, he made it. How easy it is for someone in his position to be mealy-mouthed and say nothing by just filling the space. He said something; people found it controversial. That is the nature of the man. That is what leadership is all about. At a crucial time in the BBC's history, he has shown leadership. I know only too well from working in

[Mr. Mellor]

the bowels of the BBC that that has caused problems—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) wish to intervene or is he trying to be a third-rate Caruso? Does the hon. Gentleman want me to give way?

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): For the next speaker.

Mr. Mellor: That comment is unnecessary and—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I expect good standards of behaviour from all, but particularly from Front-Bench spokesmen.

Mr. Mellor: I am trying to make a serious speech about an issue I know something about; two things that the hon. Gentleman might like to bear in mind for his future contribution.

The problem for John Birt is keeping the confidence of BBC staff at a time when the changes, as they roll out, are seen merely to threaten their livelihood. Those changes have obviously been difficult and have totally transformed the environment in which the staff work. The key thing for the future management of the BBC is that the BBC should be able to show that those changes are not an end in themselves. The impression should not be given that the changes represent an empty Gradgrind approach to efficiency. The BBC must make sure that staff know that reforms are aimed at a purpose—to liberate resources, as they have already done, so that the BBC can produce the quality of programme that will itself win the BBC its audience and guarantee its future.

The BBC should not forget that it needs high morale among its staff. One of its crucial roles in British broadcasting is to produce and train quality personnel, who then become part of the rest of the broadcasting environment.

It is not entirely plain sailing ahead for the BBC. It must battle for audiences. Although I would deeply regret it if the question of the licence fee were to be reopened because of falls in audience, that is inevitable. The BBC knows that the challenge is to prove that it is worthy of that universal levy through the quality of what it produces.

People talk glibly about superhighways and digital transmissions of one kind or another without having any clear idea of how they will work out or their likely impact. We come back to the New York example. I am not excited by the idea of 10 or 12 television stations when we used to have one or two. The number of stations proves nothing unless quality material is produced to fill them up; otherwise they just offer the kind of nonsense to which I have already referred.

International communications represent another problem. The Government have rightly put the BBC and other British broadcasters under pressure to go out to show the world what they produce. We complacently tell ourselves that we have the best broadcasting in the world, but we must go out and prove that. In fact, the BBC does rather well, because it has a net credit balance of some £50 million a year on its sales overseas as against what it buys in. It accounts for an extraordinarily high proportion of European sales of television programmes to the United States.

I can understand why it was sad, as the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, that for whatever reason, the BBC was slow—or perhaps the Government were slow to encourage it—to get into world service television. Cable News Network, CNN, is a success for one reason alone—it exists. Its success is not due to it offering a particularly good service, but because an American entrepreneur had the courage to go out and make it happen. If there is one thing that we stand for in this country, surely it is objective news values and the production of news that people believe and do not take as propaganda.

The challenge for the BBC in the future is to offer such news to the world. That may require it to embrace commercial partnerships, but provided that is done transparently and fairly, let it go ahead and do that. The increasingly dismal Balkanised world of today needs the free passage of news more than anything else. Surely that is something that the BBC is in an outstanding position to produce. That is the challenge of the future.

5.44 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The Order Paper makes the point that the second report of the Select Committee on National Heritage, "The Future of the BBC", is relevant to the debate. The Select Committee is gratified that the general framework for the future of the BBC contained in the White Paper is that which the Committee's report recommended.

The charter is to be renewed for another 10 years, and the licence is to be continued as a source of funding. Those at the BBC might well say, "So, that's that, then. We've got our charter; we've got the licence that we advocated and campaigned for; we've been given a vote of confidence, so we can carry on as before."

The BBC has certainly been given a vote of confidence in general. It does maintain high standards of public service broadcasting. It does act as a role model for ITV and Channel 4. It does have a beneficial influence on public service broadcasting throughout the world. It does have a reputation that is respected throughout the world, and a brand name that is recognised throughout the world. All those factors do not mean, however, that everything that the BBC does is good.

Many share my concern at the decline of nationally transmitted BBC radio. That is not a reflection on the contribution of the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor). Many are concerned about the reduction in the audience of BBC 1, and about the intermittent vulgarity of Radio 5. They are concerned about the reduction in standards of the BBC flagship, Radio 4. They are concerned about the trivialisation of too much of Radio 3. As I listen to the gibbering and twittering of the early morning programme from 7 to 9, I sometimes think that the intellectual level would be improved if commercials were included.

There is concern, too, about the imperviousness to criticism expressed by dedicated listeners about some of the things that are taking place on BBC radio. The wholly mistaken belief apparently held by Liz Forgan is that the way to retrieve lost radio audiences—the BBC's share of the radio audience is now less than half of it—is to chase competitors down market. The right hon. and learned Member for Putney referred to Classic FM. I do not

believe that the future for Radio 3 lies in trying to copy that station, although I fear that far too much of Radio 3 is doing exactly that.

The secure future of the BBC for another 12 years does not mean that the BBC has the right to be complacent. I say "12 years" because we have two years of the present charter still to run, followed by 10 years of the proposed new charter. That complacency is unjustified, not simply because the BBC has had for a long time consistently fewer television viewers than ITV and Channel 4 combined, but because all four terrestrial channels are now on a downward trend, as satellite and cable relentlessly increase their share of the market and as choice therefore increases.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the regulations about the amount of domestic content that govern commercial television should also be extended to satellite television, so that they all compete on a level playing field?

Mr. Kaufman: I do not believe that such a regulation would be enforceable. As the choices proliferate and the number of channels increase, the current regulation of terrestrial television will become less feasible and effective. Of course, the regulations of the European Union require to be observed, but, as the BBC's share of the television audience goes down, one can see the challenge it faces.

At the end of last month, the BBC had 42.7 per cent. of the television audience, compared with 48.6 per cent. at the same time in 1991. In 1991, satellite and cable did not reach audience figures worth counting. By 1992, they had attracted 3.9 per cent., by 1993 the figure was 5.2 per cent., and by 1994 it was 6.1 per cent. Last month, they had 7.5 per cent. of the television audience. The number of households with access to cable and satellite television has risen from 1.3 million in 1990 to 3.9 million by the end of 1994. This week, BSkyB announced in its reports on the latest successes that more than 4 million households now have access to cable and satellite.

The country's streets are being dug up relentlessly. I received a letter from Nynex about large sections of my constituency which are about to be excavated, and I have responded with a serious warning that it had better behave if it is to avoid trouble from me.

Soon, those who are watching satellite and cable will outnumber the audiences of BBC 2 or Channel 4, each of which now has around 10 per cent. Satellite and cable already have 7.5 per cent.

The number of hours being broadcast by terrestrial television is dwindling in proportion to the number of television hours overall. At present, the four terrestrial channels are transmitting 32,000 hours of television per year, whereas satellite and cable are transmitting 100,000 hours per year.

This is only the beginning. On-demand and interactive services have not even started. The interaction of computers, TV games and CD-ROM is not yet happening, but although we cannot forecast the time scale, it is clear that it is only just over the horizon.

The 10 years of the new BBC charter may also be the last 10 years of any BBC charter. By the time the new charter comes up for renewal, the BBC, if it is to survive, will have to be changed beyond all recognition. If it does not, it will dwindle into the British equivalent of the American Public Broadcasting Service, with a small niche audience which responds fitfully to on-air appeals for funds to top up a meagre Government grant.

If that were to happen, the BBC would be providing public service broadcasting which, instead of being produced in-house or commissioned from independent producers as it is now, to our great advantage, would have to be bought in because the BBC would not have a reliable source of funds to finance its own programming.

A niche audience cannot expect the mass of the population to provide licence fees to fund its specialised minority tastes. It is essential for the BBC to transform itself if it is to survive, and if the ethos of public service broadcasting is to survive. The great contribution of the BBC and Britain to world communications is the ethos of public service broadcasting which pervades broadcasting in many parts of the world and would never have existed without the BBC.

The media world now is already much changed, not only from what it was when the present charter was instituted, but even from what it was when our Select Committee report was published and when the Government published their responding White Paper. Already, the boundaries between print, computers, telephones and television are breaking down into one visual continuum. Several newspapers, such as *The Times*, are available on-line. If one wants to read *The Daily Telegraph*, one can read it on computer as well as by going to a shop and buying it. Those changes are just beginning; they are relentless, and we cannot pretend that we or the BBC can ignore them.

We live in a world in which cross-media ownership is changing, a world in which the *Daily Mirror* and Associated Newspapers have their own television stations which are permitted under the cable regulations; we invest in overseas television and, as I shall be pointing out in a moment, overseas television invests in us. It is a world in which the BBC grows, or, to all intents and purposes, the BBC will die.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): An unstated assumption of the right hon. Gentleman's argument, which I have been trying to follow closely for the past few minutes, seems to be that there is a zero sum gain. In other words, as satellite and cable expand and all the new multi-media technologies expand, the BBC is doomed to lose. Is it not at least possible that one of the changes is precisely that people want a variety of media forms to be available, and that the BBC can survive if it does its known thing well?

Mr. Kaufman: Far from the BBC being doomed to lose, if it organises, structures and prepares itself properly, it can be stronger than it has ever been, and can play a major part in future developments. Only if it thinks small and constrictively will the BBC be doomed to lose.

Ten years ago, the BBC's competitors were ITV and Channel 4. Today, BSkyB and other satellite and cable services are biting into its audience, with already dozens of choices for the increasing number of subscribers to non-terrestrial services. Tomorrow—by "tomorrow" I mean a time scale that is impossible to specify, but which, nevertheless, is attenuating as we proceed—there will be hundreds of alternative choices.

[Mr. Kaufman]

In their White Paper following up the Select Committee report, the Government say that the BBC should be able to evolve into an "international multi-media enterprise". That sounds very nice. It is a good piece of phraseology, but what does it mean?

May I put to the House what an international multi-media enterprise really is? I quote from an article in the *New Yorker* of 16 January written by one of the most authoritative commentators on television, Mr. Ken Auletta. This is how he described the scope of Viacom in the United States:

"The company . . . has branches in almost every area of entertainment, including movie and television production (Paramount Pictures and Paramount Television); music programming (MTV and VH-1); children's television programming (Nickelodeon); pay TV (Showtime, the Movie Channel) books and CD-ROMs (Simon & Schuster).

It owns the world's dominant video-store chain"—

which has nearly 4,000 stores—

"and one of the world's busiest music retailers (Blockbuster), and five regional theme parks. It owns twelve television stations and fourteen radio stations. Its cable systems have a million one hundred thousand subscribers. It has a seventy-eight-per-cent interest in the Spelling Entertainment Group, whose head, Aaron Spelling, is the most prolific television producer in Hollywood. It owns fifty per cent. of the All News Channel and the USA Network and fifty per cent. of the Comedy Central channel. Viacom is the largest single customer of the Hollywood studios (through Blockbuster, Showtime, and the Movie Channel) and of the record companies (through MTV and Blockbuster). It has joint ventures with several other companies, and this month it is launching, with Chris-Craft, a new TV network. Through Viacom Interactive Media, it is also involved with the development and distribution of interactive-television programming, video games and on-line computer services. And it owns a library containing a total of fifty thousand hours of TV programs and feature films."

That is the environment in which the BBC will have to operate; it cannot ignore that fact. If it is to be an international multi-media enterprise, as the Government rightly say it should be, that is the sort of competition it will be up against. Viacom is not the biggest media and entertainment company in the world; it is No. 2, behind the United States company Time Warner.

The White Paper is right when it says that the BBC is competing in a market which is increasingly dominated by aggressive, very large enterprises. How on earth can the BBC compete with leviathans like that? Happily, it has already started to, as it is constructing a global partnership with a British-owned media conglomerate, Pearsons.

I can say without undue complacency that that is exactly what I recommended 18 months ago—I even named Pearsons as the appropriate partner for the BBC. I said that when the director-general of the BBC was still saying that he had lots of time to consider his options. He has certainly learnt a lesson, and I am pleased about that.

With Pearsons—which is a publisher and a newspaper owner, as well as having an interest in television—the BBC has launched its first domestic United Kingdom satellite channel, UK Gold. As the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) pointed out, since last month the BBC has been transmitting a 24-hour international news channel, BBC World, which is funded by advertising. It reaches 1.2 million homes on the European mainland, and has a potential audience of 8.4 million homes.

The BBC's European entertainment satellite channel, BBC Prime, which is funded by subscriptions, already reaches 2.3 million homes. Two United States channels are to follow, which will be transmitted by satellite and funded by cable subscription.

Cox Communications, a huge American company, is a partner in the BBC-Pearsons European venture. It is also involved in UK Gold and in another satellite channel, UK Living, to which the BBC supplies programmes. That is, and must be, only the beginning. The BBC's new global partnership, though formidable, is incomplete.

Sir John Gorst: Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the role that he describes for the BBC in the future will be compatible with the suggestions from both sides of the House that it should also be concerned with regionalisation? We have heard how the BBC has scaled down its production in various centres outside London. Is it possible for the BBC to maintain its production levels and, at the same time, compete in the world market which the right hon. Gentleman describes so correctly?

Mr. Kaufman: Yes, indeed. We are on the verge of implementing digital compression. When that comes along, we will be able to have not only regional programmes, but local, city and neighbourhood programmes. Advances in technology will allow the BBC to become a global operator and, at the same time, provide programmes of local interest in a way that has not been possible previously with broad-brush television channelling.

The BBC's partnership is incomplete. The BBC is a provider of what is now called "software"—that is, the programmes—and it is allied with the major and powerful publisher Pearsons. However, the BBC must have a guaranteed market at home for its public service entertainment, news and education programmes.

That guaranteed market is the infrastructure that is essential for providing the high-quality programmes which the BBC and its partners can market worldwide. I do not believe—I differ from the right hon. and learned Member for Putney on this point—that the BBC is marketing its programmes as effectively as it should. We refer to that point in our report. If the BBC is to be a strong competitor, it must have a non-terrestrial highway into UK homes which will enable it to provide on-demand and interactive services.

I was very disappointed by the Secretary of State's response to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). I also regret the extremely short-sighted decision of the President of the Board of Trade about British Telecommunications plc as a potential broadcaster. BT is the most obvious partner for the BBC. It already has access to many millions of homes in this country, it has developed the necessary optical fibre technology, and it is probably the most cash-rich organisation in Britain.

I find it inexplicable that the Government have decided to maintain the ban on BT becoming a broadcaster until into the next century, when, within that time scale, the cable companies will become literally entrenched in this country. Those companies are permitted to compete with BT in offering telephone services, and many of them are owned or part-owned by American telephone companies.

For example, several of the cable companies which are now permitted to broadcast in this country are part-owned by Southwestern Bell, an American telephone company.

Telewest owns several other UK cable companies, and it is 74 per cent. owned by two enormous American companies. One company is TCI, a giant which challenges Viacom, and which is the world's largest cable systems operator. It owns 49 per cent. of the satellite Discovery channel and has a 12 per cent. voting interest in Turner Broadcasting, which owns CNN, TNT and the Cartoon channel.

The other company is US West, which is America's fourth largest provider of local telephone services, serving 25 million customers in 14 states. It is a partner with Warner Brothers Filmed Entertainment, which is part of Time Warner—a company even bigger than Viacom, whose scope I have described.

What possible sense does it make to have a regime under which an American telephone company is permitted to broadcast television programmes in this country, but under which the premier British telephone company is banned from doing so? That was an extraordinarily perverse decision for the Government to make, a Government who—I quarrelled with them for doing so—privatised BT, but now prevent it from being a competitor in a market in which advantages are given to enormous United States telephone companies.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I have great sympathy with much of what the right hon. Gentleman has been saying, but will he perhaps consider and recognise that, since its creation as a private company, BT has taken a dog-in-the-manger attitude to the use of its ducts for cable, not only through its own companies—by its investment in cable throughout the country—but through other companies? It is, in fact, BT that is denying the House and others who live in Westminster access through Westminster Cable to, for example, the new Channel One cable service in London. If BT took a more positive attitude, perhaps the House would.

Mr. Kaufman: I do not carry any particular flag for BT. I wish that it was still publicly owned. I wish that it had a greater sense of community responsibility, but that is not the argument that I am making. The localised problem in Westminster is nothing compared with the fact that that huge British company, which has the technology and facilities to provide broadcast programmes, is not permitted to do so, whereas American telephone companies are.

Whether the BBC is able to go into partnership with BT, it is clear—to me it is welcome—that the BBC is developing into a major commercial enterprise. It is transcending its original terms of reference by going into partnership with even bigger commercial enterprises here and abroad. Such changes in the BBC's character and structure are, in my opinion, essential if it is to survive and prosper, but further changes are necessary.

At some stage before too long, a new BBC chairman will be needed to succeed Mr. Marmaduke Hussey when he retires. I trust that, when the Government fill that vacancy—when it arises—they will not do so by dipping their hand into the bran tub and coming up with another venerable member of the great and the good.

In this new environment, the next chairman of the BBC should be a young man or woman who is dynamic, has a strong business sense and understands thoroughly the new technology and the new market, who can provide leadership to take on Viacom and Time Warner and have a chance of coming out on top.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Kaufman: I am delighted that my hon. Friends were so enthusiastic about my speech that they were about to give me a standing ovation, but I have a moment or two more in which I seek to detain the House.

In the Select Committee's second report, we said:

"The British Broadcasting Corporation, which was among the world's pioneers in first radio and then television, will, if it is to survive in any form, have to find a role and a structure which enable its enormous strengths and unrivalled international reputation to prevail in this new and exciting environment."

In the somewhat smug briefing note that the BBC sent around in connection with the debate, it repeats the nonsense that revenues from commercial enterprise will be no more than 15 per cent. of the corporation's total revenues. No effectively run commercial enterprise can sensibly place a limit on the business it gets. The BBC had better go for the maximum possible revenue, because, sooner or later, licence payers will revolt against paying a poll tax to maintain an organisation, which, even now, the majority—before long the predominant majority—do not watch as their primary source of entertainment, education and news.

Moreover, if the Government decide—by Government I mean any Government who are in power; my own preference is obvious—to limit or reduce the licence fee in the review scheduled for 2001, the BBC will have to get more commercial income. In any case, at some stage, that income may—I hope it will—exceed the licence income. Any future Government, including a Labour Government, may at that point need to consider whether it makes sense for the BBC to remain in the public sector. It is already a hybrid organisation—part public, part private. The waters on which the new BBC will sail will not be calm—they may be turbulent—but the voyage may be enjoyable as well as exciting, and the destination will be alluring.

For nearly three quarters of a century, the BBC has served the nation well. If it did not make those at Broadcasting house and the television centre even more complacent than some of them already are, I would echo Michael Grade's panegyric of the BBC as a "national treasure". If the whole concept of public service broadcasting is to survive, that treasure needs a new setting. I hope that those responsible for the BBC will have the enterprise and imagination to ensure the organisation's new role in the new and challenging century.

6.15 pm

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): I agree with much that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, although I shall approach some of the points that he made from a different angle.

I congratulate the Government on producing a rather dull White Paper. Alas, not every Department has the courage to be boring when it needs to be, but this is certainly not the time for the Government to impose radical new departures on the BBC, not because it does not need some radical changes—it does—but because the

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changes required can effectively come only from the BBC itself. It has made a very impressive start in that direction in recent years.

I am particularly glad that the White Paper recommends keeping the licence fee. It is not very much liked, as the right hon. Gentleman said so clearly, and it cuts very little ice to say, as the BBC so frequently does, that it costs less than the price of a daily newspaper. However, as the Select Committee made clear, for the present and the foreseeable future it is the least bad method of raising the necessary revenue.

Advertising is a very good way of paying for many television and radio channels, but certainly not for all of them. If the BBC went over to advertising, wholly or in part, it would undoubtedly diminish choice. Some struggling competitors would find that they did not get enough advertising to survive. The BBC would certainly become more like its rivals than it is now, further diminishing choice.

The BBC without advertising in the United Kingdom is rapidly becoming much more commercial: first with producer choice, and the internal market. In the early days, there were scarcely muffled cries of pain emerging from Broadcasting house, and stories circulated of idiotic time wasting, and straitjackets imposed by accountants who would not know how to organise a test card and a record of "Sailing By". I have no doubt that many of those stories were true, but it seems as though most of the initial crudities have been ironed out, and producer choice is yielding efficiencies and thus savings, which can be ploughed back into the making and the improving of programmes. If that is so—I believe that it is—it is a very necessary and impressive achievement.

Undoubtedly, producers with set budgets, freed to shop around inside and outside the corporation, become more cost conscious and more interested in the benefits that competition can bring, in economy, naturally, but in ideas as well. In such competition, there is, of course, no new temptation for the BBC to compete for ratings. That already comes from the BBC's knowledge that, the lower its ratings, the harder it is next time around to justify the licence fee, not least to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst).

Audience figures make a direct and immediate financial impact overseas, however. It is too early to say whether the new worldwide BBC satellite television channels in Europe, the middle east, Japan and the Indian sub-continent have all the potential that is hoped for, and whether the BBC and its partners will secure that potential if it is there; but, as the right hon. Member for Gorton suggested, the essential point is that success will depend on its winning and retaining overseas audiences for whom advertisers want to pay.

The more success the BBC has in that regard and the larger the profits that accrue, the more inevitable will be a shift away from the United Kingdom in the BBC's centre of gravity. That will change the corporation's attitude to commercial considerations, notwithstanding what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about keeping domestic services separate from foreign services and commercial broadcasting separate from broadcasting financed by the licence fee. That is possible in accounting terms, but it is not psychologically possible to maintain such a distinction in the organisation.

I imagine that the change will be increasingly visible at home as the BBC engages in private sector partnerships to exploit the opportunities offered by digital and cable broadcasting in education and a series of "niche" markets, as well as more general entertainment markets. It is clear that the BBC's future is increasingly and ineluctably commercial, but it should evolve naturally: the BBC should be encouraged to take advantage of the immense opportunities which it has overseas—thanks to satellite and cable television—and at home—thanks to technological developments such as digital broadcasting. That would be better than setting about the corporation with a legislative tin opener, as some have suggested that the Government should do. I am glad to say that those ideas seemed to disperse before the publication of the White Paper, but they were very much in the air a few years ago.

I am not unduly worried that BBC quality, whatever that is, will suffer; rather the reverse, as long as the BBC takes a hard and understanding look at its markets. It knows that its success overseas and in the domestic market will depend heavily on its brand name, and that in the long run its fortunes will rest on the protection and projection of its well-earned but easily lost reputation.

It would be pleasant to think that in due course the BBC's profits in the rest of the world will be so great that it will be able to dispense with the licence fee at home, but it is more likely that the question that has been referred to several times this afternoon will still be there in 10 years' time, and almost as intractable. It will have changed its form because by then digital technology will probably have made encryption and direct-subscription BBC a practical possibility. However, that bridge must be crossed in the next century rather than now.

Like the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), I do not want to return to the question of the licence fee too soon, because I feel that the certainty of the BBC's income in the next few years is vital. The present Government's job is to keep out of the way while the BBC makes its own progress according to where opportunities and audience needs beckon and what technology makes possible. If I read the White Paper correctly, that is essentially the Government's view as well. There is simply not enough money from the licence fee—certainly not enough from the general tax revenue that Governments of any flavour would be willing to invest—to expand BBC activities in any other way. The BBC's task will be to exploit commercial opportunities internationally without losing its public service ethos, as the right hon. Member for Gorton pointed out.

As for the BBC's transmission service, surely the main question is not whether it should be sold off but how and when it can be freed to compete fairly in the market. In that regard, I agree with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. National Transcommunications Ltd. has had a useful period in which to establish itself; it is a fine company, which I was delighted to privatise when I was the Minister responsible for broadcasting. There should be more competition in the market now, however. I should like to see the transmission service at arm's length from the BBC, with a substantial private sector shareholding. I should like the BBC to benefit from the one-off capital receipt from a partial sale, and from a continuing share of the profit that I hope will be earned from the winning of non-BBC contracts by the new, separate transmission company.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will not be able to give an idea of the Government's thinking when he winds up the debate, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear; but I hope that a decision will not be long delayed, because it is already overdue.

I am glad that the Broadcasting Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council are to be merged. The reduction by one in the number of regulatory bodies is welcome, and there should be some saving in overheads. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will make it clear that the Treasury will not take all the savings, and that he will ensure that the new body has enough resources to sustain an effective research programme.

No one else will carry out regular, original, fundamental research on the changing impact of television. The industry will seldom produce more than viewing statistics and audience reaction to different programmes. In a rapidly changing broadcasting environment, programme makers, public bodies and the public at large need a better understanding of the evolving impact of television and radio on attitudes and perceptions, not least those of children. If my hon. Friend feels that he cannot prevail on the Treasury, I hope that he will ensure that appropriate funds are obtained from fees levied on the broadcasters themselves.

6.27 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Let me repeat the apology that I made to the Under-Secretary for State earlier for my inability to be present for his reply to the debate. I am grateful to him for his understanding of the reasons.

In the BBC we have a national institution of the greatest cultural and economic significance, to which every speech that we have heard so far has paid due tribute. The debate has featured a consensus that is remarkable in view of broadcasting debates that took place as recently as four years ago. I hope that I shall be forgiven if I touch on matters that were controversial then but appear rather less so today; I suspect that not only the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) but one or two less vociferous hon. Members still have those arguments at the back of their minds.

For some three quarters of a century, broadcasting on radio and subsequently on television, the BBC has entertained, provoked, educated and inspired the nation. It has been rarely silent, occasionally isolated, but never insignificant. Even in wartime—when the BBC was both weapon, through its broadcasts overseas, and defence, through the uniting power of the home service—it never wavered from its aim of providing, in Lord Reith's words,

"the best of everything, to everyone".

A mass observation diary kept in 1941, in the depths of the war, records:

"Favourite topic on Mondays seems to be the previous day's Brains Trust session. Hardly anyone ever confesses that he didn't hear it, or if they do, take care to give adequate reasons for so doing."

More recently, letters to the Home Secretary calling for an amnesty for a character in "The Archers" showed how deeply entwined in the national consciousness the BBC and its service still are.

Our general-felt fondness for "Aunty" should not alone guide Government policy towards the BBC in the 1990s and beyond, for "Aunty" is also a business with an annual income approaching £2 billion a year, over 90 per cent. of which comes from the licence fee imposed on every television owner in the United Kingdom. It employs some 20,000 people full time, and draws on the services of thousands more in producing and distributing more than 17,000 hours of programming on radio and television each year. It broadcasts daily to more than 100 countries worldwide, and gathers news and information by the hour from many more. Its 1994 accounts reveal its assets to be worth some £1.5 billion.

The House has many times presided over the fates of corporations with comparable balance sheets and great social significance. In the past decade and a half, it has approved every proposal that the Government have introduced for the sale of our major public utilities. Today, however, the Government are not proposing the sale of the BBC, or even some half-measure towards privatisation. We owe a considerable debt of gratitude to the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), whose White Paper this is, that that is so.

Against the trend, we are debating a White Paper that proposes to preserve the BBC as a public institution, funded by the licence fee, constituted under a royal charter, and with its assets held in trust for the nation. Such an approach is all the more remarkable when, for most of the 1980s, Conservative Ministers were regularly to be heard fulminating about the left-wing bias, depravity and unpatriotic tone of the BBC. In her memoirs, the former Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher, commented that those broadcasters disguised their own interests as

"high minded commitment to some greater good".

During that decade, it was not beyond imagination that the BBC would be broken up, its constituent parts privatised and the licence fee abandoned. The White Paper is all the more welcome for that reason. Almost the first phrase in the White Paper is "public service"; it is not "efficiency", or even "commercial freedom".

In the general thrust of its proposals, the White Paper seeks to preserve the strengths of the BBC. As the director-general, John Birt, has said, that can be achieved not by placing the institution in aspic but by enabling the corporation to adapt to the new and fast-developing demands and expectations of a changing world.

The Government have recognised—late, but not too late—that the public service broadcaster need be, not the enemy of competition in television and radio, but a friend and rival. For 40 years, that has been the nature of competition in British broadcasting. For more than half its lifetime, the BBC has had to compete with commercial television. Although heavily regulated, the independent companies have been able not only to compete in quality and choice but to make substantial profits from advertising. Throughout the last decade, however, competition has increased dramatically. It is natural to question the necessity for a public broadcaster in that new expanding marketplace.

In 1983, there were but three channels, but today there are more than 50. The growth has been largely in local and regional cable services, and in the proliferation of satellite broadcasting under the effective monopoly of Rupert Murdoch. The Select Committee on National Heritage nearly fell over itself with enthusiasm for that

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technological change. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) gave a flavour of that in his remarks earlier in the debate. The Committee declared:

"The Media Revolution is Nigh!"

as its first statement in the report on the BBC's future.

From almost nothing a decade ago, cable television lines now pass 2.7 million homes. Fourteen per cent. of households not passed by cable have satellite dishes. Michael Grade, chief executive of Channel 4, once said that the effect of the BBC on the commercial channels was that it kept them all honest, but if the BBC does its job properly, it can do more than that: it can keep them all on their toes, and it can challenge other broadcasters to compete in the quality, range and inventiveness of their programmes. It does that already.

Research conducted by the Independent Television Commission last year revealed that, in homes that have chosen to invest in cable and satellite services, 70 per cent. of viewing time is still spent with the BBC, ITV and Channel 4. That is the context in which the remarks of the right hon. Member for Gorton should be borne in mind. We have not yet arrived at that revolutionary state to which he drew our attention. Overall, the two BBC television channels account for 1.7 hours of daily television viewing—44 per cent. of the total. Therefore, the role of the BBC in the new marketplace is more, not less, important in raising standards and in forcing other broadcasters to compete in quality and choice. It is our wish to ensure that the BBC will still be able to keep them on their toes in 2005, when as many as 200 broadcasters may be jostling for viewers' attention.

No one, except the BBC, can guarantee the success of the BBC; nor can we know the ultimate shape and scale of the media revolution that is in its early stages. To second-guess those changes and to restructure the BBC according to one favoured projection or another of markets a decade, or more, into the future all but guarantees disaster. Our only prudent course is to provide the BBC and British broadcasting in general with a solid platform on which to evolve in the multi-media age. That is achievable under certain provisions, not all of which the White Paper appears to be prepared to secure.

The first of those provisions is the continuation in public ownership and the retention of the licence fee as the major portion of BBC income. That is assured by the White Paper. The licence fee is a crude form of taxation. It is regressive, expensive to collect and administer, difficult and disproportionately expensive to enforce, and it distances the BBC from the demands of audiences. Because it is set by the Government, it provides Ministers with a means of putting pressure on the BBC by threatening its future income. Furthermore, some people have argued that, as the BBC accounts for an ever smaller proportion of viewing time, the licence fee will increasingly be seen as an onerous requirement on viewers, who may not desire to watch or listen to any of the services for which they pay.

Ian Hargreaves, in his DEMOS pamphlet "Sharper Vision", considers such arguments almost sufficient to justify privatisation of the corporation. He believes that continued state ownership will prevent the BBC from adapting to and exploiting new markets. I do not believe that. The licence fee has certain advantages for the BBC and for broadcasting in general, which could not be sustained under any other funding regime. It expands choice overall by providing a source of income for production which does not come directly from the pockets of other broadcasters or media.

The licence fee is predictable, allowing for investment by the BBC in new programmes and in expensive genres such as drama, against which others must compete in kind. It is secure, providing the safety needed for risk taking, which others have to match.

Of all the problems associated with the licence fee, most are due to its structure rather than to its principle. One, however, consumer sovereignty, is likely to be of increasing importance, and it arises from the mandatory nature of the licence. The 1986 report of the Peacock committee into the funding of the BBC notes that viewers have sovereignty over cable and satellite channels, for they can vote for those services with their wallets; that they have indirect influence over the content of ITV and Channel 4 schedules, for unpopular programmes cannot attract premium advertising revenues; but that the BBC could, if it so wished, ignore that, at least in the short term, and its revenue would remain the same.

The most commonly proposed solution is to introduce an element of advertising into the BBC. Experience abroad has shown, however, that even the injection of a small amount of commercial revenue into the mainstream activities of a public service broadcaster can have a disproportionate effect on the range and quality of programmes.

The only bankable equation for a commercial broadcaster is the ratio of viewers to pounds spent on programming. The more viewers who can be attracted for each pound spent on programming, the greater the broadcaster's profits are likely to be. If an hour of "LA Law" costs only £30,000, but an hour of home-produced drama costs up to £400,000 and attracts half the audience, "LA Law" will win every time. The programmes that will come naturally to dominate schedules will be popular, but predictable, repeated and imported.

The French learnt that lesson to their cost in the 1980s. Within two years of introducing advertising to their public service channels, not only had the range of programming on those stations suffered but the balance had tipped towards a greater concentration on populist programming, such as music, games, and sport, more repeats and more imports. I therefore support the consensus approaching unanimity in our debate this afternoon—although perhaps not in the country as a whole—that we should put the issue of the licence fee well and truly on ice. Alternative mechanisms need to be found to inject sufficient consumer power into BBC programming.

The most appropriate candidates for accountability who are available are the board of governors and the national councils. The board of governors has the duty of ensuring that the public interest is protected in the BBC, that the money from the licence fee is efficiently spent and that BBC programming reflects the needs of audiences.

Those 12 men and women are, like police officers, appointed by the Crown. In theory, their duty is not to the Government of the day but to the public. However, like quango members everywhere, they owe their selection for appointment directly to ministerial patronage. There is a fundamental conflict between those two elements. The

whiff of patronage cannot be entirely eradicated from a board that owes its appointment to favour. That is not good for the BBC or for the public.

I note the Select Committee's view that

"the Board is at present seriously unrepresentative of the various sectors of society".

The Select Committee recommended that it—the Select Committee—should approve the appointments. The White Paper, which in so many areas has adopted the Select Committee's views and arguments, disposed of that recommendation by simply confirming that the Government intend to carry on as before.

From paragraph 6.15 of the White Paper, it appears that the Government believe that if members of one party appoint the governors, that will avoid accusations of partisanship in the selection. Perhaps some other hon. Member better schooled than I am in formal logic may be able to explain the reasoning behind that patent piece of nonsense. The only way to secure an independent, unbiased and representative board of governors is to adopt a selection procedure, which, in itself, is independent, unbiased and representative. I am disappointed that the Government rejected all alternatives to the present system without giving their grounds for doing so.

I suggest that approval of proposed appointments by, say, two thirds of the House, could present a workable alternative. The proposals for appointments could still be drawn up by Ministers, but they would do that knowing that cross-party consensus would eventually be required. That mechanism would create an incentive for more open consideration and the extension of the pool of possible candidates to create a more representative board.

Mr. Maxton: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the appointment of the national governor from Scotland should be made from Scotland and not by the Department of National Heritage? Certainly, once we have a Scottish Parliament up and running, that Scottish Parliament would make such an appointment.

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

In the circumstances, the governors must be protected more than they are at the moment from the unacceptable pressures from the Government. The White Paper proposes that the governors' duties be laid out in the new charter, but there is no suggestion of what those duties may be. I suggest that they include a specific reference to securing the BBC's editorial independence from the Government.

Independence is the cornerstone of press and broadcasting freedom. Even the slightest sign of meddling by Ministers, for their private or political interests, in editorial decisions can undermine public faith in the media. As a public service, the BBC must be above that suspicion.

No guarantee of independence exists at present, but it is a general principle of law that that which is not specifically forbidden is permissable. There have been too many incidents in the history of the BBC, and in broadcasting in general, where the lack of a specific prohibition of that nature has created sufficient uncertainty for the corporation or other broadcasters to submit to the political demands of Ministers.

When the BBC was founded, it was so constrained by the Government that if one had tuned into the Derby in 1926, one would have heard only the shuffle of hooves on wet earth as the horses ran past the microphone. All commentary was banned by the Postmaster-General, as was the announcement of the result, on the ground that it would damage the newspapers—a rich source of revenue for the Post Office. Even the King's Speech at the state opening of Parliament in 1923 was considered unfit for the wireless because it contained controversial material—an area which the Postmaster-General felt should be left again to the press barons.

Perhaps more relevant to this debate, in more recent times there have been several actual and alleged instances of intervention which are hardly less subtle. The famous Zircon episode in Glasgow, which Scottish Members will remember, and "Slide into Slump", the "Panorama" programme on the economy which was pulled from its scheduled appearance just before the last general election, were arrested in the full glare of public scrutiny. Even an apparent intervention, if it gains currency, can be as damaging to all concerned as an intervention itself.

If the Government are truly committed, in the words of the White Paper, to the "chain of accountability", they will consider seriously the proposal of a specific duty on the governors to protect the BBC from political interference in editorial decisions. Conservative Members may trust their own Ministers not to interfere with the BBC, but I do not know whether they would trust a future Government of a different political view who may be formed during the lifetime of the next charter.

I wonder whether Conservative Members have considered the likely consequences of the White Paper proposal affecting the BBC's regional policy. I heard what the Secretary of State said about that earlier, but I am not entirely convinced that the required degree of commitment exists.

Most of us represent constituencies that are outside London. Our constituents, who form the majority of the population and therefore provide the BBC with its keep, have every right to hear and see something of their own lives and regional interests reported and reflected on television and radio locally and nationally.

The White Paper nods that way. It states that the national councils could "make an input" into the BBC's strategic decisions and policies. For BBC controllers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the White Paper recommends

"a budget for the programmes produced specifically for audiences in each country."

That is not enough. The BBC's motto is

"Let nation speak unto nation".

Something else must have been thought of when that motto was dreamt up. Ours is a country of several nations. In that context, the motto should not mean, as the White Paper portends, a little more of Scotland speaking to Scotland, and of Wales conversing with itself. It should mean, "Let Scotland speak to Wales and Wales to Scotland, and both to England." Today the conversation is all one way.

English voices, outlook and opinion drown out all others in almost every circumstance. Eighty-five per cent. of BBC output originates in London; 97 per cent. in England and the remaining 3 per cent. in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I do not believe that the public are impressed by that distribution. The BBC conducted a corporate image survey in 1991 and 1992 which investigated perceptions of that metropolitan bias. In

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every region of the United Kingdom outside London, the east and south-east of England, between 35 per cent. and 70 per cent. of viewers thought that the BBC looked to London too much. In every one of those areas, less than half those people felt the same way about their local ITV company. The White Paper says only that the BBC should

"heed these criticisms and respond to them".

The BBC's response to date has been inadequate. The Hatch report, published in April 1994, promised a £75 million boost for BBC regional services. The money, however, will be spent largely on what are called "centres of excellence"—a Manchester bi-media production base, a music production centre in Cardiff and more schools programmes in Bristol. Merely moving money about in that way will not meet the demands of the public to see and hear less of London and more of the rest of Britain.

A genuine regional policy would ensure that a greater proportion of networked production originated outside London, especially in news and current affairs. That would require an effective decentralisation of decision making and management from London to the nations and regions of Britain. We need more of a regional BBC, not a BBC with a regional policy.

The national councils will not provide the impetus. The budgets of the national directors will, by implication, be determined by the centre and they will have only an advisory role—not an executive role—in national BBC policy making. I therefore urge the Secretary of State to reconsider his specific recommendations. He may wish to consider, for example, the proposal of the Broadcasting for Scotland Campaign, to establish specific requirements for monitoring management progress in regional coverage.

A great many opportunities lie ahead for British broadcasters, especially for the BBC. Globalisation and digital technology, new means of delivering large volumes of high-quality signals, interactive and on-demand services, the convergence of diverse media into common formats and increasing sophistication among viewers and listeners are combining to invert or make redundant almost every understanding and assumption about mass media that we have developed over 70 years.

Despite those opportunities, in 1991—the point may already have been made—Britain ran a deficit of £100 million with the rest of world in broadcasting services and material. On current trends, that deficit is projected to rise to £640 million by the turn of the century. We are falling behind and we would be foolish to let ourselves miss the opportunity to shape and profit from developments. The BBC, our largest publisher and broadcaster, with a base of skills across every media form, is a natural vehicle for the fulfilment of ambitions.

As the BBC knows, its name is—perhaps—second only to Coca-Cola in being recognised in almost every country. I see no reason whatever to deny the BBC the benefit of fully exploiting overseas markets. I also welcome the possibility of the BBC's entering into secondary domestic markets, through, for example, subscription cable services which provide repeats of programmes.

The future expansion of terrestrial services will almost inevitably occur through the commercialisation of digital compression technology. The BBC has as much a role to play in those services as it did in, for example, the change from 405 to 653-line television screens, which took many years to accomplish. However, it is unlikely that digital television will replace traditional analogue broadcasting for many years. A smooth and managed transition to digital, which balances the need of the market to expand with the interests of audiences in ensuring wider choice, continuity and programming, is essential.

Essential to the debate is the regulation, or otherwise, of the systems in which consumers must invest if they are to receive digital services. That involves set-top converters—proprietary technology for converting digital signals into images and sounds. If one company were to control access of broadcasters to consumers through control of conversion technology, there would be a considerable danger that, without regulation, a monopoly would develop in digital services, similar to that in satellite services at present.

The BBC argues—I am inclined to agree—that further progress towards digital transmission should not take place without firm guarantees that no such monopoly will be allowed to develop, which may include the BBC controlling its own transmission network, for which privatisation is an option.

Ambitions for a global, digital BBC will be for nothing if it cannot also succeed at home. Strength in Britain is the only basis on which the BBC will be able to build. The White Paper goes some way towards ensuring that. It suggests by no means the best of all possible worlds, but it certainly does not suggest the worst.

6.57 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I declare what I would call an old interest, as I was once employed by the BBC in the early 1950s as an all-purpose Welsh and English news man. Since then, I have always been indebted to the BBC for that very educative and valuable experience. Although I did most of my work in Wales, I had the privilege of contributing to national news programmes, such as "Eyewitness" on the home service and "Radio Newsreel" on the light programme.

I deserted the BBC to establish independent television in Wales in 1957, but I have always kept a close, professional eye on the corporation. I have sometimes been highly critical of the BBC when it has, in my view, overplayed its independence of government and of the state, especially in news and current affairs programmes. Occasionally, the BBC has tended to act rather like the Church in the middle ages and become, as the Church was then known, imperium in imperio.

Nevertheless, I am among the first to appreciate the excellence of the BBC, which is why I want to begin by commending the critique of current affairs broadcasting set out by the director-general John Birt in his Dublin speech and reported in *The Times* on Saturday. It highlighted the concerns of many of us about the relationship between the media and politics; the tendency of the media to disputation and to pressurise excessively; and the media's attempt to dictate policies by seeking instant reactions, leaving no time for reflection and measured judgment. That report in *The Times* should be compulsory reading for every interviewer and every politician. The thinking behind it is very sound.

At one time, I would have used this debate to consider the arguments for and against privatisation of the BBC or parts of it. Although such a discussion is not appropriate

on any scale in this debate, I am not convinced that we should rule out that possibility at some future date. We may have to consider the possibility again in the next decade, such is the pace of change in the media and such is the pressure for resources under which the BBC will come.

I agree with the scenario painted by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) who, as Chairman of the Select Committee on National Heritage, certainly knows precisely what multi-media entails. The new multi-media world has changed one's perspective of the BBC and its future is not quite as assured as it used to be. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir. J. Gorst)—alas, he is not in the Chamber—put his finger on the issue when he asked whether the BBC was capable of carrying out a dual role.

There was a time, too, when I would have argued strongly for the break-up of the BBC, primarily on the ground that it was so large in organisational terms and so extensive in its programming that the contents of the programmes were virtually beyond control. There is still some truth in that. There are fresh arguments, which we have heard, for more regional control. One way to such regional control is virtually to break up the BBC. At the same time, the role of the governors has changed for the better, as the White Paper notes, and it is to be more clearly defined in future, on the lines that

"The Governors' role is to look after the public's interest in the BBC, not to manage it."

That happened frequently in the past.

The proposed merger between the Broadcasting Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council and the new council's brief

"to carry out research into both the content and scheduling of programmes"

should also help in monitoring and control. At the end of the day, the BBC and its public are very dependent on the individual producers' sense of responsibility and their accountability to professional superiors. Therefore, the ethos of the BBC is important and it will become increasingly so as competition for viewers and listeners becomes ever more acute, with the advent of more choice—seemingly infinite choice—in our multi-media world.

The conclusion of an early chapter in the White Paper on the future role of the BBC strikes the right balance. It states that the primary focus of the BBC's activities must be programming for United Kingdom audiences, but that

"it should develop its role as an international broadcaster, building on its present service for audiences overseas."

All hon. Members are aware of the high standing of the BBC abroad, and it is right that its achievements should be built upon—that is in British national interest. The problem, of course, with the dual role of "Serving the nation" and "Competing world-wide", as the White Paper has it, is, I suspect, that the international role will require much more resources. With finite resources from the licence fee, are we to see more resources devoted to programmes primarily for consumption abroad, and possibly at the expense of programmes which, by their very nature, are suitable only for the home market? That fear appears to be fairly widespread, as indeed is the fear that the regions will be the first casualties in the battle for resources.

The BBC is a highly centralised concern—some people think that it is too centralised—in spite of its regional and local services. It tends to be dominated by the metropolis, as we have heard, as indeed are the national newspapers, and it has to be reminded constantly that it is not the London broadcasting corporation but the British Broadcasting Corporation. It has excellent facilities in the regions, and it should make full use of them. After all, the regions are the training ground for much of its talent, both technical and cultural, and they are capable of producing programmes of high quality and originality, too.

The BBC has much to gain from the strong regional presence if it is properly used. I am talking about not only Wales and Scotland but the English regions. If only the BBC could overcome its centripetal tendency, and the belief that little of quality or interest can come from beyond the perimeter of the M25. Of course, some programmes from the cultural peripheries of the metropolis are quite interesting, but much of that programming is filler material. One wonders why the regions do not fill in obvious gaps and give the all-Britain dimension to BBC programming that I find missing from time to time.

The hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) gave us some figures. I am told that only 3 per cent. of network programmes are made in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which have 17 per cent. of the audience. The BBC, in the Hatch report, recognised the need for change, but, as I understand from the Broadcasting for Scotland Campaign and the Broadcasting Campaign for Wales, it has not fulfilled the promises that have been made.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Wales specifically. I welcome the White Paper's section on the role of the national governors and national councils and the statement that they

"should make an input into setting the annual objectives for the BBC management as a whole".

Mr. Jessel: That matter is important, and it was raised earlier. Will my right hon. Friend enlarge a little on what he said? Does he say that guidance was given to the BBC that it should have a much larger proportion from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland than the 3 per cent. that was mentioned?

Dr. Howells: It is in the White Paper.

Mr. Jessel: That is for the future; I am talking about the past.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It is true that, as soon as the White Paper was published, the BBC announced plans. The situation is summed up by the Broadcasting Campaign for Wales, which states:

"The White Paper does accept the force of the argument for a less centralist BBC and reaffirms the importance of fairer representation of the nations and regions of the UK across all its services. In response to these criticisms, the BBC pledged to implement a new funding commitment to the regions"—

that is the £75 million that we have heard about—

"however, this plan is clearly limited as it still confirms central control of programming and resources and could lead to undermining the regional programming service itself."

I have a similar statement from the Broadcasting for Scotland Campaign.

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

I was talking about the appointment of national governors and the role that is to be given to them. There is no doubt that that role will enable them to assess whether the BBC is ensuring that a reasonable proportion of the United Kingdom output is made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Some people, including those in the Broadcasting Campaign for Wales, would like the governors' responsibility for regional policy to be stated in the charter. I see no great difficulty with that, but perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage will deal with the point. Such people then go on to talk about what is basically a quota system of production and resources.

I have enough experience of broadcasting to know that there are dangers in being too specific about programme hours. I do not wish to see quality sacrificed for quantity or anything else. Nevertheless, I hope that everything that can reasonably be done will be done to reassure the regions that they can play their full role. They are very concerned, as anyone who has read the representations of the campaigns for broadcasting in Wales and Scotland will know. There is deep distrust of the BBC's centralising tendency.

The BBC has made a substantial contribution to the success of the Welsh language fourth channel, S4C, in Wales, and long may it continue to do so. A specific commitment to that effect would be most welcome, although I believe that one is already incorporated in the legislation, so it is probably too much to expect it to be doubled up in the charter. But the idea could be considered.

The quality of the BBC's Welsh language output serves to highlight the need for more English programmes produced in Wales—although not, I hasten to add, at the expense of Welsh language programmes. No light entertainment in English, for instance, is made in Wales, and there are no soap operas or children's programmes for non-Welsh speakers. But there is a new policy in the making as a result of the White Paper, and it is to be hoped that that will remedy some of the defects in the regions.

Mr. Wigley: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that although there is a paucity or even a total lack of some programmes in the English language in Wales, other programmes are doubled up—sometimes sport, for example, local coverage or even politics? We need a more coherent approach, as has been achieved in the Welsh language through S4C. Can he foresee an organisation growing in the future that would enable programmes from Wales to be brought together to ensure a proper balance, at least, so that the English speakers in Wales could have the sort of balanced service that the Welsh speakers have now?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. We want a more balanced English output in Wales, corresponding to the scheduling style of S4C, the Welsh programme channel. If the new policy of increasing production in the regions envisaged in the White Paper is vigorously and successfully pursued, the deficiencies may be removed. I believe that if more were produced in the regions, that would pay the BBC handsomely, because it would secure audience loyalty in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

Mr. Flynn: A remarkable unanimity seems to be emerging on that issue among all the parties in Wales. We all agree with every word that the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) is saying. We are all keen to ensure that the English language communities, with their distinctive characteristics, are represented as well as the Welsh language communities. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the unique problem in Wales—that of the language communities—could be best tackled if the sums for each language were not the subject of dispute but were separately ring-fenced?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am always wary of ring-fencing. Clearly, a view has been taken that the commercial joint venture—the international dimension—should be ring-fenced and the public service element should be open to negotiation. There are dangers in ring-fencing within the public service broadcasting system that the BBC currently runs. I do not want to pursue the point, but it is clear that in Wales, for example, we should like to produce not only for our own consumption, but for the network.

There is a deeply felt need for good quality home-produced British programmes. As more channels become available, those programmes will stand out as different from the mass of international offerings, which I find boringly similar in style and content. Nevertheless I admit that those probably achieve the largest audiences now. But although the BBC's audiences may relish the foreign product today, I believe that in time the novelty will wear off and future audiences will want the home-grown product. Perhaps that belief is a matter of faith on my part; it is certainly the result of my great faith in the people who work in the broadcasting industry.

The Select Committee has produced a comprehensive report backed by a mass of useful evidence, and the White Paper is a well-considered document that provides a sound basis for the BBC's future. In my experience the BBC is a sensible organisation, and my plea is that it should be really sensitive to the critical voices, especially those in the regions, and should enlist the co-operation of the regions to fulfil its primary role—that of producing programmes for United Kingdom audiences.

7.15 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I listened with great care, and much agreement, to the speech by the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts). I only wish that he, as a Welsh Tory, would use the same logic that he applies to the centralised BBC when he talks about the centralised British state, and would argue for the devolution of power from Westminster to the nations of Scotland and Wales and to the other regions of England. If he applied the same logic to that subject as he does to the BBC, he would be forced to that conclusion.

I shall return later to what the right hon. Gentleman said about privatisation and the role of the BBC in the international arena, because I believe that both he and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) got it wrong about where the long-term future of the BBC lies.

Last September I had cable television installed in my house, and I shall start by asking a rather odd technical question. When I am at home I spend most of my viewing time watching BBC1 and BBC2, and my wife does the same when I am not at home, but we now receive those channels down the cable, not through the aerial. When my right hon. Friend cites figures about the penetration of cable, I wonder whether when I am watching BBC1 and BBC2 via the cable I am listed as a cable watcher or a BBC watcher. If I am not listed as a BBC watcher, all the figures for BBC viewing are being distorted—

Mr. Allen: My hon. Friend may be counted twice.

Mr. Maxton: Perhaps; anyway the figures would certainly be distorted, and that may make a big difference to the way in which we think about the future of the BBC over the next few years.

Being able to switch between 45 different channels has reinforced my view that the BBC is the best broadcasting company in the world. My trips to the United States, where I have also been able to watch innumerable channels in hotel rooms, and to other parts of the world where I have had the same experience, have done the same. Every time I come back with the reinforced view that the BBC is the best broadcaster in the world—not only the best public service broadcaster in the world but the best broadcaster across the whole range of entertainment.

Not only did the BBC pioneer the televising of sport but still, in terms of the commentary, the camera work and the programmes later in the evening showing highlights, the BBC coverage is better than anything else. I can now see golf from America every weekend on some channel or other, but the American programmes do not match up in any way to the BBC coverage of the British Open.

The BBC does the best comedy too. What better comedy programmes are there anywhere than those made by the BBC? The programme with the highest rating over Christmas was not a film or anything else but "One Foot in the Grave", a programme with which most people of my age, and yours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, identify. Certainly, our children recognise many of the characteristics of the leading character. Over 75 years, the BBC has built up a big reputation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I may be anticipating the hon Gentleman's argument, but does he not also agree that many people do not have the choice of cable or satellite, because they cannot afford it, and that the BBC offers quality and range at an equivalent cost of less than £8 a month, which ensures that people can have access to such programmes throughout their lifetime, no matter what their wealth?

Mr. Maxton: I agree. The licence is not merely the way in which we pay for the BBC; it is integral to BBC programming. It is part and parcel of it and not just something that we put up with. Without the licence, the nature of the BBC would have been very different during the past 75 years and its future would be different.

The BBC creates a range of high-quality programmes. All of us criticise it at some time or another because we think that it is being unfair to us politically. Perhaps I can add to the complaints that my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton listed about BBC radio. Sometimes, BBC Radio Scotland is over-nationalistic.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Maxton: That proves my point. The BBC achieves balance because the hon. Gentleman, who represents the Scottish National party, believes that BBC Radio Scotland is over-weighted towards the Labour party—no one believes that it is over-weighted to the Tory party, but that is another matter.

The BBC achieves balance and an in-depth analysis of current affairs that very few other organisations in the broadcasting world achieve. It is innovative—much of what has happened in television and radio broadcasting throughout the world has stemmed from the BBC. That is evident not merely from dramas, such as "The Singing Detective" but from comedy programmes such as "Steptoe and Son" and "Some Mothers do 'ave 'em"—a range of comedy programmes demonstrates that the BBC has been very innovative—to current affairs programmes such as "Newsnight" and "Panorama" and the sports coverage.

It is a matter of quality and not merely of being innovative. Even the fairly standard drama series, such as "Lovejoy" and "All Creatures Great and Small" are better produced, acted and directed than their equivalents on other terrestrial channels and those equivalents are better than the series that one sees on satellite or abroad.

Those comments show that I have a strong commitment to the BBC and I believe that the licence fee is integral to its quality. The BBC has been financed, both independently of Government—it has not been financed through taxation—and independently of commercial pressures, which has allowed it to develop its expertise and skills. Conservative Members claim that the market can solve all problems, but the BBC is an organisation that proves that, in certain circumstances, the market is best left well out of it. If the BBC had been forced to live in the marketplace, it would be a very different organisation and would not have created such high-quality and innovative programming.

Everyone has accepted that the licence fee is the way in which the BBC should be, and will be, funded during its next period. I am a little worried that no one has pointed out that we ought to consider how those of us who can afford to pay more for the licence fee can do so, so that the BBC has a bigger income. Also, those who cannot afford to pay a full licence fee should be able to pay less. I do not know how we can do it, but we should think about it.

We also ought to consider how to extend the licence—we tend to forget that it is a broadcasting and not a television licence. We have not got the balance right for hotels and should reconsider the amount that hotel chains pay for their televisions, if every room has a set and people are using them all the time.

I listen to radio only when I am in my car and yet I do not have to pay for a licence to have a radio in my car or in my wife's or my son's car—I have three radios, people are listening to them and I pay nothing for that, which is wrong. We must study licensing, but it should remain the basic way in which the service is funded.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should have adopted the recommendation

[Mr. Fabricant]

in the Select Committee on National Heritage report, that there should be a higher licence fee for homes with two or more television sets?

Mr. Maxton: Yes, they should. I admitted in that Committee that we have four televisions in our house and pay for only one licence—the same as any pensioner. The Government and the licensing authority have said that it is not technologically possible to tell how many televisions are in one house, but it ought to be possible in the near future, and we should consider whether we should pay more for a licence if we have more than one television set. That would help to fund the BBC.

The BBC is not perfect. I am one of its strongest supporters, but I have one major criticism, which has already been voiced. By the way, I congratulate the Broadcasting for Scotland Campaign on the way in which it managed to get its brief to every hon. Member that it thought might speak tonight and on the fact that it has been so widely used. For my constituents in Scotland, however, the BBC often seems very London-based. To put it in the most simple terms, if it were raining and blowing a gale in London, one would think from watching the weather forecast after the main news that the whole of the United Kingdom was suffering bad weather, although we might be having a heat-wave in Glasgow—I admit that it is often the other way round. The weather forecast leaves the impression that all Britain is having an awful day, so people everywhere should wear their raincoats.

All surveys of the BBC show that the further away from London one gets, the lower the regard for its services, and the more its popularity declines. In Scotland, the BBC is nothing like as popular as it is in the south-east. The Broadcasting for Scotland Campaign has made it clear that it is not some form of Scottish independence movement—far from it. We are arguing for a strong British Broadcasting Corporation, but for the devolution of some of its functions to other parts of the United Kingdom. That case matches the case that I would argue for devolution for Westminster. Devolving some of the BBC's functions and powers from its headquarters in London to the regions would strengthen the BBC, just as it would strengthen the United Kingdom if this place gave some of its powers to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom.

More importantly from our point of view, too much of the talent in Scotland, Wales and the regions of England is sucked to London because the BBC over-centralises its production here. We have a great deal of talent in Scotland and the fact that the BBC's income in Scotland has been cut has meant that we are losing that talent in a flow to London. Some people will go anyway because they want to work in London as they think that it is the centre. Others do not. They want to stay and work in Scotland, but find that they cannot do so.

The idea that the BBC provides a cultural subsidy in the regions—I cannot remember the exact term—has proved very true in Scotland. It allows musicians to work in an orchestra in Glasgow, provides work for other musicians and for actors, which keeps the theatre alive in Scotland, and provides work for technicians, who sometimes work for STV, for private companies and for the BBC. None of them would be there but for the BBC's presence in Scotland.

If the money available to BBC Scotland is reduced below a certain critical amount, it will become no more than a local news station, but BBC Scotland is much more than that; it already has a proud record of producing high-quality programmes. It may interest hon. Members to know that the most popular BBC2 comedy over Christmas was "Rab C. Nesbitt", with its Glaswegian language and humour. I confess that I do not like it much—it represents a type of Glaswegian to whom I do not readily relate. Still, in the south of England it was the most popular comedy.

It is most important that the BBC continues to expand its output of such high-quality projects, which sustain the cultural life of Scotland. More importantly, they allow people in the south of England to see that there are other parts of the United Kingdom beyond their own little areas. When they go on holiday, they go to France or Spain—not to Scotland, or certainly not in sufficient numbers.

As for the BBC's future after the next 10 years of the charter, I believe that my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton tried to look too far down the road, given the speed of technological change. I disagreed with the right hon. Member for Conwy about the BBC's international role. What the BBC can best sell abroad, to the United States and countries such as India, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, are programmes that it has already made for the domestic market. It is not a matter of making new programmes to sell. What makes the BBC so different from the public service broadcasters in the United States is its library of material—newsreels, old programmes and so on—which is ready to be sold to feed the voracious appetite which the cable channels will have for programmes, thereby making enormous sums of money—

Sir Peter Lloyd: There seems to a small contradiction in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He is not happy that programmes should be made for Scotland in the south of England, but he thinks that the same programmes will be received with enormous enthusiasm even further away in India. I do not entirely disagree—although there will be pressure, if the BBC succeeds, to make at least some of the programmes broadcast to Asia in Asia. However, there is a definite conflict between what he said about Scotland and the need for local production and his ensuing remarks.

Mr. Maxton: That may be so, but I believe that the largest English-speaking country in the world is India, so there is an enormous audience there. Throughout the world there will be a huge viewing audience for BBC programmes. That perceptive audience is going to want high-quality programmes. English is spoken in a great many countries, and the BBC, more than any other company, provides those countries with programmes. There is a huge market to be tapped.

Mr. Fabricant: While I agree with the hon. Gentleman's general sentiments, I just wonder whether "Rab C. Nesbitt" would be understood in Bombay.

Mr. Maxton: Perhaps not, but as the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) will confirm, there are millions of people of Scottish origin, forced out of Scotland by

economic circumstances, living in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, and they will look forward to seeing the programme on cable television.

Mr. Welsh: The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has misinterpreted the hon. Gentleman. What the hon. Gentleman really means is that we in Scotland want to go beyond Rab C. Nesbitt", good though it is. Scotland has much more potential and talent to offer the wider world. That is the positive note to strike.

Mr. Maxton: It is certainly right that Scottish talent should be used to make programmes—even films of Shakespeare's plays, for instance. When the Scottish national orchestra puts on a concert in Glasgow it does not necessarily play Scottish music, so why should BBC Scotland be limited to making programmes about Scotland?

I also differ from my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton in that I have no objection to a publicly owned company making money which can then be used for the benefit of those who truly own public companies: the British public. Just because the BBC can make money abroad selling programmes does not mean that it has to be privatised. Let us keep it in the public sector and use the money that it makes abroad to make better programmes and to keep making high-quality programmes—without undue commercial pressure arising from the fact that it can make and sell good programmes abroad. With a bit of luck, making money in that way might enable the BBC to reduce the licence fee. Surely that is the right way forward.

I hope that the Government will pay heed to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton said about BT. It is enormously inconvenient for our constituents when their pavements are dug up unnecessarily; certainly, they want cable, but they do not want the streets dug up to lay down more cable when BT already has cables in place. They resent that—they would rather not have it done.

More particularly, it should be noted that BT is the biggest British technological company. Almost every other cable company is either directly American-owned or a wholly owned subsidiary of an American company. Do we really want to hand over our telephone, television and computer interactive systems to American companies when we have a British company that could do the job?

I disagree, however, with my right hon. Friend's argument that the BBC should work with BT as joint private companies. There is an alternative, although it is not always popular to state it in the Labour party these days. Instead of privatising the BBC and joining it to the privatised BT, perhaps, because it is so important to the future of the nation, the Labour party should seriously consider taking BT back into some form of public ownership. That would give us a publicly owned BBC working with a publicly owned BT with a monopoly of broadcasting cable. The resulting company should be allowed to operate in the world markets as a private company.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover) *rose—*

Mr. Maxton: After the attacks that the hon. Gentleman made on my late friend John Smith, I shall never give way to him in this House, because his conduct in that regard was disgraceful. Anyway, I had finished my speech.

7.38 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Until the end of the speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), I found quite a lot with which I could agree. Then the mask slipped and the real Labour party revealed itself. Conservative central office, with which I used to have some connection, will doubtless be taking down the hon. Gentleman's words at this moment.

Mr. Maxton: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will note that I am speaking from the Back Benches.

Sir Norman Fowler: I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will stay exactly where he is, probably in all circumstances. On a more serious note, I agreed with much of what he said about the quality of the BBC.

I shall be brief because many hon. Friends still wish to speak and one or two speeches have been delivered at a leisurely pace. Matters are not made easier when those who make such speeches, particularly the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, then disappear.

First, I declare an interest. I have been a member of the National Union of Journalists for more than 30 years. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House who act as freelance writers are also members of that union. I am also the non-executive chairman of Midland Independent Newspapers, but I am one of the few ex-members of the Cabinet and shadow Cabinet who do not have their own BBC programme. I make no complaint about that and it is certainly not a job application.

Almost 30 years ago, as a journalist I covered the middle east war on the Arab side of the conflict. I remember the beginning of that war in Beirut. Authoritative news was hard to come by. Censors and phone taps prevented news from getting in or out, and propaganda was all-pervasive. The scene that sticks in my memory is that of two American journalists outside our hotel trying to tune in their radio so that they could hear what was happening outside the country. Of course, the service that they were trying to pick up was the BBC world service.

The position has changed since then. We saw the great advances that a channel like CNN made during the Gulf war. For all that, one thing has remained constant: the BBC still maintains an international and national reputation for the quality and objectivity of its news. I emphasise that I am talking about news, not the so-called prestige programmes like "Today" and "Panorama", or the prestige interviewers like the brothers Dimbleby or even Mr. Paxman, who, I see today, has been voted the most offensive interviewer in the country; personally, I think that that is just a public relations attempt on his part. I am certainly not talking about high-class chat shows where small groups of like-minded souls sit around a microphone filling in that awkward hour between 9 and 10 o'clock on a Monday morning. What I am really talking about is the serious business of gathering, evaluating and broadcasting news so that it is put to the public, who can then be properly informed. The work is done by reporters and correspondents on the ground, not interviewers safely anchored in their studios.

We are constantly told, and have been constantly told in this debate, about the media revolution through which we are living, the vast new horizons that stretch before us, and all those other analogies and metaphors that are

[Sir Norman Fowler]

used. Hon. Members on the Front Benches have used those terms this afternoon and the Select Committee said succinctly that the media revolution was nigh. The Government put the point more prosaically, although it was the same point, in their White Paper.

The irony is that, although the opportunity to deliver more programmes obviously exists, it by no means follows that we shall see more news organisations or, for that matter, better news. We may have television, cable and programmes transmitted down the phone line, but that could simply lead to the prospect of more soaps, old films, game shows and talk shows. The media revolution alone does not guarantee good news programmes. It does not guarantee well-reported news that is objectively presented either on television or by any other medium.

The man in the street or on the train—some of us on the Conservative side still like travelling by train—may not see the benefits of those policies. The reasons for that are clear. First and foremost, news gathering is an expensive undertaking and the media revolution does not alter that. It is cheaper to slap someone in front of a microphone and take questions than to keep a staff of reporters ready to dig into issues of concern. Views are free, whereas gathering news costs money. The danger is that, if television is viewed purely as a balance sheet operation, news is relegated so that it does not interrupt the films or series.

The position might be easier to bear if trends in the national press were more encouraging. I shall leave others to speak about the regional press, where, as one would expect, I would argue that standards are different and better; but in the national press there has been an unmistakeable trend towards the ideological. I refer here to the so-called "quality papers", the broadsheets, rather than the so-called "tabloid press". As those papers pursue their causes, the divisions between the editorial leader columns of views and the columns of news become increasingly blurred. Some papers take strident views on issues such as Europe, which spill over into their news columns. Their leaders, articles, columnists and news reports all point the same way. The reporter gets to know the story that is required and the story that is not. He knows what will lead the paper and what will appear on page 7.

For those reasons, I applaud the news coverage of the BBC. The extent of its news service is unsurpassed and the standards at which its reporters aim are right. Its reporting is good and lively but fair. The BBC stars—I choose people with whom I rarely have professional dealings—are reporters like Martin Bell, Kate Adie and John Simpson. They are the standard bearers of the BBC. I am a strong admirer of BBC news reporting standards.

The House may recall that I was a Cabinet Minister for 11 years and at Conservative central office for another two. I am quick on the uptake and recognise that my view is not necessarily held by all my colleagues. As a close observer of two Prime Ministers, I cannot remember the cry, "God bless the BBC" coming too often to their lips; indeed, I cannot remember it ever coming to their lips. My recollections of the Wilson years are exactly the same: I do not remember Harold Wilson having a better view of the BBC in action when he was Prime Minister. I am afraid that the trouble with Ministers—shadow Ministers are just as guilty—is that they want their views to be publicly related, not reported. No self-respecting media organisation will do that; nor should it. Such organisations should make a judgment on the true position. What politicians can rightly expect is that reports should be balanced and fair, and the BBC comes closer to achieving that aim than any other media organisation that I know.

Of course, mistakes are made. The hour-by-hour demand for news makes a reporter's job more difficult than it was 10 or 20 years ago. Organisations like the BBC should have the maturity to correct stories when they are wrong. In my experience, it most often does that and is much better at doing so than my old newspaper, *The Times*, which used to have a reputation for pursuing that kind of correctness. I remember the famous—or perhaps infamous—story in 1992 about the Prime Minister entitled,

"Can Major take the strain?"

in which *The Times* tried to examine the state of his mind and said:

"Sarah Hogg, the . . . head of the . . . policy unit . . . has two young children and likes to get home to see them."

The children were aged 19 and 22, so I imagine that they would have been surprised if their mother went back to see them. The report also said:

"Mr. Major leads a surprisingly solitary life at Downing Street. His temporary flat in Admiralty Arch was small and poky."

Having visited that small and poky flat in Admiralty house, I must say that I know that income standards under Mr. Murdoch have undoubtedly improved on *The Times* since my day, but I did not realise that it regarded that rather palatial accommodation as a small and poky flat.

In spite of the complete absurdity of that story, *The Times* refused to correct it, although it was self-evidently wrong. What has been good about the BBC is that, when it has got it wrong, it has tried to put those things right. I wish that other parts of the media would follow its example.

That brings me to my second and last argument about the BBC and the media. There is an enticing theory about the media—that the great technological revolution means that national boundaries no longer exist, that we are an international marketplace. Michael Green of Carlton Television says it most directly:

"The present system of regulating media ownership in Britain serves only one useful purpose: to encourage an international vision of our independent broadcasting industry as a cottage concern—charming little English thatched villages in a worldwide industry that is today dominated by skyscrapers. I want some of those skyscrapers to be ours".

It is all moving stuff.

I am in favour of British media organisations seeking international markets—I support the BBC in the efforts that it will obviously make—but I am in favour of it, provided we recognise where the first duty of a media company in this country lies.

In a democracy, broadcasting organisations and newspapers have a specific importance and a specific influence. They are not like simple consumer products; the media have a power for good or for evil. Therefore I assert that a media company's first duty is to its own audience, be that audience national or local. The person who comes first is the domestic customer—the listener, the viewer.

Different countries have different traditions and different strengths. That, after all, is what much of the European debate is about. We do not want British

television to be turned into ever more mid-Atlantic flaff. That is not in the interests of this country. We do not want BBC programme making to be dominated by the type of market that those programmes may obtain overseas.

Mr. Maxton: In support of that, I do not think that the audience that it will sell to abroad want it either. They want the British-based, British programme.

Sir Norman Fowler: I agree.

Michael Grade of Channel 4 will probably be alarmed to hear that I agree with him, but I agree with a great deal that he said in his article in the *Evening Standard* last night. What matters is what is being done for the consumer here. So, in pressing their case, people such as Michael Green must answer questions for themselves. They must answer the question, has Carlton improved television in London? They must answer the question, has Carlton, by taking over Central Television, a commitment to a city such as Birmingham? To phrase it as gently as I can, I would say that the jury is still out on both those questions.

I am aware that some of the developments in television in the past years that I would at least question have taken place under the current Government. I draw attention to the fact that we all have skeletons in our media cupboard. The Labour party has the skeleton of being opposed to the introduction of commercial television and leaving the BBC as a monopoly. If the truth is known, all Governments have a great deal to be modest about in their handling of the media, and it would be wise for us all to accept that.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State now has an opportunity. We have, I believe, reached a satisfactory conclusion on the BBC. We have come off the idea of pay-as-you-watch television as the way of financing the corporation, and not a moment too soon. We are committed to the licence fee. I have to say to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that that licence fee provides more than £1.5 billion a year for the corporation. That is not a bad financial base, by most commercial standards, for any organisation to be based on. Doubtless, improvements can be made, but I hope that, above all, the structure will now be allowed to settle.

I must remind my hon. Friend the Minister—I should like him to discuss the subject when he replies to the debate—that in other areas of the media the position is anything other than settled. The review of the rules governing cross-media ownership appears likely to rival "The Mousetrap" for its length of run, yet no one can be remotely happy with the present position. I do not pretend that the decisions for the Government are easy, but I would be very cautious about some of the opinions that have been expressed, which are aimed simply at making the bigger media organisations even bigger and more powerful. I would be especially cautious about that, given the lack of performance so far, with some of those organisations wishing to grow.

It is beyond dispute that some conclusion from the Government on the cross-media ownership debate needs to be reached. It was described as an urgent matter for discussion and decision in the House about 12 months ago. I believe that nothing has happened since then. I wait to hear my hon. Friend the Minister's reply; I know that he will guide us on what the Government have in mind.

I welcome the fact that, if nothing else, we appear to be settling the process of the BBC debate. I believe that the BBC has high standards, and that those standards are recognised throughout the world. I expect nothing more from it than that it seek to maintain those high standards, and I look forward to resuming the normal political hostilities with the BBC at the earliest opportunity.

7.56 pm

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): I was interested when the former Secretary of State for National Heritage, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), quoted from Milton. It nudged a memory bank. One of my earliest memories is of listening, as a little boy, to a radio programme about the life and work of Milton. I became an immediate fan of Milton, and also of the BBC. I therefore declare an interest—I am a fan.

I congratulate the present Secretary of State for National Heritage on his report. It is superb. I welcome it, as I am sure Labour Front-Bench Members do, with minor reservations here and there. I did not expect it, and I congratulate the Minister. I was surprised by the parallels between the Government report and the report of the Select Committee on National Heritage. Both are entitled, "The Future of the BBC". As a member of that Select Committee, I declare an interest.

If I may crave the indulgence of the House, I wish to show the parallels between the two reports. As the BBC's present royal charter, granted in 1981, expires at the end of 1996, the Government and the Select Committee on National Heritage regarded that event as a rare opportunity to consider the role, objects, organisation and funding of the BBC in the years ahead, and both the Government and the Select Committee published consultation documents and reports entitled "The Future of the BBC".

The National Heritage Select Committee's inquiry noted that the Broadcasting Act 1990 created a new statutory framework for commercial television and radio, for local cable and satellite services, with the aim of increasing the number of services and choices for audiences. In its report it said that, against that background, the role, functions and organisation of the BBC were bound to change too in the near future.

In its inquiry, the Committee invited interested organisations to submit their opinions, and received 170 such submissions. It also held 14 sessions, taking oral evidence from 40 separate groups of witnesses. It noted that in the BBC 1981 royal charter there were three terrestrial channels, with a fourth due to transmit in November 1982.

Our Committee also noted that the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984 was passed in anticipation of developments in cable and satellite broadcasting. The speed of change in that medium necessitated further legislation in 1990. There is no doubt that those rapid changes transformed the broadcasting scene from that which had existed in 1981.

The nature of broadcasting has been significantly changed by the development of cable and satellite. By the end of 1993, the Independent Television Commission had issued licences for more than 120 cable and satellite programme channels. Our Committee was told by the director general of Cable TV Associations that the system was currently capable of carrying 50 television channels

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and 30 radio channels. It is a rapidly changing scene. The industry had licence obligations to feed 14 million homes—70 per cent. of the population—by 1998.

Four years ago, the satellite channel, BSkyB, doubled the number of television channels for the United Kingdom audience. According to BSkyB, in July 1993 nearly one in five homes had a dish or was connected to cable, which meant that nearly 10 million people were able to watch cable-satellite programmes. The BBC forecasts that by the year 2000, 50 per cent. of the population will have access to satellite and cable services.

With all that new technology, the BBC, too, must change and adapt. For all its good work, the BBC can never expect or hope to be in the same position in the future as it is now, as viewing share will force it to come under increasing pressure because of the huge potential expansion of choice. The BBC could become a minority service provider along the lines of public service television in the USA. I hope that it does not, but if it did, it would then be difficult to justify the retention of a licence fee, paid by the overwhelming majority of viewers who would not be watching a great deal of BBC television.

As regards the licence fee, the Committee gave a great deal of thought as to the best way of funding the BBC. It did not consider that the licence fee was an attractive method of funding. It is a regressive tax that bears heavily on those least able to pay. Collection is expensive and, in addition, the amount of evasion is considerable. The BBC estimated that 1.7 million people evaded payment in 1991-92, with the resultant loss of £130 million of income. A further £35 million was lost from those in households with colour televisions who buy the cheaper black and white licence. That meant that, in 1991-92, the BBC had to forgo £257.5 million of potential income.

The Committee therefore considered alternative ways of funding the BBC. It considered allowing advertising on the BBC, but the ITC thought that that would imperil the future independence of Channel 4 and severely restrict the continuing development of the satellite and cable industry. Giving the BBC access to advertising revenue would take at least between £300 million and £400 million from the ITV channels. Channel 4 stated that the introduction of advertising on the BBC would mean the end of the channel. Granada said that it would have a disastrous effect on it.

In the light of the evidence, the Committee rejected the idea of making the BBC rely on direct advertising. The second option considered by the Committee was sponsorship, but it came to the conclusion that that could do no more than supplement the BBC's main source of revenue. The Committee was concerned, however, about the transmission of tobacco-sponsored events. It noted with satisfaction the BBC's decision not to broadcast future events that were sponsored by tobacco companies.

After considering all the options for funding the BBC, the Committee came to the conclusion, with great reluctance, that the present flat-rate licence system met with the least number of objections. The Committee also believed that the BBC should be permitted to maintain its radio services and that those services should not contain advertising. It also considered, however, that if the BBC wished to advertise under its new charter, it should have a right to make an application to Parliament for the appropriate changes.

The BBC has also experienced an unprecedented growth in and success of programmes provided by world service radio. The service has a regular audience of 124 million people, who listen at least once a week, and it provides truth to those living under dictatorships.

The Committee published its findings on 2 December 1993 and came to the conclusion that the BBC's charter should be renewed for 10 years. No doubt after studying the Select Committee's recommendations, the Secretary of State published his White Paper on the future of the BBC in July 1994. I welcome the general thrust of that paper and I believe that the Secretary of State has taken note of a good proportion of the Select Committee's report.

I welcome most of the conclusions in the White Paper. I shall mention some of them to highlight the parallels between that paper and the Select Committee's report. The Government believe that the BBC should continue to be the United Kingdom's main public broadcaster. I completely agree. They believe that the BBC should be able to evolve into an international, multi-media enterprise, building on its present commercial services for audiences in this country and overseas. The Government believe that the BBC should continue to broadcast a wide range of radio and television programmes for people with different tastes and of all ages. They also believe that world service radio should continue and that the BBC should develop further world service television.

The Government believe that the BBC should extend its commercial activities at home and abroad and that it should exploit its assets and generate income from its programmes as well as publishing magazines, books, videos and audio cassettes. They believe that it should plan for joint ventures with commercial companies around the world. Finally, the Government believe that the BBC should keep its licence fee as the main source of income for public services for at least five years.

I welcome the aims and objectives of the Government's White Paper. In the next 10 to 15 years, the number of broadcasting services of all kinds will increase and evolve into multi-media services, using different means of distributing a wide range of materials. Through the choices that they make in selecting services, it will be the British public who ultimately determine the standards of audio-visual material available in the United Kingdom in the next century.

I believe that the Secretary of State has listened to the arguments put forward by the Select Committee—incidentally, it is an all-party Committee and the report was agreed unanimously by it. The Government have put forward proposals to assist the BBC to survive and compete as a public broadcasting authority in the next century. I welcome their report.

8.6 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan), who makes a most notable contribution to the work of the Select Committee on National Heritage.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we worked together on our report on the BBC, which was completed in December 1993. As he and others have said, a large part of what we

recommended was accepted and adopted by the Government in the White Paper published in May last year.

As BT has been mentioned several times, I declare a quasi interest as it has sponsored charity concerts in which I have performed on the piano in aid of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Although I was unpaid, what took place was sufficient to give me a favourable bias towards BT.

Tonight we are considering the BBC. The first thing that must be said about it is the absolutely outstanding quality of a large proportion of what it produces. It has high standards of excellence in its output of news, features and drama, among other things. I am particularly proud that "Middlemarch", which was mentioned by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), was produced by Dr. Louis Marks, my constituent and my near neighbour at Hampton Court Green. A great many other people too took part in that magnificent production, which continues to redound enormously to the credit of the BBC.

The BBC's achievements in the arts are generally superb. Last night, on Radio 3, I heard the live relay of "Cosi fan tutte" from Covent Garden. It was beautifully done and beautifully broadcast.

Reference has been made already to the several BBC symphony orchestras. The Proms are a tremendous national asset; they are a great cultural festival and a great British festival and represent something that the BBC does for Britain of which we should all be enormously proud.

Britain is one of the most musical nations in the world and I believe that we should build on our strengths. It is not for nothing that it is called the British Broadcasting Corporation. It ought constantly to project what is British and what is best about Britain. I agree with an hon. Member who said earlier that the growth in the use of the English language worldwide is now unstoppable. Hardly anyone mentions Esperanto any more, and there is enormous export potential for film and other BBC products in future all over the world where the English language is increasingly used.

We should have more Gilbert and Sullivan, particularly the Lord High Executioner's song from the Mikado that is called,

"I've got a little list—I've got a little list"

with its verse which refers to

"the idiot who praises, with enthusiastic tone,
all centuries but this one, and all countries but his own."

The White Paper says that the BBC should promote the British side. The Secretary of State, who has just come in, is sitting not on the Front Bench but below the Gangway. I remind him that paragraph 2.6 of the White Paper says that the objectives of the BBC should include

"reflecting the national identity of the United Kingdom. The BBC should broadcast events of national importance. It should ensure that the rich cultural heritage of all parts of the United Kingdom is represented in its programmes and is available throughout the nation."

There have been many interventions about the proportion of Scottish broadcasts produced in Scotland and Welsh broadcasts produced in Wales, but it seems to me that there is something slightly synthetic about how those interventions and interruptions have been organised.

I received a paper from the BBC this week, that, in a passage headed,

"More Money for the Regions"

states:

"The BBC has been increasing the programming output of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions. Under its new regional policy, launched in spring 1994"—

that was between the Select Committee report and the publication of the White Paper—

"it plans to double the amount of drama made in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in 1997; double light entertainment output from the regions within four years; more than double music and arts production in the regions over the same period; triple the amount of Continuing Education and Schools programmes produced in the regions by 1996-1997; and quadruple the proportion of children's programming made outside London."

As the complaint was that only 3 per cent. of programmes were produced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to go on the national network, if one multiplied that by three or four, the percentage would be not far short of the proportion of the population of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to that of the United Kingdom.

It cannot be done all at once. The BBC will have to make sure that it has staff who are living in the right place. Some of them will not want to move house. Their children will be at a particular local school or their wives will be used to having their hair done at a particular place. Not everyone moves quickly and easily, but the BBC is clearly taking a big step in that direction. Those who go on and on about it seem to be asking for something that is being done already.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) would do me the courtesy of ceasing to distract my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's attention from my speech, because my remarks are addressed to my right hon. Friend through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The White Paper provides for the charter being renewed for 10 years from 1996 to 2006. That has been welcomed enthusiastically by the whole House. I agree with those who have said that the 10 years from 1996 to 2006 might possibly produce the last charter for the BBC in its present form. Deep changes are taking place and it will be difficult to sustain the charter after 2006, despite the tremendously high standard of much of the output.

Those changes include a falling share of the market. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to a fall from 48 per cent. to 42 per cent. in the past three and a quarter years. There have been numerous technical changes. In about 10 to 15 years' time it will be possible for people to dial on their telephones to get just about any video programme that they want, and have the costs put on their telephone bill. People will get used to that and it will influence their attitude to the payment of a licence fee of £80, £100, or £120 a year. They will be used to paying as they go along and will not want to pay a set amount as they have been willing to do in the past.

The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton said that the licence fee tends to fall most heavily on those least able to pay. The BBC has a bee in its bonnet about the concept of the licence fee. The concept of a licence fee is almost a traditional sacred cow within the BBC. One can understand the historic reasons for that. It is partly that the BBC wants a direct relationship with its

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

viewers and listeners and believes that that buttresses its independence and neutrality, but I do not believe that the system can survive the next 10 or 15 years.

It is not just that after that time people will have got used to paying as they go for other programmes and wonder why that does not apply to BBC programmes, nor is it just that, on present trends, some 80 per cent. of the listening public will be listening to other channels. There is also a serious problem with licence evasion.

The Select Committee was told that the evasion rate was about 7.5 per cent. in 1993, despite the strenuous use of detector vans to catch television licence evaders. The proportion has oscillated since then, but has not changed substantially. In 1993, about 1 per cent. of those 7.5 per cent. were caught and brought to justice. The detector vans went round by day, which is cheaper than by night because the people in the vans do not have to be paid overtime.

Of the 1 per cent. who were caught watching their television sets without a licence, almost three quarters were women, including a large proportion of young mothers—largely single-parent families—or women pensioners. It is a demographic fact that women live for six years longer than men, so far more female pensioners than male pensioners will be home in the daytime.

Many of those women live alone. Some are at home all day and are not well off financially, whether they are pensioners or young mothers. Some, but not all, are in poverty. People in that position are likely to pay first for those services which might be cut off, whether it is their electricity bill, their gas bill, their telephone bill or their water bill. Those bills are civil debt. They are likely to leave payment of their television licences until last, perhaps intending to pay later and hoping that they will not get caught in the meantime.

Anyone who gets caught not paying the licence fee—which is not a civil debt—has committed a criminal offence and can then be surprised to find that he or she has a criminal record. The only parallel is the annual car tax, which it is also a criminal offence not to pay. If we decriminalised the licence system, the evasion rate could leap from 7 or 8 per cent. to anything between 10 or 20 per cent. That would make the licence system completely unworkable from the BBC's point of view as it would be impossible to convince the public to accept such a high evasion rate. The Select Committee recommended that it should not be decriminalised. However, it is not an ideal system and we were not happy about it.

I am rather surprised that so many right hon. and hon. Members have sounded positive about the licence system. The Committee recommended—it is endorsed in the White Paper—that the licence system should continue until it becomes technically possible to disconnect licence evaders in the same way as it is now technically possible to disconnect services when people do not pay their telephone, gas, electricity or water bills. However, it will be quite a few years before that is technically feasible. It is a race against time as to whether the licence system can survive until then.

I do not believe that the licence system makes the BBC quite as impartial as it thinks. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who is a former party chairman, said that the BBC was balanced and fair. I am quite satisfied that the BBC tries to be fair in presenting the views of the political parties, especially during general election campaigns. That is a BBC tradition and it is scrupulous in adopting a non-biased approach to the political parties.

However, I do not think that the BBC is completely impartial on contentious issues in other respects. For example, BBC programmers tend to invite on to quiz programmes—especially radio quiz programmes—a disproportionate number of extremists from both of the main parties because it makes for a more exciting broadcast. Those with more moderate views in either main political party tend to be left out. I will not mention any names; we can all think of the types of people I mean. In doing that, the BBC is effectively creating a bias towards the Liberal party because it is depicting both of the main parties in a way that is unlikely to appeal to floating voters. I think that we must watch that trend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) intervened earlier in the debate and, although he did not actually mention Europe, I could tell that that was what he meant as I sympathise with his views. There is a politically correct point of view on the subject of Europe, and the hierarchies within all three political parties and the nationalist parties tend to have a positive attitude about the European Union. However, that politically correct standpoint is not shared by half the people of the country and that proportion is tending to increase. On this question the BBC must be careful to be more impartial.

I turn to the arts. I praised BBC Radio 3 fulsomely at the outset of my speech. However, under the regime of Sir William Glock, Hans Keller and others in the 1960s and 1970s, the BBC music department was allowed to let rip virtually uncontrolled. Sir William and Mr. Keller surrounded themselves with staff in the BBC music department who shared their bias towards the inter-war Vienna 12-tone school of music and composers such as Berg, Schoenberg and Webern. As a result, there were appalling ping-pong noises on Radio 3 for years on end and an entire generation of young British listeners were put off contemporary music. We are still suffering the consequences of that.

That was a terrible thing for the governors to do. I shall send a copy of this extract of my speech to the chairman of governors and I shall seek his assurance that he will establish a mechanism within the BBC to ensure that no such disaster ever occurs again.

I end where I began by praising the BBC. We believe in the set-up and we have endorsed and encouraged it. However, I do not believe that the charter will be renewed in 2006 and it will certainly not be renewed in 2016. We must be conscious of the decisions which were made last year and this year which will be applied next year. However, we must also look to the BBC's long-term future. That is what the White Paper and the Secretary of State have begun to do.

8.25 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): All hon. Members, at least on Opposition Benches listened with rapt attention to that very interesting contribution from the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel). I was struck by what he said about music. It is interesting to read the BBC report of 1922—which I am sure that all hon. Members refer to regularly—in which Lord Reith said that if the country was exposed to chamber music everyone would enjoy it and it would become a popular musical form.

Outrageous as that claim seemed at the time, it came close to being realised during the war. There was a limited range of broadcasts on the radio and people from all sections of society developed a deep appreciation, understanding and knowledge of music. It is sad that our children now hear a much more limited range of music and that that rich experience is denied to them.

You will be delighted to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker—as will the House—that I have abandoned my carefully prepared speech because the points that I wanted to make about BBC regional broadcasting have been made far more eloquently by the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) and other hon. Members. I agree with all of the points that they have made on that subject. It may have something to do with the fact that certain briefings came into our hands at the same time.

However, I claim the right to make a few more points. I have the rare distinction, which I prize immensely, of having once chaired the Broadcasting Council for Wales for a record period—it was a record then and I am sure that it will remain for all time. I chaired the Broadcasting Council for Wales for 15 minutes, having served on it for five years.

I resigned after 15 minutes because my appointment coincided with the Conservative Government's announcement that they would not go ahead with the establishment of a separate Welsh language channel. That announcement was contrary to all that I had worked for in broadcasting in Wales for the previous decade within my party. Happily, the Government reversed that decision—not because I resigned, but due to events involving other parties.

I am happy to look back at that period and to record that the S4C Welsh language channel has been a sumptuous success and has exceeded all of our expectations. It has been successful not just in broadcasting terms or in its important contribution to the Welsh language, but it has contributed enormously to the Welsh economy and the creativity of our young people. Young people have had the opportunity to learn skills both in front of and behind the camera and the microphone. Their talents, skills and creativity have been allowed to blossom. The channel has proved an enormous asset to Wales and long may it continue to serve Wales in its current form.

There have always been difficulties with Welsh broadcasting. They date back to the 1920s when Wales had to compete with the west of England for broadcasting time and allocation of money. I am sad to say that that is still happening today. There is no clear distinction between the moneys for English language and Welsh language broadcasting. There should be some ring fencing to get rid of some of the tension and the futile waste of energy between those two groups.

I make a plea, too, for English language broadcasting, because the constituency that I represent, like many other areas in Wales, has a robust, distinctive and unique community—a very tough one. Although I live in the heart of my constituency, within two miles of my home, the accent and the culture changes. Risca is a valley community. If one moves throughout Wales, one finds an infinite variety of groups of people who find it difficult to express their personality through broadcasting.

On the BBC world service, sadly there was not the mea culpa that I had asked for from Ministers. It is a sad story. Twelve years ago, in the House and outside, many voices were clamouring that we must build on the world reputation of BBC world radio. At that time, if a BBC world television service had been launched, the cost, I am informed, would have been half the price that we paid to clean Victoria Tower. It was a minute amount. We could have gained. It was a vacuum out there. We could have gained the world reputation that has been stolen from us by lesser terrestrial stations.

We must fight every inch of the way to restore that now. We might never reach the pre-eminent position that really was ours for the taking and which was denied to this country by ideology, by the belief that it had to be a commercial channel, and that it had to be on the one basis only. It would have been a magnificent investment for our countries and for the languages of our nations. The prized people on whom I look back—from the days when I had something to do with the BBC—are people like Charles Curran, a gifted-director general who, I believe, spoke Irish, and Alasdair Milne, a man in a lesser position but who also spoke a Celtic language—Gaelic. We can look with some pride at the achievements of broadcasters in the nations of Britain in promoting and giving us an opportunity to use all the beautiful languages of this island—English and others as well.

The BBC has a unique role for all of us. It has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House that we must keep it out of the hands of the idealogues. There have been threats from all sides. Everyone will want to move in and control and run it. I believe that the BBC is unique to all our lives. It has made a great contribution to all of us. In the war, the radio was our channel for information. It was our friend, our companion, our teacher, until television arrived as well. Other channels are coming in and producing programmes of great quality, but the BBC has a special place within the heart of the nation.

A Hungarian writer talked about language and said that the nation lives within her language. It is a striking image of a nation living in a place, and the place was the language. We can all say—the people who live in these islands—that, to us, the nation resides not in the great institutions of state, not in the Church or royalty, but within the BBC. All the languages of these islands of ours owe a great debt of gratitude to the BBC. The nations of Britain live within the BBC. We hold that in trust. They must never betray that trust.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): In the 47 minutes available before the winding-up speeches, four hon. Members hope to catch my eye. I hope that they will be able to do so.

8.34 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I shall do my best to be brief.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the debate takes place against a background of a fast-changing marketplace. He is correct. I took the opportunity a few moments ago to talk to him, knowing that, unfortunately, he had to leave the Chamber. I wanted to make the point to him that I now wish to make to the House.

Those who sat on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill which became the Broadcasting Act 1990 made a fundamental mistake in permitting one

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broadcaster, one publisher, to have an undue influence in the marketplace. I was one of those—I fully concede this—who was instrumental in stating that I believed that the Murdoch organisation should be allowed to have the control it had over satellite television and newspapers. I believe that I was profoundly wrong. I have said so publicly in the past, and I take no particular pleasure in placing that fact on the record tonight.

The fact is that we cannot put that jack back in the box. That being so, I want to say, through my hon. Friend the Minister, to my right hon. Friend that I believe that he can and should move swiftly to free other participants from the shackles of restricting cross-media ownership regulations, so that UK-owned television, newspaper, telephony and data companies can create alliances to compete in the development of world markets. We heard from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) of the impressive array of holdings of Viacom. Hon. Members know only too well of the impressive array of holdings of the Murdoch corporation. Others are equally large.

If UK Ltd. is to have a major stake not only in the domestic but in the European and world marketplace, the time has come to take the brakes off and let competitors to Mr. Murdoch form alliances and move into the field. I say that with this proviso: the obligations of franchise agreements entered into by existing commercial television companies should and must for the foreseeable future be for ever and beyond. It is in that context, that kind of commercial, international broadcasting, that the debate takes place. My right hon. Friend was right to draw attention to that at the start of his remarks.

I shall touch briefly on a number of matters raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

There is no doubt in my mind that we need a public service broadcasting organisation in the United Kingdom. Every western democracy that has started from the position of having only commercial radio and/or television has had to invent a public service system, and none that has been created has been anything like a match for the services offered by the BBC. In my view, the BBC has provided the benchmark for domestic radio and television services throughout the world—certainly throughout the former Commonwealth. The BBC's services have been and are respected worldwide. We should, perhaps, contrast that with what I know as "Murdochvision" throughout the world.

Rupert Murdoch is a man who exchanges nationality for a few United States newspapers. He has now revealed himself in his true colours—in my view, as a born again collaborator. Mr. Murdoch and his organisation have done what no journalist who calls himself a journalist could possibly do: surrendered editorial control of a section of his broadcasting to the Chinese, in exchange for a censored market share.

Can one imagine the BBC doing that? The BBC's world service is pre-eminent among international broadcasters because of its integrity. If anything demonstrates the need for BBC world service television, for the European service and the European entertainment services, it is the standards—or lack of them—of the BBC's competitors. It has been said that it is a shame that the BBC did not enter the marketplace sooner. I agree. On the other hand, the BBC has had the opportunity to learn, perhaps, from other people's mistakes, and it is entering the marketplace with a clear vision of where it needs to go.

We do not normally feel privileged to serve on Standing Committees dealing with statutory instruments, but I felt very privileged indeed the other day to serve on the Committee on a statutory instrument that gave the legal go-ahead to the BBC's co-operative venture into European television. I wish it well: I think that it will be a tremendous success. It is the need for a respected and reliable news service first and foremost, internationally and of course nationally, that the BBC satisfies.

It was, I believe, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Carthcart (Mr. Maxton) who said that the BBC was the best broadcaster in the world. I wonder whether some of us would have said that even three years ago. One of my hon. Friends said earlier that he had changed his view, and I have changed mine. I have changed my view of what I used to regard as a monolithic organisation, over-bureaucratic and militating against the programme makers, largely as a result of the work of one man. Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), I pay tribute to the director-general of the BBC, John Birt.

As far as I am aware, the director-general does not speak Irish like Charles Curran—although he may, come to think of it—and I am fairly certain that, unlike Alasdair Milne, he does not speak Gaelic. What he does speak is common sense. It is because of his efforts—largely and for a long time unpopular, and prompting vitriolic criticism that was a source of personal grief to him—that the BBC is now able to invest money at the sharp end to make good programmes. More money is now going into programmes and less into administration than at probably any time in the past, and certainly at the time when I worked for the BBC.

I also pay tribute to the speech that the director-general made in Dublin on 3 February. I was sorry that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) marred an otherwise excellent speech by criticising what the director-general said. I wonder whether he read the speech in context; certainly most of the journalists who reported it had not.

Among other things, John Birt said:

> "But if we journalists are to play our part in building a better world, it can only be built on a firm foundation of truth . . . on a sense of the sacred and solemn nature of fact; on a political foundation which is calmer, less frenzied—more restrained, composed and considered; on an acceptance that people and institutions have strengths and virtues as well as shortcomings; on a recognition that scepticism and rigour, insight and detachment, fairness and integrity, must be the prime journalistic virtues"

I doubt that any journalist in the House or outside it could disagree with that.

What caused offence was the observation:

> "Reporters who pretend that answers and remedies are obvious; that everyone in the world but them is an incompetent fool; overbearing interviewers who sneer disdainfully at their interviewees; the sub who composes a crass and unfair headline; the columnist at his or her desk pontificating arrogantly—all exhibit attitudes which are unattractive in a journalist, and rarely appropriate . . . For journalism is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end."

I agree with that. I think that John Birt was right and courageous to say it, and I think that it needed to be said. I think that he was trying to make the point that the media are powerful, that television is extremely powerful and

that that power must be exercised with responsibility. Surely he was trying to say that that was the rock of self-control on which the BBC and its reputation for integrity had been founded. If we lose that, we shall lose a great deal, and it behoves us to pay attention to what the director-general said.

On regional quotas, I am a dissenting voice—not because I believe that the regions do not deserve their fair share of production or that they do not have perhaps more than their fair share of talent to contribute, but because—as I have told the general advisory council of the BBC—I do not want production to be moved out of London, where the basic production facilities, the majority of actors and actresses and a great number of writers can be found, simply for reasons of tokenism. That would only waste money that could otherwise be invested in an area of broadcasting that has been mentioned far too little today: truly local broadcasting.

I entirely approve of funding the BBC with the licence fee, but if we are to continue to do so, we must examine the corporation's functions carefully. I do not want to cut those functions, but we must ensure that they are directed properly. Given all the broadcasting services that are becoming available, we must ask whether we can sustain two national public service television channels and four national public service radio stations.

Might it not be better to ask the BBC to consolidate some of its broadcasting services, and to make room for the creation and release of resources, not for the regional tokenism that I fear might result if production were simply transferred out of London, but for genuine bi-media radio-television stations throughout the country? They would be truly local, serving truly local needs.

I believe that the BBC is neglecting and underfunding a public service requirement. It is removing resources from local broadcasting when it should be strengthened: more money should be provided to beef up not only local radio but local television. That money does not grow on trees. I do not believe that the BBC can fulfil all those functions and expand into world broadcasting, as we all appear to agree it should, without making cuts somewhere; I do not want an elitist channel to be created, but I question whether some of the programmes on BBC1 and BBC2 are worth the making, given the BBC's reputation.

The BBC's transmission service has been mentioned. It is an important subject that bears further consideration. National Transcommunications Ltd. is a good company, set up on wholly commercial lines, but is it right to subsidise a competitor that is allowed to sell its spare capacity in the marketplace in the knowledge that, with the advent of digital transmission, that spare capacity will increase and the BBC will therefore have a larger market?

I think that the best proposal we have heard tonight is that the transmission service should be an arm's-length operation. The BBC should be able to hive it off, gain the benefit of an injection of finance, and release a commercial organisation to compete with NTL on equal terms in the open market in the provision of services, not only for the BBC but for other commercial organisations. Undoubtedly we shall return to that debate.

The licence fee has also been mentioned, not only in connection with the way which the BBC should be paid for, but, in particular, in connection with the way in which it is applied. I was very interested by what the hon. Member for Cathcart said about wanting a fairer system: I share his feelings, and have been advocating such an improvement for some time.

I hope that Ministers will think again—despite the White Paper's rejection of the idea—about the possibility of a basic-rate fee of £1 a week for a single television set, an enhanced fee of around £120 for a domestic unit of two television sets and a video recorder—a video recorder is, of course, a receiver—and a third tranche of around £200 for anything more than that.

Such an arrangement would provide a bedrock public service system for pensioners, single-parent households and others who cannot afford, or do not want, more than one television set. It would provide a fair service at a fair price—slightly more than double—for households that use and can afford what are effectively free receivers, and a service at a further enhanced price for those who can afford, and therefore use, even more than that.

That would be an interim measure, to operate between now and the day when the technology is introduced to allow us to collect the licence fee by encryption. I am not talking about pay-per-view. At that point, the arguments about how many sets a household has and how the number can be checked will go out of the window. We should return to that matter and consider it seriously.

I am delighted that my hon. Friends have decided to merge the Broadcasting Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council. I wish only that we could move further towards the recommendation in the Select Committee's excellent report, and consolidate all the complaints commissions and standards councils into one body for both independent and BBC television. If we did that, we would cut much bureaucracy and create a much better reference point for complaints.

I welcome the White Paper, and I hope that it will lead to the perpetuation of the BBC as one of the best broadcasting services in the world, as it has been already described.

8.50 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall follow your request to be brief.

On the speech of the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), I do not want tokenism in programme production replacement, but I do not support his preference for the self-fulfilling prophecy of concentration in London. If carried out in full, the BBC's commitment to moving the production of £75 million-worth of network programmes from London would mean that the total contribution from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would rise from 3 per cent. to only 4.2 per cent. That becomes even less impressive in view of the fact that, in recent years, control of £55 million-worth of network programming from elsewhere was centralised in London, and £40 million was taken out of the regional programming budget.

It cannot be healthy or acceptable that 97 per cent. of network output comes from one source, but guess who take the decisions, and guess where they are based? I ask Conservative Members to look on this not as a girn or a whine, but as a problem to be solved. Scotland in particular has a great deal to contribute, but the reality of tightly controlled centralisation in London prevents that from happening.

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

I wish in general to compliment the BBC on its massive range of output. We recognise how good the quality of its output is if we compare it with that in the United States of America. We then realise the quality, depth and range of the product offered. Quality is the key word, and should be the overall aim in broadcasting output. Quantity is no problem. Technology makes quantity easier and easier to achieve. Now that communication is easy, the content of that communication becomes all-important. As we have heard this evening, technology is making the problem very much a moving target, where old certainties no longer exist.

My criticisms are specific, and are basically a plea for opportunity. The debate on the future of the BBC has been pursued with much energy in Scotland. When the Government invited responses to the Green Paper, a large number of Scottish organisations commenced a programme of discussion and debate, which resulted in a number of important statements. What was most impressive was the general consensus that arose—an agreement that, although the staff and management of the BBC were of high calibre, the way in which BBC structures operated weakened the BBC north of the border.

Many of the organisations that wanted change are closely allied to the television and radio world. The Celtic Film and Television Association, a professional body that has a membership of people who work in television and film in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Brittany, and that holds a highly successful annual festival, attracting the cream of Scottish broadcasting talent, argued especially well for a new structure for the BBC, which would allow management control to be vested in Glasgow, rather than in London.

Those views, which are also held by a wider consortium of groups under the title Broadcasting for Scotland, were made known to the BBC, not just through the Green Paper exercise, but in many informal meetings both in London and in Scotland.

Mr. Wigley: And in Wales.

Mr. Welsh: Indeed.

It is a measure of the arrogance and the insensitivity of the BBC in London that it has substantially ignored those views, but the most public response to date has been the appointment as the national governor for Scotland of someone whose everyday qualifications are the headship of one of the few Scottish private schools, and who is married to the daughter of a peer. He is hardly a "lad o'pairts". He is the voice of the very British BBC in Scotland; he is not the voice of the Scottish viewer of the BBC.

Similarly, the dispersal of management power and programme-making autonomy has been treated with disdain by John Birt and his centralist colleagues, including the BBC chairman. Lip service is paid in the White Paper to decentralisation, but actions, as ever, speak louder than words.

In the past six months, the largest independent radio commission ever granted in Scotland was decided on in London and given to a London company, which, on a grace and favour basis, may or may not spend some of its revenue gains in Scotland. The contract for the United Kingdom-wide helpline that will be established by the BBC, and that will be based in Glasgow was also decided on in London and given to a London-based charity which had never operated north of the border.

On the board that made that decision sits an individual who had only recently ceased to be a director of that charity. The Scottish bidder for that contract described the selection interview as

"taking part in a charade".

I hope that the Minister will deal with those problems, because they are strongly felt in Scotland and in other parts of the UK.

In the past month, BBC drama in London has cancelled a major Scottish project by a respected Scottish writer in a casual and cavalier fashion. There will be an expansion in children's programmes to be made in Scotland, but that single success does not make up for the rest of the dismal draining of power from BBC Scotland. I am not talking just about an ordinary work. It was a winner of the Whitbread award, and it has been described by some people as the best Scottish novel of the 20th century, yet it has been dismissed in that way.

I am convinced that, in the BBC, fury exists at many of those decisions, but BBC staff are unable to speak, so I shall try to speak for them tonight. The BBC is weakening the loyalty and effectiveness of its Scottish staff and the impact of its Scottish output by holding tightly to the reins of London control. An independent and autonomous Scottish broadcasting company is required, free of outside control.

Scotland deserves the best in broadcasting, and it can have it, if it spends the licence fee it collects on Scottish output. The people of Scotland export their money to pay for a service that is poorer than it would be if they kept that money at home. Until that independent corporation is established, I want the BBC in Scotland to manage its own affairs, taking the best from London as it wishes, but making the best programmes for Scotland—not just in Scotland, but wherever such programmes need to be made. I commend the initiative of "Europa", a Gaelic language current affairs programme series which reports on Europe from Europe. Such an initiative could be followed by a range of other programmes. The talent, ability and technology are there, but they must be unleashed and allowed to flourish.

When BBC Scotland is allowed to be its own master, it performs well. Indeed, it out-performs many other broadcasting companies. However, the trend in the BBC is to crush initiative and independence with an iron fist of management control and accountants' double-speak. The people of Scotland are watching John Birt. However, if he goes on as he is now, very few people will be watching his programmes in Scotland. That situation is wasteful and completely unacceptable.

Some Conservative Members may dismiss my plea. My plea is not artificial. The plea is heartfelt, from Scotland and from Wales. The problem cannot be dismissed; it must be dealt with. The output and talent are ready to be unleashed, and they can be shared with a wider world. However, that decision must be taken at management level, and so far the BBC has failed to take it. I regret that, and I make an earnest plea to the Minister to turn that around for everyone's benefit.

8.58 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): It is a great privilege to take part in this debate. However, as tail-end Charlie on the Conservative Benches, I feel that my colleagues and Opposition Members have already said much of what I intended to say. I shall not repeat those points. It is also my privilege to be a member of the National Heritage Select Committee. Many of the issues in the White Paper have been taken directly from the Select Committee's report, which is most gratifying.

Hon. Members have rightly stated that the BBC occupies a unique place in world broadcasting. Michael Grade's phrase, "a national treasure", has been quoted many times. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said that the BBC is the best broadcasting company in the world. Whether it is or not, it is interesting to note that BBC television won 256 awards in 1994, more than in any other previous year, and what a range of awards for such a range of programmes.

I shall name just a few of the award winners from what is a very long list. They ranged from "Absolutely Fabulous", which won an Emmy for the best popular entertainment, to "File on Four", which won a One World Broadcasting Trust premier award. "One Foot in the Grave" received an award from the Royal Television Society for its brilliant construction. "Red Dwarf", a personal favourite of mine, won an Emmy. "The Bullion Boys" also won an Emmy and "The Snapper" won a BAFTA production award and the Prix Italia.

"Sport on 5" and "Radio 5 Live" have become a tremendous success under Jennifer Abramsky. She has raised "Radio 5 Live" like a phoenix from the grave of Radio 5 which was dying a death. "Radio 5 Live" is a very successful radio network in its own particular niche. "The Wrong Trousers", a marvellous cartoon, won a BAFTA and an Oscar for best animation. It is worth noting that BBC television won an unprecedented five international Emmy awards. That was the largest number won by a broadcaster since the awards began.

It is not simply a case of quality within the BBC; it is also a matter of efficiency. Before I became a Member of this House, I was involved in the construction, financing and management of radio and television stations. My company set up radio and television stations in 52 countries. I saw for myself how the BBC operated, as it was a client of mine. I also saw how broadcasters very close to the United Kingdom, such as the Nederlandse Omroep Stichting, the Dutch state broadcasting service, and Rikisut Varpid in Iceland, operated. I also saw how broadcasters operated further afield in Jakarta, Zimbabwe, south America and the United States.

It is interesting to note how efficient the BBC is in the use of its studios. When I entered radio stations and television studios in Hilversun, I saw empty studios. The BBC has come top in the European Broadcasting Union in utilising its resources. Its television studios have a 68 per cent. resource rate. That applies to the number of days in production and preparation excluding refurbishment and statutory maintenance. That is a tremendously high percentage when compared with that of other broadcasters. No one can accuse the BBC of wasting licence payers' money.

As time is short, I want briefly to raise several specific points, some of which may not have been raised so far. With regard to the White Paper's main recommendations, I support the licence fee. It is not my natural inclination to have organisations funded in that way. My natural inclination would be to say, "Come on, let's privatise the BBC." However, that is simplistic, for the reasons that hon. Members have set out today with regard to programming thresholds and financing. It would also be a little simplistic to say that the BBC is exclusively the public service broadcaster. I heard one Labour Member say that "The Jewel in the Crown" was produced marvellously by the BBC. As I recall—

Mr. Maxton: The mistake was made by a Conservative Member.

Mr. Fabricant: I am told by the hon. Gentleman that the mistake was made by a Conservative Member. Of course, "The Jewel in the Crown" and "Brideshead Revisited", both often credited to the BBC, were excellent, quality programmes made by Granada Television. However, that does not decry the point that the BBC is the major public service broadcaster not only in the United Kingdom but in the world.

Mr. Maxton: Is not, in fact, the reverse true? The fact that everybody thinks that such high-quality programmes are made by the BBC reinforces the point that it makes high-quality programmes.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, sums it up completely accurately.

As I said in an earlier intervention, I am slightly disappointed that—the hon. Member for Cathcart, whom I am tempted to call my hon. Friend, also raised this point—the Government will not raise the licence fee for those people who have two or more television sets. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been advised by his officials that, technically, one cannot measure whether a house has one or two television sets operating at any one time, but they are wrong. I speak as—possibly—the only fellow of the Institution of Electrical Engineers who happens to be a member of the House. Without modification, a detector van may detect the operation of two television sets in a house. The Government should think about whether it may be worth charging homes with more than two television sets a slightly higher licence fee.

The Government are right to accept the White Paper's recommendation that the Broadcasting Standards Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission should be merged. That makes clear sense.

I also had the privilege of sitting on the Statutory Instruments Committee—as did the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen)—which enabled the BBC to branch out into international television broadcasting.

Mr. Allen: The Opposition prayed against that measure, otherwise it would have been passed without the House having any say or any participation in the process.

Mr. Fabricant: I do not condone that view. The subject produced an interesting debate in the Standing Committee, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out at the time. In all my two and a half years' experience in the House, it was unique to witness a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments having a decent debate and a thorough discussion. I am delighted that that SI has enabled the BBC to produce BBC World and BBC Prime.

[Mr. Fabricant]

There is no question but that the BBC has a unique reputation not only in the United Kingdom but overseas. In 1940, the BBC had the courage to broadcast the bad news. So, in 1943 and 1944 when the war began to turn in our favour and the BBC reported it, people believed that that was so. The voice of the United Kingdom was the BBC.

The BBC's reputation is still strong. I was working in Moscow, as Radio Moscow was my client a few years ago, when there was a movement of troops in the streets of Moscow. We did not know what was going on. It was just prior to the coup that occurred a month later. Everybody on Radio Moscow, the national state broadcaster, was concerned about what would happen. People feared that they might have to return to the bad old days of Stalin and lose their ability to operate without a great deal of censorship.

In the main newsroom, nobody knew what was going on. The TASS feed told us nothing. Then, a friend of mine called Valentin Khlebnikov, the director of engineering at Radio Moscow at that time, took me into his office. He locked his door, pulled out the drawer of his desk, took out a shortwave radio and stuck it on his window sill. I remember that, behind the radio on the window sill, I could see the golden domes of the Kremlin. Yet, where was he getting his news? It was from the BBC world service, broadcasting in Russian, despite the fact that the news was being made within 200 or 300 m of the very building on Pyatnikaya Ulitsa in which I was standing. That is a sign of how important the BBC still is as a world broadcaster. In fact, I believe that the BBC has more listeners world wide than Radio Moscow, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America and Radio Beijing combined.

I wish to cover some further brief points. I have already dealt with BBC engineering in an intervention, so I shall not speak now at length. The BBC transmission department cannot operate as a commercial entity while it is still part of the BBC. Despite the fact that the BBC has produced an excellent document about fair trading, in practice, it is not possible for such an organisation to trade fairly. Although revenue costs may be isolated from BBC mainstream operations, it would be impossible to separate out the infrastructure and the BBC's capital assets. This is unfair on National Transcommunications Ltd. and other companies that might want to come into the market.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State seriously to consider breaking the NTL monopoly and producing a real alternative by privatising Transmission Engineering. In any event, it is based in a separate building in Warwick, it is encapsulated, and that could easily be done.

I pay tribute to John Birt. He has had to make some very difficult decisions. I pay tribute also to Marmaduke Hussey, whom I met for the first time, some 15 years ago in Brighton, before he worked for the BBC. He and I were trying to set up a radio station in Cornwall. He could not carry on because he was then made chairman of the BBC. We should never underestimate the difficulties that Marmaduke Hussey has endured as chairman of the board of governors in getting it to support some of the initiatives and changes that John Birt has instituted.

I briefly acknowledge John Birt's statement in Ireland and his excellent article in Saturday's edition of *The Times*. I shall not quote huge chunks of his article, because I shall run out of time—indeed, it has already been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale). All that I can say to John Birt is, "Fine. Many of us agree with your sentiments, but you are the director-general, so now do something about it."

On the whole—99 per cent.—I support the White Paper, and I commend it to the House.

9.11 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I thank hon. Members who curtailed their remarks so that others might have a few minutes in which to speak.

By and large, the reaction to the White Paper has been relief—relief that the Government have not surrendered to the Conservative Back-Bench free market ultra-enthusiasts and have abandoned the doctrinaire solutions to the corporation's future that some have proposed. I wish to sound a more critical note about the White Paper than has been expressed so far. Although there is relief at what the Government have not done in the White Paper, it could hardly be said that there has been great enthusiasm for what they propose to do in the White Paper. The reason is that the Government propose to do remarkably little in the White Paper.

The Government have rightly rejected the way forward which was advocated by some in terms of privatisation, but they have not been able to propose a convincing mission of their own for public service broadcasting in the United Kingdom. There is a sense that there is a holding operation that is designed to place the BBC on an uncontroversial back-burner and avoid damaging public rows about its future while the Government fight for their survival on other fronts. That is made clear at several points in the White Paper. I was particularly interested in the paragraphs about the future of the BBC's transmission services, to which several hon. Members have referred, including the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant).

One paragraph of the White Paper tells us about the current position with the transmission services. The next paragraph tells us that, in 1989, the Government wanted to privatise the transmission network. A later paragraph tells us that, after five years of careful deliberation, the Government now do not know what they want to do. There is no conclusion on that subject in the White Paper. Although I am pleased that the Government are moving back from privatisation, contrary to Conservative Members' views, I believe that there has been a flagrant loss of nerve on their part. That is a telling pointer to the vacuum that exists at the heart of what ought to be the Government's policy.

The BBC's transmission network could, and should, be an important element in the development of the United Kingdom information super-highway. The fact that, after years of deliberation, the Government clearly do not know what to do about it is symptomatic of the wider inertia gripping them in that context, to the deep detriment of the national interest.

That vacuum is most damagingly apparent in section 2 of the White Paper, which contains the discussion of the

"BBC's role in the United Kingdom".

Paragraph 2.6 rightly states:

"it will be necessary for the BBC to have clear objectives as a public service broadcaster after 1996."

That is undoubtedly true, but what should those objectives be? What exactly is the BBC for?

Here the Government's difficulties are greatest. Ideology presses for privatisation, but pragmatism has rightly ruled that out. That leaves the Government unable to produce a convincing answer to the question: what should the key objective of our main public service broadcaster be? Their ideological hostility to the public sector has prevented them from formulating a convincing statement of that mission.

The White Paper presents a bland list of desirable somewhat bureaucratic attributes that the corporation should exhibit, and it is hard to argue with any of them. For example, the first of the 10 objectives is

"giving priority to the interests of audiences".

That should indeed be an objective, but it will hardly be one whose pursuit will engage the passions and energies of the people whom we shall need to drive forward Britain's key player in the coming multi-media revolution.

The other nine objectives listed for the BBC are no more helpful than the one that I have quoted. At the heart of the White Paper, where there should be clarity and vision, there is a void. I suggest that the primary objective for the BBC should be to provide the United Kingdom benchmark for quality in the multi-media era that we are entering.

We are all aware that the danger attached to the coming explosion in broadcasting quantity is that it will be accompanied by a collapse in quality. The continued operation of the BBC independently within the public sector, financed by the licence fee, is our guarantee that that need not happen. That is a vital mission, worthy of the talents and skills of the corporation. Quality of service to the whole nation must be built on a BBC that remains in the public sector.

The BBC's public service role is not an outdated relic of a bygone age that will eventually subside into extinction, as several Conservative Members, while supporting the White Paper for now, have suggested. I do not accept that idea. The public service role is the key to ensuring that broadcasting in the information age will be stamped through with the hallmark of quality.

The public sector commitment is a guarantee of quality of service in a rapidly changing environment. It will ensure long-term investment in talent, skills, and research and development, and will provide the stability and freedom in which creativity and, above all, quality and universality of service can thrive within broadcasting. We cannot afford to allow quality to be reduced to being the preserve of an exclusive market niche. It must be maintained as the consistent hallmark of United Kingdom broadcasting, available to everyone.

There are several unresolved issues within the White Paper. It suggests two distinct roles for the BBC but does not explain how those are to be reconciled. If the advertising revenues of the commercial operations of the BBC began to fall, what would be the implications? How far would the quality of broadcasting be preserved under such commercial pressures? Would the BBC's reputation for impartiality and quality be compromised and undermined?

The White Paper makes it clear that the aim of the commercial arm is to generate money to supplement income from the licence fee. One would assume that that would enable the licence fee to be reduced, as some hon. Members have suggested, but the implication of that trend is made clear in the Select Committee report, which states:

"it might be very difficult, if not impossible, to justify the existence of a licence fee at all."

The more successful the commercial arm, the greater the threat to a publicly funded broadcasting service enjoying the benefits that freedom from commercial pressures allows.

The Government may claim that the licence fee will never be replaced, but will such a claim survive when a future Minister assesses the request from a profit-making BBC to increase the licence fee?

We can choose. Are we going to embrace the opportunities of the new communications technologies, which are presenting themselves to us, and make them work for us, or are we going to sit back and watch the future unfold? The White Paper is welcome, as far as it goes, but it leaves many important issues unresolved and we cannot allow many of them to remain so for much longer.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In my rush to allow the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) to speak, I did not remember to declare an interest. From time to time, I advise the BBC on certain technical matters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I suppose that that is as near a genuine point of order as we ever get in this place.

9.20 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I am delighted that this White Paper has finally been brought before the House for debate. I am equally delighted to be making my first speech in the Chamber in my new capacity as a spokesperson in the shadow Heritage team of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith).

While we welcome the White Paper, we have some criticisms of it. None the less, it is far better balanced than we could possibly have hoped for at one time. I do not want to be too much of a party pooper—there seems to have been a cosy consensus across the Floor of the House—but some of us remember the way in which the BBC has been browbeaten, cowed and intimidated during the past 16 years by an orchestrated campaign by the Conservative party and Conservative Members. We also remember when the attack on the media was compounded by the dog's breakfast of the Broadcasting Act 1990. Some of the eulogies that we have heard, especially from Conservative Members, must be taken with a relatively large pinch of salt.

Those who care about the quality and independence of television in the United Kingdom, regardless of party, can breathe a sigh of relief that the BBC has thankfully been regarded as a privatisation too far. The BBC is a public service broadcaster. As we have heard from all parties tonight, it is an institution in which the people take great pride, and I welcome the decision to spell out that public service role in the new royal charter—a charter that we in this House will not be able to debate directly.

[Mr. Graham Allen]

There is much to value in the BBC's traditions and yet the BBC must always be open to change. The new technology that is driving the changes is exciting and we welcome the prospect of a new generation of interactive citizens, in addition to today's passive viewers. We must always remember, however, that the increase in channels, which digital, cable and satellite will undoubtedly open up, is meaningful only if it represents a choice of high-quality, watchable programmes—the sort of programmes to which the British public are used—rather than an excuse for channel surfing through trash and trivia. Replication should never be confused with choice. The next Labour Government will continue to look to the BBC to set the quality benchmarks by which we shall judge all television output.

The four, core terrestrial channels are still the only services for 80 per cent. of households and will continue to be for some years; hence there must be a balance in our judgments today between preparing the BBC for its future in cyberspace and ensuring that it plays to its traditional strengths. Equally, it must continue to earn its reputation, not least in news. A BBC that took its lead from the tabloid pack, that regurgitated No. 10 briefings undigested, and that collaborated in soundbite-ism would be a BBC less worth defending.

Modern public service broadcasting, in John Birt's words on Friday,

"must put reflection as high as disputation."

He of course knew that most of us would hear those words before today's debate. His challenge, and ours, is to do something about them.

In the absence of an effective Parliament, it is often the BBC which bears the added burden of being the nation's political health service; and public understanding of the issues is the BBC's most effective immunisation campaign. The BBC and journalists everywhere will be helped in this task by an incoming Labour Government introducing a freedom of information Act—strongly promoted and fought for not least by my hon. Friends the Members for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher)—and enshrining the freedom of the press for the first time in British law by incorporating in it the European convention on human rights.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman will know that I support the idea of a freedom of information Act. However, if we had such an Act to enable journalists to explore matters that should be in the public domain—Robert Maxwell when he was alive, for instance—should there not also be privacy legislation to protect people against intrusions into their privacy which have nothing to do with the public interest?

Mr. Allen: One of the articles in the European convention on human rights confers on all British citizens, for the first time ever, a right to privacy which would need to be balanced against the freedom of speech that is also to be found in the convention.

Hon. Members from all parties have agreed that the media world is changing rapidly and that, to continue its role as the United Kingdom's public service broadcaster, the BBC will have to change too. In recent years, it has tried to prepare itself for the road ahead, but we should not forget that the toll exacted to avoid privatisation and to retain the licence fee as its main source of income has been a human one. The words spoken today by the Secretary of State in support of the licence fee did not come easily; they were won by the jobs of 6,000 people who no longer work for the BBC. It has been a painful process, but it has allowed the BBC to survive in a hostile political climate. In effect, it was out to compulsory competitive tendering, and, at a cost, it won back its own job. History may judge that to have been a brilliant political operation, but we should never forget that it was achieved at a very high price.

The White Paper represents a fundamental contradiction that the Government have posed for the BBC: that of maintaining its values while accommodating the demands of commercialisation. That is a contradiction which will haunt the broadcasting industry for the duration of the BBC's new charter. We see that already, with advertising appearing on the two new channels, BBC World and BBC Prime, and with links between BBC1's "Big Break" and the *Daily Mirror* and between "Antiques Roadshow" and *The Sunday Times*. Already, the ITV companies are getting anxious about the possibility of unfair competition.

Mr. Jessel *rose—*

Mr. Allen: Can the hon. Gentleman be brief?

Mr. Jessel: Yes. Given what the hon. Gentleman has said about commercialisation and the position of the Government, may I ask him whether he is aware of the fact that the National Heritage Select Committee, whose report in a sense helped to pave the way for the White Paper and which is chaired by a distinguished member of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), argued—as the right hon. Gentleman has also personally argued—that the survival of the BBC will depend in future on commercialisation? Will the hon. Gentleman read the views of his right hon. Friend on that point carefully?

Mr. Allen: As I shall explain later, it is clear that the Labour party fully supports how the BBC is making the most of its assets. We agree that those assets should be utilised 100 per cent. abroad as well as domestically. But that is, in essence, to preserve the BBC as we see it: fundamentally, a public service broadcaster—that is certainly our priority. It is in no sense to give it schizophrenia, whereby one day it is a commercial broadcaster and the next a public service broadcaster. That is certainly our priority.

As well as the implications for the service provided by the BBC, serious political implications must be considered. The BBC's independence and integrity are its most valuable assets and must not be compromised. Yet by entering into deals with satellite and cable companies as well as other terrestrial broadcasters, the BBC may be drawn into conflict over issues of ownership, control, fair competition and autonomy. It is a danger, and we and the BBC must guard against it.

Many hon. Members have referred to the funding of the BBC and the licence fee. The Labour party's position is crystal clear: while the licence fee is far from perfect, it remains the best means of raising the bulk of the BBC's revenue, both today and for the foreseeable future. The stability of income which the licence fee represents

safeguards the BBC's most important assets: the ability to make long-term plans and commitments, and to promote the regions and nations of the United Kingdom.

Dr. Howells: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are special problems in the relationship between BBC Wales and S4C, the Welsh Channel 4? BBC Wales has spent a considerable part of its funding on making Welsh language programmes for S4C, with the result that precious few funds remain for making English language programmes for the 80 per cent. of us in Wales who do not speak Welsh and, moreover, programmes that could help BBC Wales to break into nationally networked programming in a much bigger way.

Mr. Allen: My hon. Friend makes eloquently the point made by several other hon. Members tonight. The Labour party would press the BBC to ensure that adequate sums of money are allocated to Wales and Scotland, but specifically to Wales, so that English language programming can be developed as my hon. Friend suggests is appropriate. I would go so far as to say that, under an incoming Labour Government, a Welsh Assembly would wish to deal with that issue rapidly.

The BBC's dependence on the licence fee allows it to take such steps, provided that pressure from my hon. Friend and other colleagues is made clear. It also allows the funding of minority programmes and allows the BBC to retain its editorial independence. Sadly, all that may be undermined by the Government's failure to guarantee the licence fee beyond 2001. It is an unnecessary uncertainty, which is rapidly becoming the trade mark of the National Heritage Department.

We accept the logic behind encouraging the BBC to become a more commercial entity but we want to ensure, as do all interested parties, including the BBC itself, that that is done fairly and in a way that does not risk the BBC's strict public service obligations. The ITV companies are understandably concerned that the BBC will compete with them and, if it used the licence fee to subsidise sales of programme rights, the BBC could obtain an unfair advantage. We want a healthy, competitive BBC but, equally, we want to ensure that it is not at the expense of ITV and Channel 4.

The Broadcasting Act 1990 is not a good precedent for the Conservatives' stewardship of television's finances. Farcically low bids for the ITV franchises and the dog's breakfast of the Channel 4 funding formula proved that. For the sake of broadcasting, let us hope that the commercialisation of the BBC does not produce such unintended consequences.

As we would expect, the Conservative White Paper does not adequately discuss democracy and accountability. Opposition Members feel that the BBC is too important an institution to be the mere creature of the Executive. It should be established legitimately by Parliament in statute law. An Act of Parliament would allow open public debate about the role of the BBC and its future.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) mentioned the statutory instrument. It was amazing to realise that something as significant as BBC World or BBC Prime would have been established without the official knowledge of the House—let alone a debate—had not the procedural device of praying against the order been used in this place.

Constitutional safeguards would be necessary, were the BBC to be established by Act of Parliament. I believe that the tyranny of a passing elected majority could be almost as unhealthy as the tyranny of the Secretary of State, but it is not beyond the wit of Parliament to devise safeguards, especially with the new Government committed to reinventing our democracy. It is an undemocratic outrage that the House is prohibited by the Executive from examining or amending the royal charter when it deals with such important matters as the public service obligation and the strength of our commitment to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom.

The board of governors also needs to be reviewed. Even the governors do not claim to be representative, and they are accountable only to the Government of the day. The National Heritage Select Committee recommended that the process by which the governors are appointed should be made "more extensive and public". We agree, and we would suggest that, as a minimum, that must mean the ratification of any proposed appointments by the National Heritage Select Committee.

Equally, in addition to the annual report and accounts, the Government should ensure that Parliament is given a full day on the Floor of the House each year to debate media matters, and the BBC specifically. If we can do it for the armed forces—next week, we shall do it for the Royal Navy—we should do it for the BBC. An institution as important as the BBC requires equal treatment.

We are also worried about the handling of viewers' complaints and regulations, a subject mentioned in the White Paper. The Broadcasting Standards Council, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, the ITC and the separate regulatory bodies for radio and telecommunications appear a confused and confusing arrangement to the consumer wishing to complain or to find something out.

We welcome the proposal to merge the BSC and the BCC. However, as the ITC will now have regulatory responsibility for BBC World and BBC Prime, we need to consider whether it would make sense to take the merger one step further. In an age of convergence of media and communications, we could have a unified organisation for all broadcasting organisations, possibly an umbrella organisation, which could have the ability to monitor issues of ownership and output throughout the range of electronic communications.

Whatever the framework, we must master the new technological environment, not be mastered by it. The information super-highways should not become the conduit for second-hand, second-rate imports. We must match every technological leap with enhanced British programming. We must develop our own cultural agenda and, where necessary, fight for it as fiercely as the French have done for their cultural agenda. That must include fighting to sustain parts of the BBC service that could be threatened by increased commercial competition.

For instance, the coverage of important sporting events should remain a priority of the BBC. The list of key sporting events such as the cup final, Wimbledon and the grand national is part of our cultural heritage and, as such, those events should be available on terrestrial television.

The BBC should not fear the growth of cable and satellite. On the contrary, the potential for new developments is immense. An active Government will in future encourage the cable companies to continue to develop sub-regional, or even city, channels, perhaps

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building on the work of the Channel 5-to-be. Their demand for high-quality, locally made programming could dramatically boost the BBC in co-operation with ITV, the independents and local authorities. We need to ask the BBC directly what it is doing to capitalise on those opportunities, for there are tremendous opportunities in education, health and local services.

Many cable companies are already cabling schools for free and are crying out for high-quality television and services to offer with that cabling. Much as we support BBC and ITV regional television, it, too, must change and exploit new challenges. It must increasingly be a resource to nourish the localities and less an outpost for the centre. It will be encouraged in that role by the regional and national assemblies that an incoming Labour Government will create. Those assemblies will want to see a bouquet of audio-visual industries grow locally. The development of that local skills base will be the seedcorn of, and underpin, our global position in the next century.

The White Paper records the BBC's intention to launch digital services, which will allow for a large number of new channels by the end of 1997. We await a Government who have the vision to encourage and promote those initiatives in partnership with the private sector. The information super-highway is, however, the latest example of how the Government have missed the opportunity to help the private sector to work in partnership with the public sector. The Department of National Heritage is silent, I am afraid, on that matter, as it is on so many others—the interactive are being led by the inactive.

The Department has offered no super-highway initiatives, no ideas on Channel 4 funding, no proposals on privacy and freedom of the press and no White Paper on cross-media ownership and restrictions. As his answer to the question posed the other day by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) made clear, the last film seen by the Secretary of State was "Doctor Dolittle". Little has been done either to promote the digital revolution that will open up the possibility of dozens of niche channels. That will require conditional access mechanisms that can scramble signals and allow them to be decoded only by recognised subscribers. The Government should be acting now to prevent consumers being forced to buy a number of different decoders.

It would also be unacceptable if a de facto standard which conferred monopoly power on the owner and offered the danger of unfair price increases were to emerge. The Government should start working now, perhaps for a common European interface, enabling a choice of conditional access systems, to ensure fair competition and consumer choice in the digital broadcasting market.

The final issue raised in the debate was transmission. The change there is basically a sop to the rabid right which feels cheated that the whole of the BBC has not been privatised. There is no guarantee, however, that if the BBC's transmitter network was privatised the result would be lower transmission costs across the board. Indeed, the privately owned NTL has a monopoly of transmission services to the ITV companies, which complain continually that their transmission costs are higher than they need be. With all the opportunities of digitalisation about to come on stream, it would be nonsense were the BBC transmission services to be diverted into a privatisation battle. That would mean delay and contracts governing which managing director got which salary cut and which share option. The privatisation tail would be wagging the digital dog.

In conclusion, the White Paper is to be welcomed, if only as a disaster avoided. The result of a Government running out of steam, allied to nimble political footwork, has been the survival—at a cost—of the BBC as one of Britain's key assets. The next Labour Government will ensure that the BBC spends its energy not on survival or on confusing commercialism with efficiency but on seizing the opportunities for growth presented by new technology and on continuing to set a standard for public service broadcasting both here and abroad.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): It is an unusual pleasure to be asked to reply to a debate in which there has been such a large measure of cross-party agreement. It has also been an exceptionally well-informed debate. I should like to take the various speakers chronologically and answer the points that they raised.

I start with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I was very grateful for the general welcome that he gave the White Paper and that was echoed by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) from the Front Bench. However, he raised a number of points where there was at least a shade of criticism of what we had done. For example, he welcomed the retention of the licence fee as a means of providing the BBC with £1.6 billion a year, but wondered why we had to have a review in five years' time.

The Government decided on a continuation of the licence fee, but, as a number of hon. Members said, the extraordinary speed and complexity of the change in technology means that we do not want to set ourselves into a straitjacket on any matters on which we can help the BBC.

One or two hon. Members—including my hon. Friends the Members for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) and for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), in his extremely good speech—mentioned that not everybody was happy with the idea of a licence fee.

Many people outside the Chamber do not like having to pay for their licences when they can get ITV for free because of the advertisements. It is proper that the House of Commons should say that it is a vexed question. The majority of those who have spoken have been in favour of the licence fee, but the Government thought that it would be right to review it in five years' time and I am sure that that is correct.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury asked when we would bring forward proposals for digitalisation. That is a good question. It is also a complicated question, and trying to work out what the regulations should be when we have to multiply by six or 10 the number of frequencies that can operate on digitalisation as opposed to analogue is extremely complex. However, later this year we intend to bring before the House our proposals on that extremely important matter, particularly the regulatory framework to deal with it.

The hon. Gentleman—and many others—raised the important issue of the regionalisation of the BBC. Perhaps it would be helpful if I gave a few facts for hon. Members to ponder now and later when they read *Hansard*. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) speaks from a Labour point of view about what should happen in Scotland. The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) speaks from a rather different point of view. I certainly have no doubts about the seriousness with which the matter is regarded in Scotland, although I would differ from him as to the solution that I would impose.

As the House will know, in 1993, the director-general asked his adviser, Mr. David Hatch, a senior manager at the BBC, to perform a wide-ranging review of regional network production and the representation of the entire United Kingdom on the network. The BBC's new regional policy resulted directly from the recommendations of the Hatch report.

The BBC's aim is that by 1997 the proportion of network production—that is, television and radio programmes for broadcasting throughout the UK—made outside London and the south-east will increase from one fifth to one third—an increase of 67 per cent. That amounts to a shift of £75 million out of the south-east of England—£65 million in television and £10 million in radio—increasing expenditure on network programming outside London from £188 million to over £250 million a year, an increase of 33 per cent. The amount of drama made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be doubled by 1997, to nearly 20 per cent. of all BBC drama. At present, each year the BBC spends about one third of its total income—some £496 million—in the regions, including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That covers the cost of local, regional and network services.

The House will have a chance to debate the matter, probably after Easter this year, when we lay before the House the royal charter and the agreement that the BBC will make with the Department of National Heritage. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North said that we would not be able to debate the subject, meaning that hon. Members would not be able to change details of the royal charter through debate in the House. However, hon. Members will have the opportunity to debate the matter extremely fully.

Mr. Maxton *rose—*

Mr. Sproat: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Cathcart, but I shall go on to reply to what hon. Members have said during the debate.

Mr. Maxton: I reiterate the point that I made earlier. The BBC can fulfil its regional programming commitment simply by sending crews from London to Scotland to film a series of plays. They stay for a couple of months and then return to London. That is not giving production back to the regions; that is simply retaining it in London and making films outside London. I hope that that is not what the BBC means in making its commitment.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I understand that the BBC does not just want to make films or programmes in Scotland about Scotland for the Scots; it wants to make films and programmes in Scotland that will be screened throughout the United Kingdom network. We are not talking about the Jameson syndrome, where someone from London travels to Scotland to make a programme with no Scottish character or flavour.

I come to a question that is perhaps rather difficult to explain convincingly. It concerns whether the governors of the BBC should be elected or whether, as the National Heritage Select Committee recommended, they should be selected by that Committee—not an unusual proposition. When the Government of the day select the governors of the BBC, they do not do so with party political issues in mind.

I have no idea how most of the present governors of the BBC vote. They comprise a former Chief Whip of the Labour party and a prominent member of the trade unions. I do not believe that asking the House to choose—whether on the Floor of the House or in a Select Committee—the governors of the BBC will do anything other than polarise the issue and make it more political. I think that that would also be true of a Labour Government. Although allowing the Government to select the governors may seem to be politicising the issue, in my experience that is not so and it is proven by the present membership of that group.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred to the deteriorating balance of trade in television programming. It is a worrying matter. However, any balance of trade deterioration in programming is not due to a deterioration within the BBC. In fact, the BBC's import and export of television programmes is in credit. The programming balance has shifted throughout television because there are so many satellite and cable stations using American films. Of course, that does not mean that it is not sad that we do not have a balance of British films on television, including on cable and satellite. The hon. Gentleman did not suggest that, but as this is a debate about the BBC, I think that the House should know that the BBC's balance of trade in programming favours British programmes.

The hon. Gentleman said that we should not have recommended that the general advisory council be abolished and that there should be an English regional council. As far as the general advisory council is concerned, the BBC takes advice from many bodies. The Government believe that the BBC should increasingly seek specialist advice and also directly consult its own audience. In that context, we do not believe that the charter should continue to require the BBC to maintain a general advisory council. The BBC has set up 10 English regional councils, the chairmen of which meet in the English regional forum, and the BBC board of governors is advised by the forum on policy in the regions.

A matter that was mentioned by a number of hon. Members, although the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury raised it first, was the merger of the Broadcasting Standards Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. The hon. Gentleman said that he welcomed the merger, and, obviously, we are grateful for that support. But my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) went further and said that, although he welcomed it, he hoped that the new body would have the opportunity to research matters such as the effect of television programmes on children, and so on. That was not something that I had originally thought that the new body would do, but it is an interesting idea and we shall certainly look at it closely.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) raised a point regarding Mr. John Birt: although Mr. Birt has had to put up with much criticism about the number of jobs lost and other changes

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in the BBC—the hon. Member for Nottingham, North said that the loss of some 6,000 jobs has been a heavy price to pay—it is the pruning of the bureaucracy in the BBC that has enabled it to put an additional £100 million a year into programme making. It has been a price to pay, but it has not been frittered away. It has gone right to the heart of what we all want to see the BBC doing.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who courteously told me that he would not be able to stay to hear the end of the debate, made a rather dazzling speech. Those who sat on the Select Committee are no doubt used to that dazzle, but I found it very effective. He said that, too often, the BBC is, or appears to be, impervious to listeners' views. I do not know what it used to be like, but from now on it will not be a case of being impervious, because it has as well structured a programme as one could ask for in the circumstances. It will be conducting a series of local seminars throughout the United Kingdom, to hear what listeners and viewers have to say about what it does.

Information about what the BBC intends to do will be set out in its statement of "Promises to Audiences"—a slightly creepy title, so perhaps we can find a better one. The promises made in that statement will be sent to all viewers with their reminder to pay their television licence. The viewers will be told, "Here is what the BBC said it would do. If you do not think that it has done it, write in and say so, and the BBC will, in all reasonable circumstances, take action on what you say."

A rather more careful consideration of complaints made to the BBC will in future be made by the BBC itself. It has set up a new complaints unit. In the first eight months of operation, the unit received some 590 complaints, of which it upheld 102, which is quite a serious number for a body that investigates complaints about itself to justify.

No doubt the package of the statement of promises and the complaints unit is not perfect—no doubt there is more that the BBC can do and it will not stop the BBC making mistakes—but it is certainly a refutation of any charge that the BBC is impervious to the criticisms that listeners and viewers might make.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) has been extremely ill, and I thank him very much for rising from his sick bed and coming to the Chamber today. He gave the White Paper a slightly back-handed welcome and said that it was not the best of all worlds, but that at least it was not the worst of all worlds. He asked about the Government naming the Scottish governor. I should make it clear to the House, particularly to the hon. Member for Angus, East, that although it might be the Government who make the decision, the appointment of the governor of the Scottish BBC is made on the recommendation of the Secretary of State for Scotland. It is, perhaps, not quite as far as the hon. Gentleman would like to go, but at least it is not, as he was saying in another context, a decision made in London on a London basis.

This has been an impressive and exceptionally valuable debate. It is a rather melancholy thought that the further we move from automatic party lines, the better debate we have. We shall have a chance to return to the subject when the royal charter and the agreement are laid before the House; we hope that that will happen at Easter or thereabouts.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Housing Renewal (Birmingham)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am grateful to Madam Speaker for allowing me to raise the issue of urban and private sector housing renewal.

On Tuesday this week, Birmingham city council's urban renewal committee reported to the full council

"That the Committee's inability to reduce the backlog of Mandatory Grant Inquiries with existing resources is a serious source of concern. That the backlog of inquiries in December was over 9,000. That the Urban Renewal Division is receiving an increasing number of applications which have to be dealt with in six months and that this is adversely affecting the planned grant programme which is based upon date order inquiry."

I intend to spell out what is behind that concern, using my own words and information that I have gathered from many sources around the city, for which I take full responsibility.

I shall draw attention to the need for a major policy change in the way in which we fund urban renewal; although I shall concentrate on my constituency of Perry Barr and the city of Birmingham, I am aware that what I shall say applies to virtually all inner-city areas in our great conurbations.

Of course we have a resource problem; it would be futile to ignore it. The scale of that problem is clear from, for instance, the existence of 9,500 inquiries about urban renewal grants in the city of Birmingham. If only half those qualify and the average is £10,000, that will mean £47 million. Birmingham's housing investment allocation for the whole city—for private, council and housing association homes—is only £38 million.

It goes without saying that I believe that we are not investing enough. I shall not insult the Minister by spending time on an issue with which I understand he cannot deal, but I hope that he can deal with the reallocation of current funding. Let me explain why I think that he should act as quickly as possible.

Following the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, a new concept of urban renewal was introduced involving renewal area schemes and a new right to a mandatory renovation grant for poor owner-occupiers. Birmingham—always at the forefront of quality urban renewal—declared four renewal areas in 1991, that in central Handsworth being in my constituency. It has drawn up a 10-year programme to deal with the physical, social and economic aspects of community life rather than dealing only with housing, as did the old system of housing action areas.

My constituency is the largest in Birmingham. Three of its wards—Oscott, Perry Barr and Kingstanding—are in the outer city, and were farmland 70 years ago. Handsworth, my inner-city ward, contains housing more than 100 years old. About a third of that ward was designated a renewal area. It contains 2,800 dwellings, 95 per cent. of which are in private ownership—that is, owned by the occupiers.

In 1991, 82 per cent. were either unfit for occupation or qualified for relevant works, and 54 per cent. of residents were in receipt of means-tested or unemployment benefit. The ethnic mix, measured by head of household, is as follows: 44 per cent. are white, 23 per cent. black and 25 per cent. Asian. Obviously, the figures for the population are slightly different—31 per cent., 21 per cent. and 44 per cent. respectively.

Central Handsworth, therefore, well met the criteria for a renewal area. It is a goodly sized area, a vast number of people there are on means-tested unemployment benefit, and a massive amount of housing is unfit and requires attention. I accept, of course, that poor owner-occupiers in poor-quality housing live elsewhere in that ward, but it is not possible to declare a bigger area that meets the criteria.

Area renewal—the concept of doing up whole roads and adjoining roads as part of urban renewal—has been tried and tested as the best means of improving the quality of life, including the health of residents. It is better than isolated, one-off house improvements, known in the trade as "pepper-potting". That may be okay for the householder concerned, but it does nothing to uplift an area and so encourage investment, economically and socially. Furthermore, if an area is not dealt with, it will eventually literally fall down or have to be pulled down, along with those pepper-potted improvements, so wasting an awful lot of public money.

Owner-occupiers have a responsibility to look after their homes, to maintain repair, and, where possible, to make use of the equity of the asset to assist in renewal. I wish a lot more could be done on that latter point.

Not all owner-occupiers are well off, as is shown by the figures that I gave earlier. However, there is a wider collective community responsibility to ensure that each generation passes on to the next the universal benefit of good-quality housing. Otherwise, we bequeath to future generations an horrendous position. Every house will virtually have to stand for between 3,000 and 4,000 years at the present rate of renewal and rebuild.

So what is the problem? After the first four years of the renewal scheme, I and the city council recognised substantial slippage in the programme. Not only have minor works ended, but, in the Handsworth renewal area, there has been an absence of community and economic development work, which was envisaged in the renewal area strategy. No work on industry or on the social side of the community has been undertaken.

In addition, the same roads and dwellings of my constituents have slipped off the end of recent annual programmes—for example, the remaining part of Crompton road, Hill grove, Leslie road, Willmore road and part of Wellington road. Many others are at risk. It will cause premature concern if I list them tonight, so I shall not do so.

Why is that so? Birmingham is the lead authority on urban renewal. We invented the concept of enveloping. In one year, some time ago now, when greater flexibility existed in the rules, the city council managed to secure externally more than 9,000 dwellings, although it did not do the work itself. By securing, I mean re-roofing and looking after the external part of those old properties, so that they would at least be standing and be fit and available for internal work at a later date. The urban renewal work of Birmingham is used as a model, not only in this country but abroad.

The reason for the problem is the mandatory renovation grant system. It applies to any dwelling that meets the unfitness standards, irrespective of where it is. In Birmingham, more than 9,500 current inquiries are taking

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

place in relation to renovation grants. Those inquiries, not applications, are in a queue that is based on date order—that is the way the city council decided to do it. The queue is being dealt with starting from before April 1991. There is almost a four-year queue. I am told that it might advance by two months in the summer, so slow progress is being made.

There is, however, systematic jumping of the queue in the city. That is wrecking the concept of area renewal. Application forms are freely and legally available. They are more than 30 pages long. The law allows for a fee for filling in forms, assessing the professional work involved, and obtaining the quotations for the work. At least three firms of private agents in the city—Lawrence and Wrightman, Herrington Associates and Independent John Woodcock—are operating via two firms of solicitors—Tyndallwoods and Millichip and Southall and Co.—in touting for business in the shape of the 10 per cent. fee.

That is legal, but I question whether it is fully decent and honest. It helps some poorer owners on a one-off, pepper-potting basis. At the moment, there are more than 250 applications from those firms, costing an average of £10,000 each per grant. That is £2.5 million of the urban renewal budget. It is completely unplanned, and totally unrelated to restoring areas or even parts of roads.

Once an application is accepted and agreed, the grant, by law, must be paid within six months or court action follows—when, of course, those legal firms will receive more money via legal aid. That is how the queue jumping works. It is fine for the individuals, but it is crucifying hundreds of poor families waiting in the renewal areas. Those firms of professionals will not be bothered if the dwellings are demolished later as a result of forced clearance. They will have received their fees, which, at 10 per cent., amount to £250,000 so far. They are legally helping a few, while conditions of large groups in planned renewal areas worsen.

I am told that the work claimed on the applications is well over the maximum of £20,000 per dwelling, because obviously those companies are claiming far more than the minimum amount of work. After checking by the city council and, I presume, negotiation, the average grant is, as I have said, working out at £10,000 a dwelling.

The city council is responsible for planning expenditure on the urban renewal budget and for making commitments to my constituents and others to the effect that, for example, next year the council will be able to deal with a road or two adjoining roads in a renewal area. However, such commitments are meaningless. The city council has no idea how many applications will arrive each week. Rumours abound that hundreds of applications, averaging £10,000 each, are in the pipeline.

In public expenditure terms, such dwellings cost more to work on than dwellings in the renewal areas, because, in the renewal areas, the city council can package a series of renovation grant applications from home owners into one large contract with a building company or companies, and reap the benefits of scale. That means that more poorer home owners can receive help. That is what I am about: I want more help for more poor home owners whose homes will last longer because the area will last.

I will not accept it from anyone that I am raising the case for stopping poor inner-city home owners receiving their lawful grants. The opposite is the case. I believe that the agents and solicitors are attacking the rights of the majority of poorer home owners for their own commercial interest.

I am concerned about my community of constituents; I am not seeking political patronage from one-off, pepper-potted residents. To do anything else would be a betrayal of trust, and I am not in public life to betray the trust of my constituents. Regrettably, the operation of the mandatory grant system of the renovation grants allows it to be used for the purposes of political patronage in Birmingham.

The actions of the firms to which I have referred are sending out a powerful message about resource shortage, and they are presenting a stark contrast about their views on competing cases. In other words, they are not really bothered. The firms want the money for themselves, not social justice for the communities.

The system should not allow those with inside knowledge, who think they know how to play the game with public funds, to exploit others. That must be stopped. Furthermore—I choose my words with care—they are building up ethnic tensions in the city and creating social fragmentation. I will have none of this, and where I see it, I will seek to expose it here or in my constituency.

Somehow, the Minister and the Government, using the weapons and tools of this House, must break the link between the mandatory grant and the fitness standards. We could then move to meeting people's needs, both in the renewal areas and outside. We could use discretion over minor works, which we used to carry out in the past and which have been completely abandoned in my constituency due to the activities of the agents and solicitors to whom I have referred in the Sparkbrook, Ladywood and Small Heath areas of the city.

If we broke the link between the mandatory grant and the fitness standards, we would be able to offer residents single element grants outside the renewal areas for real items that would improve matters and stop residents worrying about their houses, such as a rewiring exercise or the replacement of that bad roof. Such work would have a major impact on their lives, without the need for major building works.

Another way out of the problem, but one which I would argue against, would be to reduce the maximum renovation grant, which is currently £20,000. It could be reduced to £5,000, as some have suggested, and the system could remain the same. However, that would not solve the problem of the systematic undermining of the concept of area renewal. I do not seek any other way in which to renew our great conurbations and our inner cities than on an area basis.

I also appreciate that there are at least two other factors at work, one being the grants for aids and adaptations for people with disabilities. Under community care, the transitional money is being well spent in the inner city and the outer areas of Birmingham. When that money is absorbed into the revenue support grant in the year after next, I am concerned that it may be lost. Therefore, to protect those grants, the money should be kept under the aegis of the Department of Health, rather than under the Department of the Environment.

All people, whether in the inner city or the outer city, want to be able to keep their independence with the onset of disability. Those grants should be met from a

ring-fenced budget and not be forced to compete with the urban renewal programmes, which are legitimate in their own right.

The other factor is more difficult to explain, but it must be placed on record, because it cannot be ignored. A full renovation grant should secure a 30-year life for a dwelling. Obviously, one must compare the grant with the value of the dwelling. In our inner cities, there is not an open market on house prices.

Since many members of ethnic minorities are understandably reluctant to move out to the suburbs because they fear—and receive—harassment and feel lonely away from their culture, and there are fewer suitable large houses to buy, they somehow find the money in their families to remain in the inner city. That creates a false market, in which house values are set higher than the properties are worth—therefore attracting larger grants.

That bodes ill for the future, especially if the Government fail to tackle the problem that I have raised and clearance returns on a large scale, because the false market will be exposed and rehousing made much more difficult for the families concerned.

A change in policy would make the existing money go further. It would prevent area renewal from being undermined, it would prevent agents and solicitors from wrecking the concept of area renewal, it would prevent the misuse of the current system as a potentially corrupt means of political patronage, and it would give more help to more poor home owners in our inner cities. I invite the Minister to address the core issue.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on securing the debate, and on the helpful and informed way in which he has put his points. I found my visit to the university of Central England in his constituency and the work that it is doing to encourage cross-disciplinary teaching in the housing and construction sectors interesting and very impressive.

The debate is timely, because we are currently engaged in a review of the private housing renewal programme. In that context, I shall address the points that have been raised.

What is clear beyond any doubt is that many local authorities in the country are pursuing extensive and successful private sector renewal programmes. I have visited authorities, including Birmingham and Wolverhampton in the west midlands, which have been keen to outline their strategies for tackling disrepair in the private sector, and have been proud to show the resulting successful initiatives. Indeed, it is only two months since I visited areas in need of regeneration in Birmingham and had a useful discussion with partners and organisations involved in the urban care initiative. I also visited an area in the constituency of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) at the same time.

I want to put in context the task facing local authorities. Most home owners are willing and able to maintain their own homes. Provisional estimates from the English house condition survey and family expenditure survey suggest that expenditure by households on improvements has increased significantly since 1986, with an estimate for 1991 in the region of £20 billion.

The 1991 English house condition survey showed real improvements in housing conditions between 1986 and 1991, with a reduction in the number of unfit dwellings and a reduction in average repair costs in the private sector. However, there were still about 1.1 million unfit dwellings in the private sector in 1991. Of those, we estimate that 460,000 are owned by people who are eligible for grants under the present criteria, with the remaining properties occupied by non-eligible owners, owned by private landlords, or empty. Within the population of eligible owner-occupiers, the estimated average cost of making "just fit" is £4,700, which is considerably less than the current renovation grant average of £9,000.

Our overall aim is to bring a decent home within the reach of every family. Provisions to make decent the privately owned homes of people who require works but cannot afford to do the works themselves are part of that policy. But the resources for that provision are not unlimited. There have to be priorities. We believe that local authorities should be helped to target resources on the worst-condition housing, having a close regard to minimum habitable conditions as represented by the statutory fitness standard.

Any activity should also focus on the poorest and most vulnerable households, taking account of ability to contribute or meet the cost of required works, thus ensuring that public money is available as a safety net and not as a source of cheap finance to enhance the value of a private asset.

Another priority is that local authorities should act strategically over an appropriate time frame, in line with their wider housing role, while allowing urgent intervention where necessary. That can currently be achieved through area-based renewal, to which I will return later. It is also a priority that the regime for assisting private sector renewal should be simple to understand and easy to administer.

When the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 was introduced, a range of mandatory and discretionary grants and delivery mechanisms were given to local authorities to help to improve the unfit stock. The duty on housing authorities to consider the condition of the housing stock in their areas once a year, the duty to take action in relation to unfit dwellings, the availability of mandatory grants to deal with unfit dwellings, and the powers for area-based improvements, were all seen as important parts of a overall approach. It was felt that, taken together, they would provide a wide range of options that would give local authorities the means of deciding their priorities for private sector renewal, while ensuring that those least able to help themselves were given some form of assistance.

In practice, local authorities have not had the level of freedom originally intended, mainly because the demand for mandatory grants has taken a greater proportion of the resources than expected and distorted the underlying strategic nature of the 1989 Act regime.

Local authorities have explained to me that, instead of carefully selecting the most appropriate course of action and programming improvements in a sensible way over a reasonable time scale, they are increasingly being forced to pepper-pot grants in response to demand. In those circumstances, it is difficult to maintain a coherent strategy reflecting a considered view of local priorities.

[Mr. Robert B. Jones]

Those conflicting priorities were clearly set out in the consultation paper issued in 1993. No solution was offered, but a number of options for change both in the short term and in the longer term were explored. In the short term, we have reduced the grant ceiling for mandatory grants to £20,000, with the aim of helping a greater number of people, either through increased numbers of grants or by freeing resources to enable local authorities to take strategic action.

Guidance issued to local authorities suggests that, where mandatory grants are awarded they should not necessarily be for works with a 30-year life. Rather, the authority should look with care at what is actually needed to make the property fit and not at what might be desirable in an ideal world. There should be close scrutiny of individual grant applications and adequate systems in place to ensure that the works specified are appropriate to the circumstances of each case.

In the longer term, the objective must remain to deliver help to those least able to help themselves. The issue facing us all is how that can be best achieved from the resources available. Many local authorities have been willing to share their thoughts with my Department, through responses to the consultation paper and also, more recently, at the housing investment programme meetings that I attended and my general visits to local housing authorities.

There has been no shortage of advocates, such as the hon. Member for Perry Barr, for the benefits of strategic renewal and of renewal areas in particular. It is clear that many feel that a greater benefit can be achieved by agreeing a co-ordinated approach to improving an area over time. Even with the current mandatory grant pressures, 52 local authorities have been able to declare 83 renewal areas, and have been continuing to do so at a rate of about 14 a year.

We are keen to see such broad-based area strategies for housing improvement. A renewal area can provide the means of improving the living conditions and the general amenities of an area through comprehensive and planned activity on housing, social, economic and environmental problems. It is a focus for concentrating public and private resources to maximum effect, and for encouraging the confidence of residents and of the private sector in the future of the area, thereby stimulating investment. It is important that, where possible, employment opportunities are maximised and the area is made a better and safer place in which to live.

As the hon. Gentleman has already told the House, the city of Birmingham seeks to maintain a balance between area-based and individual activity, targeting resources on the worst housing and the most disadvantaged people. As well as responding to applications for mandatory grants, it has therefore declared four renewal areas. One of those, Handsworth, is within the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Like most larger authorities, Birmingham has found its ability to concentrate resources on such areas weakened because of the need to respond to mandatory grant applications throughout the city. When I visited Birmingham last year, the local authority made it clear that it would welcome greater freedom to enable it to pursue its renewal area strategy more actively. It regarded the abolition of mandatory grants as a price that both Birmingham and many other authorities would be willing to pay to gain that freedom; we shall have to keep that in mind when making proposals following our review. Strategic activity should not, of course, exclude help to those who are in great need but whose homes are not within a renewal area—but the hon. Gentleman will understand that I am not yet in a position to suggest how that can best be arranged.

So far, I have concentrated on the mechanisms already available to local authorities to secure housing renewal, but I know that the hon. Gentleman takes the view that, where an authority wishes to clear unfit housing, a new approach could have considerable benefits in some areas. That would centre on the provision of a new grant in addition to the usual compensation payments to those whose properties had been demolished. The main objective would be to ensure that those owners had the resources necessary to purchase a new property in the same area. That would mean that close communities that might otherwise be disrupted by a clearance programme could stay together.

The hon. Gentleman first explained his views during the passage of the 1989 Act. The Government were happy to respond by agreeing to establish a pilot study so that the proposal could be fully researched. The study has been conducted over the past three years, in conjunction with the city council, in the South Saltley area of Birmingham. My understanding is that it resulted in 16 home owners taking up the offer of grant, and that the last of those moved into their new property late last year.

The final report from the research study team is expected soon. Clearly we shall want to consider the findings very carefully to determine whether there is a case for making such grant assistance more widely available. If there is, we shall need to decide what steps to take to provide for that. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that, at this stage, I can only assure him that we shall try to reach a view as quickly as possible.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will also be pleased to know that an essential part of any future proposals for improving the grant regime will be the removal of potential opportunities for exploitation and abuse. They are few and far between, but it is important that they be removed where possible.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the pressures currently being exerted on some local authorities by solicitors working on behalf of applicants for mandatory grant. I am aware that that is becoming an issue in some parts of the country, and especially in Birmingham.

Solicitors perform a vital role in helping individuals to secure their legal rights, but there should be no need for them to become involved in the grant process. It is the responsibility of local authorities to adhere to the legislation and to meet their commitments within the resources available. Authorities' decisions on grant applications should be based on a full knowledge of the needs within their areas.

Therefore I cannot believe that it is helpful to have a solicitor pushing a particular grant applicant's case at the expense of other equally worthy applications. Although one would like to think that the solicitor is acting primarily in the interest of the grant applicants, the hon. Gentleman has suggested that, unfortunately, that is not always the case. In considering possible future changes, we shall aim to reduce the scope for the unnecessary involvement of lawyers.

Overall, it is essential for local authorities to ensure that grant-aided work on private sector housing secures the maximum benefit from the investment of public funds. I acknowledge that some local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the conflicting demands placed on them, but I know that most are maintaining effective private sector renewal programmes. It will be important to ensure that any changes arising from the current review build on this good work.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 10 February 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Otterburn Military Training Area

9.34 am

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I have the honour of presenting a petition which has been signed by 95 per cent. of the residents of the Reed and Kirkhope valleys in Northumberland, who live and work in the vicinity of the military training area at Otterburn and who are seeking to remove national park status from the military training area. The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble Petition of the Residents, Farmers, Landowners and those having recreational or commercial interests in the Otterburn Training Area and surrounding Parishes.

Sheweth that the continued designation of Otterburn Training Area as part of the Northumberland National Park is not in the best interests of National Defence or of the local economy and that such designation should be removed for the following reasons—

Declarations by the Northumberland Park Authority that its purposes and objectives are fundamentally incompatible with the purposes and needs of military training, have exposed its underlying inability as a planning authority to give fair and objective consideration to proposals for the improvement of training facilities on Ministry of Defence land.

The Park Authority's concern to remove, reduce or suppress military activity at Otterburn, in order to increase public access, poses a very serious threat to the economy of the area which benefits by over £6 million annually from the Army's presence, through direct civilian employment, letting of farms, purchase of services and spending by military visitors.

The Park Authority, with a significant proportion of its members coming from urban areas, has demonstrated little understanding of the way military activities, compatible with hill farming, have become part of the rural way of life in the Otterburn area for the past 80 years. It has also failed to appreciate that the quality of the landscape is directly due to the Army's care and development of the natural environment, which would be endangered by excessive tourism, as witnessed in the Lake District.

Recent demonstrations by supporters of the Council for National Parks against proposed improvement of roadways to facilitate important weapon training, illustrate a growing conflict of interest between the national parks movement and national defence, and underline the folly of Her Majesty's Government ever allowing an area with a long established primary function as a vital military facility to be included within a National Park.

No good reason exists why a military training area, with an excellent record for conservation and giving maximum possible access to the public within in the bounds of safety, should not continue to afford enjoyment to the public without a National Park designation placed upon it.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to seek the removal of the Otterburn Training Area from the Map and jurisdiction of the Northumberland National Park.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Disabled Students

9.37 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I wish to present a petition bearing the signatures of 400 Wakefield people who are concerned at the discrimination against disabled students in higher education. The petition has been organised by my constituent, Mr. Tony Murray, who suffers from cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. He believes that the proposed Government Bill will not in any way address the discrimination that he has faced.

The petition states:

The Humble Petition of the People of Wakefield sheweth

That disabled students should have identical rights and equal opportunities in Higher Education and not be prevented from pursuing their academic careers by insufficient care packages in the community.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House acts to ensure disabled students have unrestricted access to Higher Education.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Land Mines

9.38 am

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I wish to present a petition which is signed by more than 8,000 members of the Land Mines Action Group. The petition states:

anti-personnel landmines kill 800 and maim the same number of men, women and children every month, that more than 100 million such mines have been laid around the world, that control of the use of such mines is impracticable, that such mines are being cleared at a far slower rate than they are being laid, that self-destruct and other technology to limit the lethal effects on civilians are not fully effective, that the US has recognised the indiscriminate nature of landmines and declared a moratorium on their export,

wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House ban UK use, stockpiling, manufacturer and trade in all anti-personnel landmines and your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

It is a disgusting and barbaric trade and Britain is absolutely isolated in the world in not banning the manufacture and export of those weapons. It is impossible to understand why the Government will not become a signatory, as it is more than 10 years since Britain has actually exported any of those weapons. The petition shows that the people of this country are anxious that the Government should fall in line with international opinion and ban this disgusting trade.

To lie upon the Table.

9.40 am

Guy's Hospital

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have the honour to present, together with many colleagues on both sides of the House, a petition with well over 1 million signatures in support of Guy's hospital in Southwark and London Bridge. The petition is a response to a strategic decision announced by the Secretary of State

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

a year ago yesterday, which would mean the rundown of Guy's hospital, the removal of most of its beds and the closure of its accident and emergency unit.

Guy's is one of the most valued and most used hospitals, not just in the City but in this country. It is also one of the most famous hospitals in the world. It is clear that there is mass public opposition to the Government's proposal.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled

The humble petition of the friends, past and present patients and the staff of Guy's Hospital and the people who live and work near Guy's,

Sheweth

That Guy's Hospital is a vital service to the people of Southwark, South East London, South East England and beyond.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House believes that the decision announced by the Secretary of State on 10th of February 1994 with regard to Guy's should be reversed and that a full accident and emergency service should be kept at the Hospital and that all the beds necessary for a fully functioning hospital should be retained on the Guy's site.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, etc.

If ever a response was needed to the current consultation on the future of Guy's hospital, this must be the time.

To lie upon the Table.

9.41 am

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I beg to present a petition on behalf of my constituents and many thousands of other people. Its terms are identical to those recited by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I shall not detain the House by repeating them. As he said, it is part of a petition that has attracted well over 1 million signatures.

I warmly endorse the views expressed in the petition. I am especially concerned that thousands of people who daily travel to and work in the City of London should continue to have available to them the services of the accident and emergency department at Guy's. I also believe that it is essential that patients and their relatives in south-east London and much further beyond should continue to enjoy easy access to the in-patient facilities at Guy's through London Bridge station. That benefit should continue.

To lie upon the Table.

9.42 am

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I wish to present a petition on behalf of the people of Lewisham. Its words are similar to those of the petition presented by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). It calls for Guy's hospital, particularly its accident and emergency unit, to remain open. I have nothing to add to what the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said, other than that I hope that the Secretary of State will pay close attention to the views of the more than 1 million people from south-east London and beyond who believe that Guy's hospital is essential to the quality of health care in their area.

To lie upon the Table.

9.43 am

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I beg to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Peckham. As other hon. Members have said, more than 1 million people have signed it. They are saying that the Secretary of State must listen; she has got it wrong. More than 1 million people say that she must not close Guy's hospital. She must change her mind.

To lie upon the Table.

9.44 am

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Dulwich, as part of the petition already referred to by other hon. Members. It has attracted 1 million signatures from across the country. People have pledged their support for the retention of the accident and emergency unit and all acute services at Guy's hospital. South-east London cannot manage without Guy's. The country cannot manage without Guy's.

To lie upon the Table.

9.45 am

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Lewisham, Deptford. They collected 6,000 names as part of this enormous petition. My constituents are part of a deprived community with very great health needs and Lewisham hospital alone cannot service those needs. Many people are dependent on Guy's hospital, especially the accident and emergency unit—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members seem to think that this is a matter for some mirth, but our constituents feel very seriously that their lives are being threatened. The Secretary of State made a life-and-death decision a year ago. That decision must be reversed—the petition says so.

To lie upon the Table.

9.46 am

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): I associate myself and the people of Lewisham, West with the overwhelming number of people—1 million—who have signed the petition. We ask the Secretary of State to end the turmoil that has been the hallmark of health services in south-east London for many years. Further, we ask her to protect and defend one of the finest centres of medical excellence anywhere in the world. As the petition makes plain, it is not just people in south-east London, but people right across the nation who want that.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.47 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Some very good petitions have been presented, but they were rather lengthy, and I was beginning to get worried, as I thought I might have to stand up and move the closure motion at the beginning of the debate. In fact, there is plenty of time for this important debate.

Since 1982, when Lord Ashley was in the House, there has been a succession of Bills embracing the principles contained in my Bill. In 1982, Lord Ashley introduced a ten-minute rule Bill called the Disablement (Prohibition of Unjustified Discrimination) Bill, which in many ways was the pioneer for my Bill. Since then, there have been at least 14 parliamentary attempts to pursue such legislation. Some Bills were introduced in the House of Lords, there have been amendments to Government Bills, and there has been a series of private Members' Bills.

Among current Members, three of my colleagues, who are here today, have made significant attempts to introduce legislation for civil rights for disabled people. I am referring to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and, last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry).

In view of all that, why am I pursuing the issue again, especially when I have my own pet project—electoral registration—ready in my files? Indeed, I introduced that subject in a private Member's Bill two years ago, and it would have been a labour of love to introduce it again. Why, given that the Government have introduced their own Bill, am I now introducing this Bill? It is because its time has clearly arrived.

There is no doubt that my Bill will become law, either through the proceedings we are starting today or through some future proceedings. If I cannot get my Bill through on this occasion, the baton will be passed on to other people. The Bill is supported by all Opposition parties. If the Bill has not gone through by the time that there is a change in the political position in the House, a future Government will reintroduce it in Government time, and it will be carried.

The Government's alternative measure is seriously flawed. Its proposals are inadequate and the Government must explain exactly to whom it applies. It is a step forward by the Government, because it represents a recognition of the problem, but it is a very small step as far as disabled people are concerned.

All hon. Members have a legitimate interest in the issue of disabled rights, as 10 per cent. of the population are affected by the measure that I have introduced. Some 10,000 of my constituents in north-east Derbyshire are concerned about disabled people's rights. Hon. Members who intend to oppose the Bill should reflect upon the fact that the electorate at large are concerned about disabled rights. Many people have sympathy with the issue or have experienced the problems first hand, and one in every three families contains someone who will be covered by the Bill.

Many interest groups in my constituency are directly linked with disabled rights. The Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People, which participated in yesterday's lobby of the Parliament, operates from Clay Cross in my constituency. It is an organisation of disabled people which serves the needs of the disabled. It is a solid supporter of the Bill, as it was of past measures which came before the House which are relevant to the Bill's principles.

Links, which operates throughout Chesterfield and north-east Derbyshire, supports the Bill. Further afield, the Centre for Integrated Living at Ripley, which is run by and for disabled people, backs the legislation. That organisation was established largely through the actions of Derbyshire county council. I pay tribute to the work of the late Sid Collins, who was a councillor in Eckington in my constituency. He received solid support from David Bookbinder, the former leader of that authority. The British Council of Organisations for Disabled People also has its headquarters in Derby. So I have clear constituent links with organisations which are involved with disabled people's issues.

Because of that activity, North-East Derbyshire district council is a national leader in policy making on behalf of disabled people. It has enlightened policies in the area of sport and in the facilitation of disabled people into employment. It does a fine job for the disabled in many areas, and it has already implemented several of the proposals outlined in part VI of the Bill concerning access to polling stations. Disabled access is provided to all polling stations in the area, although further improvements are needed.

I wish to explain the procedure by which I selected the Bill. The Queen's Speech mentioned that the Government intended to introduce a measure dealing with discrimination against disabled people. The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People made a statement in the House on 24 November in which he outlined the provisions of the Government's Bill. By that time, I had been lucky in the ballot for Private Members' Bills, and I stated my intention to reintroduce the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill unless someone ahead of me in the ballot did so—I realise that the Government can use the procedures of the House to try to block important measures—or if the Minister could demonstrate that his Bill would do the job.

However, that was not the case, as neither of my Bill's main points was included in the Government's legislation. Therefore, on 12 December I submitted my Bill for its formal First Reading and the Bill was published two days later. The Government acted a month later, publishing a White Paper at noon on 12 January. It was not open to consultation, because the Bill received its First Reading and was published at 4.15 that same afternoon. It was a matter of news management.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the White Paper was the result of an extensive consultation process, and therefore further consultation was not required?

Mr. Barnes: We do not know what consultation took place. Why did the Government issue a White Paper only a few hours before they published the legislation? The purpose of White Papers is to inform hon. Members and the nation about the Government's legislative intentions. In this case, the Bill was ready for publication. Anyone

[Mr. Barnes]

who read the Bill at 4.15 pm soon realised that the grand language of the White Paper should be treated with some scepticism.

The White Paper referred extensively to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland was pushed like mad—probably because four sponsors of my Bill are from parties in Northern Ireland. However, Northern Ireland Members were not hoodwinked by the Government's provision, and the Minister has now stated that, in Committee, the Bill will be altered to apply directly to Northern Ireland. Despite the Bill's initial references, it contained no measures of any substance dealing with Northern Ireland.

An examination of the Bill immediately revealed that I had made the correct choice in publishing the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. The Government's measure is very inadequate. It contains highly restrictive definitions as to who shall be covered by "disablement", thus limiting its scope.

I keep asking the Government about the numbers. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill refers to 6.5 million people. The definitions that I have used in the Bill link in with Office of Population Censuses and Surveys figures for 1988. They show that, in Britain in 1988, 6.2 million people were categorised as disabled, and that figure increases to 6.5 million when Northern Ireland is included. How many people are included in the Government's definitions? The Government have done a cost assessment, and they should know what the numbers are.

As well as the restrictive definitions, the Government Bill contains exemption after exemption. Various education authorities are excluded under the Bill. It lists 14 mainly funding bodies which are affected, including local education authorities and higher and further education funding authorities—as well as the equivalent funding authorities in Scotland. Which education bodies does the Government's legislation cover? The Secretary of State has the power to restrict the provisions further.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): On a point of clarification, is the hon. Gentleman saying that his definition applies to 6.5 million people, and that 6.2 million people will be covered under the Government's definition—which is a difference of 300,000?

Mr. Barnes: No. I said that the OPCS stated in 1988 that, according to its definitions, 6.2 million people were included in Britain. I said, because of the similarity of the definitions that were used, that that was a good, solid figure, which has never been challenged. One can add a reasonable number extra for Northern Ireland, which would bring the figure into line with the 6.5 million that we have always spoken about.

No one has ever challenged the 6.5 million figure, and the Government were delighted to use that figure last year, because they fiddled about with it in connection with their cost assessment.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I confirm that the figures given by the Government's research department estimate that there are 210,000 disabled people in Northern Ireland, of whom 75,000 are working.

Mr. Barnes: So the figures that I am giving are correct.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I came in specifically to listen to his opening remarks. As he is discussing definitions in the Bill, I wish to say that two aspects concern me immediately in clause 1(a).

First, the hon. Gentleman slid the word "sensory" into the middle of the definition. I cannot find any real definition of what that is meant to apply to, as all conditions are either physical, mental or a combination of both.

Secondly, I am worried about the words "major life activities". I am bothered that the concept of "major life activities" is so generous as to draw almost everyone into that category. Is the hon. Gentleman doing himself a disservice by trying to widen the definition so much that it includes people whom most people would not consider to be disabled?

Mr. Barnes: The "sensory" provision is in relation to the American legislation. We can discuss in Committee the exact parameters of the definition to apply. In saying that some of the definition is so wide that it could apply to masses of people—almost anyone—the principles in the Bill are intended to ensure that the definitions begin to link more with the discriminators than with the people who have been discriminated against.

We are saying that it should not be possible to use the argument of disability to discriminate against people. Therefore, wide definitions are needed, although for legal purposes—drafting and so on—those definitions need to apply to disabled people themselves. It needs to be seen what categories are covered.

Matters of definition, as long as they are contained in the principles in the Bill, can be subject to examination, elaboration and defence. It seems to me to be entirely justifiable, because it has been around for a while.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is there not a glaring example of the contrast between the constructive and broadly based way in which the hon. Gentleman is drawing up his Bill and the restrictive way in which the Government are drawing up their Bill, in respect of companies employing less than 20 employees? People with identical disabilities will be cut out of the purview of the Government Bill by virtue of something outside their control—the size of the company they work for, which may even be reduced in size while they work there, causing them to lose their rights. Is not that the reason for having a broadly based definition, as the hon. Gentleman is doing?

Mr. Barnes: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. The Government, by producing their own definitions and elaborate restrictions, make it easier for us to establish the significance of the definitions that we are including.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Barnes: I will continue for a while.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On the definition point?

Mr. Barnes: I shall return to the subject of definitions later, because I have not started to elaborate what will be contained in the Bill. That might be an appropriate time to give way.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He wants to know whether he qualifies, with a black eye.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Under this Bill, he probably does.

Mr. Barnes: In selecting the Bill, I also seek to facilitate the clearly expressed opinions in the House that

have become evident in the past; the opinions that surrounded the support for my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood when he introduced his measure. Those opinions are reflected in the fact that the Bill that I have introduced, with its list of sponsors, and early-day motion 466, which I tabled in support of it, have included in them—when one includes the top six sponsors—people from all 10 political groupings in the House of Commons, including the two Conservative parties that exist at the moment.

That shows quite solid support, because, in many cases, the people who have appended their names for sponsorship are leaders or deputy leaders of political parties, or are spokespersons on social security matters in their parties. That shows that there is a need to introduce that measure now. I believe that it has already led to two improvements in the Government Bill—the decision about the willingness to apply it directly to Northern Ireland, although what has been applied to Northern Ireland is not as good as what is contained in the measure before us, and the provision that has been added in terms of sale and letting of property.

I am convinced that the Bill's existence will put pressure on the Government when their Bill is in Committee, although they would have to go a very long way before the principles in it began to reflect this Bill.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Gentleman has made his argument about Northern Ireland twice, but the White Paper says clearly that the policy in Northern Ireland, in content and timing, will be consistent with that in the rest of the United Kingdom. Surely, one way or another, whether through the Government Bill or in a separate order for Northern Ireland, the Government had already made their position clear.

Mr. Barnes: When the White Paper was published, and when that statement was made, the Bill, which was published at the same time or a few hours later, excluded reference to Northern Ireland and said that the measure on Northern Ireland would be introduced by the negative Order in Council procedure, so there would be no opportunity for Northern Ireland Members to debate that measure. If they prayed for it to be before the House, it would be a case of "take it or leave it", so they have the sense that they must attach their discussion of it to the current Bill, although they will not be included in it.

I understand Nothern Ireland Members' great anxiety about the Order in Council procedure. I find it odd when I notice which of the private Member's Bills that come before us include Northern Ireland and which exclude Northern Ireland. Obviously, the matter is of such a nature that Northern Ireland is included in the Bill.

I was explaining why I decided to pick the matter up. Even though I am carrying the baton at the moment—the baton that has been passed on by others and has been shaped by organisations of disabled people—we are merely the politician front runners in connection with it, going through the various procedures. The Rights Now Campaign, the umbrella organisation of disabled organisations, has played a significant role.

We had a grand lobby in Westminster Hall yesterday. A key role was played in that by Scope, and I also emphasise—as a non-sponsored Member of Parliament—the role of the Trades Union Congress and of member unions in supporting the measure, including my own union, the Manufacturing Science Finance Union.

Mr. Skinner: The most illuminating thing about that lobby yesterday, which was as large as the ones in previous years, was that every single disabled person and group that we spoke to yesterday afternoon had sussed out the Government Bill. They knew that it was a confidence trick: they had weighed it up completely. I had thought that there might have been smaller numbers yesterday. There were probably even more people present, because they know that the Government are trying to con disabled people. The inspiring thing about yesterday was they had got the message: support the Bill.

Mr. Barnes: It was an inspiring lobby by people who fully understood the principles involved on both sides, who were alert to the measures involved.

Organisations such as People First, who are people with learning difficulties, who especially are excluded by the schedules in the Government's Bill, are among those that are active. That organisation has produced an exciting presentation of the Bill for people with learning difficulties. The Government have made no attempt to do anything similar. If they intend to cater for the disabled, they must consider how the House and the Government can communicate with people having learning difficulties, so that they may play a full part in the political process.

The key building blocks of democracy are the franchise; people's ability to represent their interests; and individual freedom, independence and rights. The Bill embraces them all. I mentioned the provision concerning access to polling stations. It is not good enough to tell disabled members of the electorate that they must organise a postal or proxy vote. They have the same right as other people to vote in person.

I mentioned that organisations for the disabled are solidly behind the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred to yesterday's lobbying. Individual independence, freedom and rights are basic elements in society, and they are the essence of the Bill. The House should remember that we are talking about not 10 per cent. of the population or 6.5 million disabled people, because everyone is potentially a disabled person as they grow older, become infirm and encounter difficulty using everyday facilities. No one should feel that he or she is in a different category.

Part I covers interpretation and definitions that are open, social and non-restrictive. Clause 1 introduces the concept of a "qualified disabled person" in respect of the provision of goods and services and of employment. Nobody is saying that legislation should enable clearly unsuitable employment for a disabled individual—such as bus driving by a blind person. However, the disabled applicant's general medical condition should not be a factor. Clause 2 also provides for "reasonable accommodation" and modifications for a disabled person. Again, we are not suggesting that the world should be turned upside down overnight and that £17 billion must be spent in one fell swoop.

Part II describes the disability rights commission, which is a key element in the legislation's implementation and embraces a wide range of activities. The Bill imparts general rights, but any legislation can do that. Making them reality is a different matter. The commission will be under a duty to eliminate discrimination, investigate, and

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assist complainants by offering appropriate assistance—including legal and financial aid. It will also issue a code or codes of practice. If Parliament is not satisfied that the commission is doing its job, it can reject those codes and ask the commission to reconsider.

The Government propose a council, but that group of people will exist to counsel the Secretary of State. In that context, the Secretary of State is the initiator and mover rather than the disabled themselves and organisations for disabled people—who will comprise 75 per cent. of the commission's membership. Those arrangements are elaborated in schedule 1. Parts I and II are the heart of the Bill.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): How does the hon. Gentleman envisage the commission working? Would it be allowed or even encouraged to take the Government to the European Court or any other court, in the way that the Equal Opportunities Commission has done?

Mr. Barnes: Yes—which is why the Government do not want the Bill. There have been many cases of Ministers' actions being incompatible with the provisions and proper interpretation of previous legislation. Such a power should not be considered a problem or a democratic difficulty. It is part of establishing the rights of disabled people in society.

The Bill also makes provision for consideration of whether accommodation would unduly prejudice an employer, its nature and cost. Propaganda that the Bill is trying to achieve the impossible is countered by its provisions. If the Government want to make changes in Committee, they are welcome. However, the Bill is not new, and it is better drafted than the Government's measure. It has been around a long time, developed and improved.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): And it has been debated for 40 hours.

Mr. Barnes: Exactly as my right hon. Friend says.

Part IV, dealing with the provision of goods, facilities and services, stipulates the test of reasonableness, nature and cost of accommodation, overall financial resources of the firm involved, and specific periods of compliance that the Secretary of State could introduce but would have to justify.

Clause 12(3) presents 15 different categories of goods, facilities and services that must be considered. They form part of the essential mechanism of the Bill, and must be taken on board by the disability rights commission.

Part V deals with premises and new constructions, and describes when it is unlawful to discriminate. It has exemptions for small buildings and provisions and terms for new constructions, and says that architects and others involved must take into account the considerations of the Bill. They must ensure that buildings are accessible, except where it can be demonstrated that it would be structurally impractical to do so. There are also facilities for short-term exemptions which the Secretary of State could apply. Those measures are to help deal with the worries about cost which are always thrown at us.

Part VI relates to access to polling stations, and is my contribution to the Bill. It arises from the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill which I introduced two years ago, and which was an attempt to extend the franchise correctly to the many people who are not included. Part VI says that there must be access to polling stations for disabled people. A survey was conducted by Scope at the election which showed how serious that problem was.

The Bill introduces the notion of accessibility audits, which are covered in schedule 2. Reports must then be given to the House, and there will be opportunities to debate developments. It states that, before all polling stations are accessible, provision must be made through polling cards to inform people which station has been designated as accessible for them.

Mr. Deva: If there is an area of conflict, would it not be better to have a conciliatory or arbitration service rather than the parties having to go to court to find a solution? Will not the Bill lead to employment creation for lawyers?

Mr. Barnes: The courts are likely to be used less under the legislation that I am seeking to introduce than under the Government's measure, which will be a lawyers' delight. Furthermore, the Government's measure has no reconciling body to overcome any problems. The disability rights commission will help to conciliate and advise, and the courts will be there only as long-stop provisions.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: When I studied the Bill, I came to the section on access to polling stations with great interest. Everybody wants all polling stations to be accessible to all disabled people. Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that there are many rural areas in which there is only one place where it is possible to have a polling station? Does he also accept that it might be difficult to make that polling station accessible to disabled people?

Rather than going to the considerable expense of adapting those stations, would it not be more feasible for the polling officer in charge to allow people to vote outside in their cars under supervision, rather than forcing them to get out of their cars and into a polling station?

Mr. Barnes: That sounds like a suggestion made during discussions on the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill—that disabled people could have a bell outside village shops which they could ring to get service. Disabled people must be treated the same as able-bodied people. They need access to shops and polling stations, and the Bill will help in that.

The measures relating to access to public buildings may make polling stations accessible in any case, but the Bill states that they should be accessible within five years. Public buildings must be accessible, and the problem has to be faced by returning officers as to what their facilities—temporary or otherwise—should be.

Where does democracy start from? It starts at the ballot box. If you cannot get to the ballot box to operate democracy, where are you? Why should a disabled person be a second-class citizen, depending entirely on proxy votes and postal votes?

Mr. Nigel Evans: My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) made a reasonable point in saying that, in rural areas—particularly where there is not a wide choice of buildings for polling stations—the important thing is that disabled

people are not denied the right to vote. I have stood outside polling stations—probably every Member has—where discretion has been used and a disabled person has been allowed to vote in his vehicle. Nobody would ever deny disabled people that. Is not the hon. Gentleman being totally unreasonable in the costs which he is trying to put on to rural areas?

Mr. Barnes: The hon. Gentleman should talk to his Front-Bench colleagues, as there is nothing in the Government's Bill about access to polling stations, although the Bill's service provisions might apply there as well. Will the Government come up with alternative access provisions which might allow taking a ballot paper to a car? That can be done in any case under the current arrangements, and special legislation would not be needed.

That is very much a Committee point, because the principle of access to polling stations cannot be denied. If there are problems in certain areas, appropriate amendments could be tabled which could extend the period of phasing in the measure. I shall move on, because other hon. Members wish to speak.

The remaining items of the Bill include part VII, which relates to enforcement procedures. Those apply in employment—the use of industrial tribunals and civil proceedings—and in electoral problems, including access to polling stations. That is not on the face of the Bill, as it is a matter for the electoral courts and relates to the Representation of the People Act.

The final part of the Bill deals with miscellaneous matters. The only thing I wish to stress about this part is that it ensures that the Bill's provisions apply to Northern Ireland without the need to go to any Committee.

The Bill has been discussed on many occasions, and it is similar to measures which have been introduced. It has adjustments and additions here and there—specifically, the access to polling stations provision—but its time is now. It is overdue. We must give a Second Reading to the Bill today, and allow it to progress quickly to Committee. We must give the House a chance to choose between the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and the Disability Discrimination Bill.

I should like to know where the Minister stands in relation to the Bill. We know that he supports the Government's Bill and cannot support this Bill, but is he recommending that this Bill be opposed? Why will he not act as a facilitator for discussion on the issue of discrimination, rather than taking the role of a persuader for one measure against another?

10.29 am

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Watford): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the Bill at such an early stage. I begin by apologising to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People and the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) for the fact that I shall not be here for the remainder of the debate. Like many hon. Members, I need to fulfil several constituency engagements during the day.

I do not speak as one of those hon. Members whom the House would call an expert on disability. My hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) are well known on the Conservative Benches for their expertise, and I see in their places the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). Many hon. Members speak with a depth of expertise that I do not have. However, one of the advantages of the British political system is that we have single-Member constituencies, so it is impossible for any Member of Parliament not to have substantial contact with the disabled and experience of their problems.

I have the honour to be the president of Action for Disability in Hertfordshire, which is run out of my constituency. It is an active organisation, which has responded to the invitation by my hon. Friend the Minister of State to make its views known. At least some of the views expressed by Action on Disability have been recognised in the Disability Discrimination Bill, which the Government are promoting in parallel with this Bill.

The real expertise on disability lies with other right hon. and hon. Members. My expertise, to the extent that I have any, and what has prompted me to speak in today's debate, to my surprise—because the one thing of which I was certain when I left the Administration was that I would never again appear in the House on a Friday, less still make a speech—is in the subject of Fridays. It will be known to hon. Members, although perhaps not to a wider public, that in another guise, at another time in my political life, I was what is known in the Government as the Friday Whip. I dare say that the equivalent position would exist if the Labour party were in power.

Lest members of the public are misled, may I say that the term "Friday Whip" does not have the friendly connotations of Robinson Crusoe's rather cheery companion. The purpose of the Friday Whip is to be vigilant in the interests of the Government on the days which are set aside for private Members' Bills. It is important to explain what happens on Fridays not only in the context of today's Bill but to promote wider knowledge of our proceedings among the public. People must often ask themselves what is going on here. I have no intention of being here at 2.30 and I have no idea what may or may not happen, but one thing of which I am certain is that the public will not understand what is happening.

When I was in charge of these matters, I realised that everyone in the House who knew his way around had only to look at the Order Paper to know perfectly well from day one once the ballot had taken place which Bills would make progress and which would not. I became worried by the way in which well-meaning and active organisations and individuals in my constituency wrote to me in good faith about Bills not only on the disabled but on animal welfare, rights for the elderly, and so on. They said, "Here is a Bill. I hope that it is going to make progress. I hope that you will be there to support it." We all know that some Bills will not make progress and will not be voted on.

I believe that the public should know what is going on. I shall attempt as briefly as possible to explain, not so much to the House, because we all know what is going on here, as to others outside who may be listening. When the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East introduced his Bill, it was interesting that the only remarks that he

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had to make about part VIII related to Northern Ireland. Part VIII contains clause 36. I should perhaps read it out to the House. It is a brief clause. It says:

"There shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament—

(a) any expenses of any Minister under this Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to this Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act."

As the House knows, that means that if the Bill is to make progress, it will need a money resolution. The House knows perfectly well that only the Treasury Bench can provide such a money resolution. I have already given evidence to the Select Committee on Procedure, presided over by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery). That is what prompted me to come to the House today.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Surely at least in theory, and I hope in practice, the Government are accountable to the House of Commons. I should have thought that if, in its wisdom this afternoon—I hope that it will be wise—the House gives the Bill a Second Reading, the Government would have an obligation to provide the necessary financial memorandum.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It brings me precisely to the point that I seek to make. I hope to explain, not to the House but to the general public, how Supply is managed in the House, why it is managed in the way that it is and why, as far as I am aware, neither the parties below the Gangway nor the official Opposition have any intention of introducing any such change. If the Opposition had any intention of doing that, it would be a major constitutional change in Britain.

My contention—I say this frankly to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East—is that the Government should never provide a money resolution for any private Member's Bill. That is one of the things that I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister to state in his reply to the debate. The Government should announce that and do so quickly.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East is in his place again. I do not advocate that we as private Members should not be entitled to introduce Bills. I am anxious to preserve that right. Today's Bill, ten-minute Bills, back-of-the-Chair Bills and other private Members' Bills have exerted consistent pressure on the Administration. It is right that Parliaments should do that. They have subjected the Administration to criticism. The hon. Gentleman was almost certainly right in saying that his Bill and others introduced in previous Sessions had a substantial influence on the Disability Discrimination Bill, which the Government are introducing in parallel to his Bill, as it were. I have no complaint about that.

My complaint is that the House allows members of the public to believe that Bills that do not enjoy a money resolution are real Bills which have a real prospect of reaching the statute book, when we all know perfectly well from the outset that that is not the case.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that, if a private Member's Bill gets the support of the whole House, a money resolution should not be brought forward by the Government?

Mr. Garel-Jones: Exactly so. I recognise that it is a novel position. I made that proposition to the Procedure Committee, to be honest to the hon. Lady, so that we do not indulge in these farces. When I was in charge of these matters, it would have taken me, after the ballot for private Members' Bills had taken place and I had worked out my chart and decided, acting on instructions, what the Government's interests were—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is well known as an expert on procedure in the House, and it is all very interesting, but I should be grateful if he would get back to the Bill that we are debating.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I was seeking to respond. Perhaps I can develop my point.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way.

If there could not be a money resolution in relation to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill or many other Bills, it would be a tremendous loss to the public. Do not the Government sometimes start off reluctant to provide a money resolution, but, as they see the momentum build up in favour of the Bill, they are persuaded to do so? Is that not how democracy should work? If the right hon. Gentleman had his way, private Members would be prevented from introducing similar Bills.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I certainly do not wish to prevent private Members from introducing Bills. No doubt hon. Members who are more experienced will correct me if I am wrong, but the current convention is that if a Bill is given a Second Reading, the Government normally supply a money resolution so that the Bill is considered in Committee. I suggest that the emphasis should be changed and that the convention should be that, as a general proposition, the Government do not supply a money resolution. The hon. Gentleman is right. If there is a special case, if the pressure is great and if the private Member introducing the Bill can persuade the Government that there may be some merit in it, the Government would not be prevented from introducing a money resolution. I am simply saying that, as a general proposition, the Government should not be expected to provide money resolutions for private Members' Bills.

I will finish this point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then get on with my speech. The Bill that most upset me when I was in charge of these measures was the Elimination of Poverty in Retirement Bill. Thousands of well-meaning, respectable pensioners' organisations were bussed up to the House in the belief that the Bill would make progress. Everyone in the House knew that it would not. I find that offensive. It demeans Parliament and misleads the general public.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are debating the Bill in accordance with the present procedures of the House. I should be very grateful if we could get back to the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to take up the time of the House, because, as hon. Members will know, part of the Friday tactic—

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): On that very point—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There will no more points on procedures of the House; they must be within the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Barnes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like it to be known that I object to the claims that I am involved in a procedure in order to mislead the public. I am trying to advance the public's interest via the procedures that I am following.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And that is the end of it.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Let me make it clear to hon. Members, particularly Opposition Members, that I am not giving way to them because I do not want to take part—I know perfectly well what the Friday tactics are—in any tactics to waste the time of the House. I want to make my point and then let the House get on. The clause—

Rev. Martin Smyth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that Madam Speaker ruled that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill should be treated in the same way as a Government Bill and, therefore, that we should not have a lecture on filibustering instead of debating the Bill according to the terms of Madam Speaker's ruling?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can confirm that.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am particularly concerned about clause 36, which involves the money resolution. I wish to make it absolutely clear to the general public who will be following the debate why, in effect, it is the crucial clause in terms of whether the Bill makes progress. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) may sneer, but it is an exceptionally important point. I know that he is a supporter of the Bill. I do not wish to delay progress on it. My advice to him, if he wishes to advance the Bill, is to allow me to make my point. If he wishes to detain the House further, I do not want to be discourteous and not give way to him.

The historical basis for the rule that a private Member cannot propose an increase in charge is contained in the classic statement in "Erskine May", with which you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be familiar. I remind the House what it says:

"the Crown demands money, the Commons grant it, and the Lords assent to the grant: but the Commons do not vote money unless it be required by the Crown; nor do they impose or augment taxes, unless such taxation is necessary for the public service, as declared by the Crown through its constitutional advisers".

The House lived with that as a convention for several centuries. Then, in 1713, the House felt it necessary to reflect that constitutional tradition in a Standing Order, which reads as follows:

"This House will receive no petition for any sum of money relating to public service but what is recommended from the Crown."

That Standing Order has been tacitly accepted by all parties in the House ever since, suffering over the years some amendment in the light of experience. I propose to refer to two such amendments, because, again, they are relevant to the position that we face in the Bill.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the House authorised the raising of money for a particular war. There were funds that were surplus to the supply that had been raised, and the Exchequer was not able to pay out that money. For that reason, the Standing Order was introduced in 1713. In the words of an historian, and this is where I come to the Bill, "The Standing Order was designed as a measure of protection against the easy extravagance of a large assembly." That is why the House thought it right to introduce the Standing Order in the first place. I now give an example of where the main parties, the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats, have supported continuance of that principle.

In 1866, hon. Members ingeniously found a way around that Standing Order—you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, better than I do how ingenious hon. Members can be in these matters. Mr. Gladstone, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, moved to close what he described as a leak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I honestly cannot allow the right hon. Gentleman to continue in this way. We must get back to debating the Bill before us. I do not want to have to pull up the right hon. Gentleman again.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I certainly do not want to challenge your guidance, but, with respect, you will be aware that the crucial question, as regards progress with the Bill, is whether the Government will choose to give it a money resolution, if it receives a Second Reading.

Ms Lynne: No.

Mr. Garel-Jones: If the hon. Lady does not believe that whether a Bill is funded is crucial in enabling it to fulfil its objectives, we will not get beyond square one. It is absolutely crucial.

I have no intention of defying any of your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I contend that clause 36, which involves the money resolution, is crucial. It is important that the public understand why Parliament has allowed the operation of Supply to remain in the hands of the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Would the right hon. Gentleman care to comment on the fact that, last year, when the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill contained a similar clause, the Prime Minister said before Second Reading that he looked forward to the Bill proceeding to Committee? Does the right hon. Gentleman disagree with the Prime Minister's view last year?

Mr. Garel-Jones: When the hon. Gentleman is as old as me, and has left the Administration, he will find that one does not have to act at the bidding of the Whips, the

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Prime Minister or anyone else. If my remarks stray away from those of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, so be it. I disagree. I can answer—

Rev. Martin Smyth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you give me guidance? I understood that, on Second Reading, the debate was on the principle of the Bill, not the particulars. Surely, we are well away from the principle of the Bill and a side issue is being debated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's interpretation is right. For the last time—

Mr. Garel-Jones *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman, who is an experienced campaigner, has been doing his best to keep within the subject for debate, but he has not been overly successful. I hope that he will confine his remarks to the Bill.

Mr. Garel-Jones: If you are ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is out of order to discuss the financing of a Bill and the Supply mechanism that exists for its financing, that is an important and serious ruling. I hope that you are not. I am confining my remarks to that subject and it is significant that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) regards it as an inconsequence—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Member for Kingswood asked me a question and I want to respond. Yes, I disagree with the Government's over-generous practice of letting it be known that, if a Bill receives a Second Reading, they will provide a money resolution.

Mr. Wigley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given that debate is being allowed on the money resolution and is harking back to 1713, 1830 and thereafter, will the Chair allow a similar debate at length on every Bill that has a money resolution, and will that now be part of the procedures of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can safely say that that will not be the procedure. I have attempted—probably unsuccessfully—to confine the debate to the Standing Orders of the House and the Bill. The right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) knows that. I do not want to have to ask him to resume his seat. I hope that he will not force me to do so, and I will not have to do that if he sticks to the Second Reading.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The time of the House is being taken up because I am not allowed to develop a simple argument, which I had expected to do in about 10 minutes.

My answer to the hon. Member for Kingswood is, yes, I disagree with the practice that has arisen, which the Treasury Bench carry out over-generously—the convention that, if a Bill receives a Second Reading on the Floor of the House, it is given a money resolution. I have given evidence to the Select Committee on Procedure to that effect.

Mr. Berry: The right hon. Gentleman's argument is about misleading the public. Will he confirm that the Prime Minister misled the public about the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill last year, and that the Government did not vote against the money resolution when we debated it in Committee? If the thrust of his argument is about misleading the public, will he confirm that the Prime Minister and the Government have misled the public over this Bill, not Opposition Members?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I confirm no such thing. The hon. Gentleman is confirming that he is here to support the Bill and to make party political points. We all receive letters from our constituents on this and numerous other private Members' Bills. They believe that we are genuinely attempting to legislate, but, if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that such Bills will not make progress—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is returning to his previous subject. This is the last time that I will warn him. If he fails to heed my warning, he will have to resume his seat.

Mr. Garel-Jones: May I seek your guidance on a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I attempt to resume my speech? Will you guide me? The Bill contains a clause—36—that requires the Government to introduce a money resolution. Will you confirm that that is the case, and if it is, will you confirm that it would be in order to discuss clause 36, why a money resolution is necessary and, very briefly, the history of money resolutions? If that is not in order, I would be deeply surprised.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As the right hon. Gentleman put it, it is in order, but he has been straying much further than that and giving us a history lesson on procedure. I have drawn that fact to his attention several times and will not do so again. If it happens again, he will have to resume his seat.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You and I have been colleagues for some years and have served on Standing Committees together. I am trying to make a point so that the public will understand why the House, including the Opposition and the Liberal party, has decided that Supply remains—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not the subject of today's debate. The right hon. Gentleman may well want to educate the public on the procedures of the House, but he can do so another time. It is not a matter for this debate and that is the end of it.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Clearly, I will have to accept your ruling in that matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will, of course, but perhaps, on a further point of order—*[Interruption.]* Since you know that in no circumstances would I defy your ruling, will you guide me as to how I can take the matter further, as it is important for this and for other private Members' Bills?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. With the greatest respect, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman needs no guidance on the procedures of the House. I do not know whether he has reached the conclusion of his remarks, but I will

no longer tolerate having to stand up and draw to his attention the fact that he should return to the Second Reading. If he fails to do so, it will be the end of it.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I obviously accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I have two questions for the hon. Member for Monklands, West and one for my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I realise that my hon. Friend does not expect this question and will not be briefed to answer it. I do not expect him to give a firm answer at this stage, but I ask him to give an undertaking that he will raise the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Will he say that there will be no automatic money resolution for the Bill if it receives a Second Reading?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you say why we are not having a statement at this time from the Secretary of State for Defence on the enforced resignation of Air Chief Marshall Sir Sandy Wilson?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for me. I have no knowledge at all about any statement.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order for me to table a private notice question on the whole way in which the matter of Sir Sandy's resignation, if that be the case, as it has been publicised in the newspapers—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a matter for the hon. Gentleman, and his point of order is an abuse of the House's time. We are debating an important Bill and interventions of that nature are not helpful.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I repeat my question to my hon. Friend the Minister of State. Will he give an undertaking to raise this important matter, which I have raised with the Select Committee on Procedure, with the Secretary of State before the Whips automatically provide a money resolution in the event of the Bill receiving its Second Reading?

I apologise to the hon. Member for Monklands, West because I shall not be in the Chamber to hear him. I have two requests for him. First, will he confirm that the Opposition will continue to support the principle that Supply should remain in the hands of the Government, that they are not suggesting any changes and have initiated no conversations with the Leader of the House—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That will do: that is the end of it. The right hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

11.2 am

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The contribution by the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) represented one of the worst aspects of the House. That is unusual because on disability matters the House is usually at its best. Before coming to the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) I should like to respond to the right hon. Gentleman's two major points. First, he asked whether a Labour Government would introduce a similar Bill if the Government block this one. The unreserved and proud answer is yes. In saying that I have the support not only of my hon. Friends, but of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the shadow Cabinet. I say that in the absence of the right hon. Gentleman. He made a long speech and it is a bit absurd for him to leave the Chamber.

Those who followed the last Labour party conference will be fully aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), the shadow Chancellor, made it clear that if the Government delay, delay and delay again in the disgraceful way that they have already delayed a profound Bill, we shall be proud to introduce this measure in Government.

Mr. Tim Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: No. I am still replying to the right hon. Gentleman who took much of the House's time and then disappeared.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman is not in the House.

Mr. Barnes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not a normal courtesy of the House that after an hon. Member has made a speech he stays to listen to the following speech which may refer to his contribution, which is what is happening in this case?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, it is a common courtesy, but for a long time I have noticed that many of the common courtesies on which I was brought up in the House seem to have gone out of the window. People seem to have forgotten that, and it relates not only to leaving after making a speech but to other matters. I hope that at some time hon. Members will return to the common courtesies of the House.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is of course my intention to listen in full to the speech by the Opposition spokesman: I have no intention of being discourteous. I was simply doing you the courtesy of apologising to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for having, as it were, not agreed with your ruling. I thought that it was courteous to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is right. I dream that one day I shall stand to take a genuine point of order for the Chair. It may happen only rarely, but I live in hope.

Mr. Clarke: I accept that the right hon. Gentleman's contribution was quite uncharacteristic. Therefore, I hope that what he has just said shows contrition and is perhaps an indication that he will listen to the rest of our debate.

The right hon. Gentleman specifically asked me to respond to his second point on the issue of the money resolution. I had the great privilege of having outstanding support from all parts of the House for the 1986 legislation with which I was associated because I had the good fortune to be first in the ballot. At that time under Prime Minister Thatcher, now Lady Thatcher, the Government arranged for the money resolution. There was no difficulty whatever because the Government accepted that they had a responsibility to the House and that the views of the House are what really matter.

I shall now turn to the Bill and to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East. He courageously introduced a Bill which is well known to the House and to the other place and which would clearly have massive support in a free vote. He has shown great

[Mr. Clarke]

judgment and courage and made an unanswerable speech. Irrespective of public relations advisers getting to work on this Bill and the Government Bill, nothing can disguise the sincerity and practical appeal of my hon. Friend's speech and his splendid Bill.

Yesterday hundreds of disabled people gathered in Westminster Hall to lobby their elected representatives and let them know that the only legislation that will meet their requirements is that proposed in a Bill which will assure them of full civil rights and equality of treatment. I welcome the contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), who for many years has fought for that principle in the whole of the United Kingdom. His speech was significant and welcome.

A short time ago I attended a reception held by ADAPT, Access for Disabled People to Arts Premises Today, an organisation whose aims I support. At that reception Lord Snowdon delivered a speech that was not only effective but realistic because he showed the frustration that is shared by many hon. Members in all parts of the House about the slow progress that is being made on access. We should give the Bill a Second Reading and if we do we shall be taking on board the important views of ADAPT and many others.

The Bill enjoys the support of all political parties as represented by individual hon. Members and not necessarily by the Front-Bench line. I hope, however, that the Government Front-Bench team will allow it to make the progress that its broad range of support deserves.

Hon. Members from all parties attended yesterday's lobby in Westminster Hall. A wide range of political allegiances were represented among the people who addressed the assembly, as well as among those who were present. Those who were there will be aware that the House does not make appropriate provision for disabled citizens—voters who are lobbying their representatives—to hold meetings at which hon. Members can address their concerns, as their constituents would expect.

Those people who were not able to attend may be interested in the circumstances, which are directly relevant to the matter under consideration today. Those of our constituents with mobility problems have no ready means of access to the Central Lobby of the House, and very limited access to such places as the Committee Rooms and the Grand Committee Room. Other groups of constituents may lobby their representatives in Central Lobby and meet elsewhere to hear the views of other hon. Members, but large numbers of disabled citizens can be readily accommodated only in Westminster Hall, with all its limitations.

The problem with such an arrangement is that it is not possible to use any sort of public address system in Westminster Hall, which means that, in practice, no facility exists, even in the House, for disabled citizens to meet during a lobby of that sort, a restriction that does not apply to other lobbies. That is clearly unacceptable in 1995.

That is the reality of the situation before our very eyes. Hon. Members of all parties will recognise it, and many will also recognise that that is a perfect example of the sort of discrimination that disabled people face only too often in their day-to-day lives. Sadly, for them yesterday was no new experience.

That is a perfect example for a number of reasons. First, it is profoundly unfair and unjust to penalise more than one tenth of our constituents on the grounds of their disability. Secondly, the discrimination was neither deliberate nor malicious. I am certain that to discriminate in that way was the last thing intended by hon. Members or by Officers of the House, who were carrying out instructions given to them when the problem came into being. Thirdly, its effects on disabled people is far more irksome than some people might imagine. Above all, it is the sort of discrimination that may easily escape the reach of the limited legislation that the Government have proposed in their Disability Discrimination Bill. Such discrimination, however, would quickly disappear if the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East were finally to achieve its proper place in the law of the land.

The point, of course, is not just that my hon. Friend's Bill is better and more comprehensive than the Government's alternative. The difference between the two Bills, as has been recognised in the consideration given to both, is not just one of degree; it is a difference of kind. They are founded on distinct principles. That difference is recognised not only in this place, but by 6.5 million disabled people, whom hon. Members represent—all of us on both sides of the House, wherever we sit. That is why disabled people reject the Government's approach as inadequate, and why they want that my hon. Friend's Bill to make due progress.

Mr. Deva: Many Members want this whole process to work. It does not matter whose Bill it is. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, since 1944, the quota system has not worked, and that only a third of the people who could register on that system have registered on it? The Bill of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) still retains the quota system, whereas the Government's Bill talks about a statutory right to non-discrimination. Why does the hon. Gentleman want to support a quota system?

Mr. Clarke: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman. He is right about the quota system. It has not worked for two main reasons—Governments have not had the will to make it work, and we do not have a commission along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East, which is clearly essential to monitor and to ensure that any discrimination ceases to exist, whether it be in terms of race, gender or disability.

A civil rights approach is founded on the principle that unfair discrimination on the basis of disability is wrong. As all hon. Members would regard unfair discrimination on other grounds, such as race or gender, as intrinsically and inherently wrong, I would have thought that our support for the Bill is relevant. That is a powerful principle, underlying much of what is best in our law, and much of what we would regard as best in the traditions of a parliamentary, pluralistic and democratic society.

The Government's approach in their measure is founded on a much weaker view—that discrimination against disabled people is merely undesirable, and that it should be reduced only in some areas and to some degree. As I have said, it is not just that the degree is inadequate. The measure fails essentially in that it does not begin from

the basis of equal rights, and it gives only piecemeal concessions, instead of the rights that disabled people need and demand.

Mr. Tim Smith: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument. He said earlier that the two Bills were based on two different sets of principles. But surely the Government's Bill introduces a new right for disabled people in a number of different respects. Surely the distinction is one of degree, rather than one of principle.

Mr. Clarke: The more the debate develops, especially in Committee, where no Conservative Member has made any contribution, the more it is shown that this is a big issue both of principle and of degree. I should like to give way to hon. Members on both sides of the House, but, in the interests of a fair debate, I intend to continue with my speech.

Our arguments show why disabled people want hon. Members to approve my hon. Friend's Bill. We do not ask for much. The Bill is not a measure of positive discrimination because that is not what disabled people have put on the agenda. The Bill asks only for what disabled people require and demand: that the discrimination issue should be approached from a starting point of equal rights to work, to shop, to travel and to participate in our society as full and equal citizens. As Colin Barnes said in his moving and yet practical book "Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination":

> "Discrimination in Britain against disabled people is now widely understood as a major social problem that can only be solved by statutory means".

It perhaps represents the major division between the Government and other hon. Members on both sides of the House.

As the difference between the two measures is so fundamental, the main points in my hon. Friend's Bill are also the principal factors distinguishing it from the Government's proposal. A measure to outlaw discrimination must start from a clear definition of who is covered by its provisions. That is the first way in which my hon. Friend's Bill is essentially superior to the Government's Bill. Precisely because we start from the basis of civil rights, we propose a definition that is generous and comprehensive.

Mr. Duncan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Clarke: I shall not give way further. The hon. Gentleman had every opportunity to speak in Committee, but has not made a single speech over the past two or three weeks.

The principle behind my hon. Friend's Bill is that no one in society should be discriminated against on the basis of disability.

Mr. Duncan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has twice said this morning that, in Committee, Conservative Back Benchers made no contributions, which he apparently defines only as speeches. Many of us intervened and just because our interventions were pithy and to the point, it does not mean that they were not contributions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is responsible for his own speech.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I repeat that not one Conservative Member, with the exception of the two Ministers, has made a single speech in Committee. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) referred to interventions in Committee. I have taken those into account when studying *Hansard* and find that, in total, all interventions from all Conservative Members, including the hon. Gentleman who seeks to interrupt my speech, amount to two and a half minutes in 15 hours. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends will understand why I do not intend to give way for the rest of my speech.

My hon. Friend's Bill provides protection for those who have, for example, suffered from mental illness in the past and for those who have a reputation of mental illness which is ill-founded. We do not wish to imply that those with certain forms of disability are more deserving of legal protection than others.

The Government's approach, by contrast, is to provide an ungenerous and narrow definition of disability in medical and legal terms, which will exclude from its protection some of the types of case that I have just mentioned—for whom the injustice of discrimination is, if anything, all the more bitter. The narrowness of the Government's definition is shown by the fact that it would exclude some of those who are already registered as disabled. The Government have to make specific provision to ensure that those people are not now excluded from the protection of the law. The lack of generosity is also shown by the fact that the protection of those already registered as disabled is limited to an initial period of three years.

My hon. Friend's Bill, because it starts from the basis of civil rights, proposes that it should be unlawful to discriminate against qualified disabled people in employment. The mechanics and the timescale of how that new right should be implemented are for the House to determine. I hope that we shall have the opportunity to consider those points in detail at later stages in the Bill's progress.

The Government's proposed alternative is that there should be protection only against direct discrimination and only in the case of larger companies. Even worse, the Government propose to remove the existing legal provision for quotas of disabled workers in larger companies, thus removing an existing right before finding out whether the new provision will be effective. The Bill that we are considering today will introduce a new and comprehensive protection against discrimination in employment. But it does not propose to remove existing rights until the new provisions have proved their worth. Surely, if we want effective law, that is the right way round—it is plain common sense.

My hon. Friend's Bill approaches the issue of access to goods and services from the starting point of equal rights. It does not, as the Government's alternative does, specifically exclude education. It says that existing school building should be accessible to disabled people because the right of equal access to education is fundamental to full participation in society. Disabled access to schools,

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

which is provided for in my hon. Friend's Bill, does not mean access merely for school students, but for parents who are disabled, for school governors who are disabled—we all know how close to the Government's heart school governors are—and for teachers who are disabled.

My hon. Friend's Bill will also mean access to schools, not just for those concerned with the education of children, but for disabled people in the community as a whole. The Bill also states that the right of access to education should not only be extended to those aged under 16 or 18, but should give disabled people every opportunity to take advantage of further and higher education.

My hon. Friend's Bill says that disabled people should not only be allowed to go to the railway station, but should have the right to catch the train. There is little point in improving access to shops and offices, if members of the public who are disabled cannot get to them by public transport. There is no point in the Government proposing an alternative to my hon. Friend's comprehensive Bill, then saying that some things must be legislated for in another measure at a date that is as yet unknown.

We argue that the right of access to goods and services should mean just that, and that businesses that can afford it should make the necessary adjustments to give equal access to disabled customers. We reject the limited and piecemeal approach in the Government's White Paper, which states that if someone cannot get into a showroom, he or she can get a catalogue through the post. Just as absurd and disgraceful is the suggestion that, instead of being integrated into our society, disabled people should sit outside polling stations in their cars waiting for ballot papers to be delivered. I have seldom heard of anything more disgraceful.

The Bill should also commend itself to hon. Members on both sides of the House because it makes explicit provision for their disabled constituents to vote. As I understand it, there is nothing that unites us more than our commitment to the electoral process. We are determined to remove the scandal whereby only 12 per cent. of polling stations were fully accessible to disabled voters at the last election. If we pass the Bill, we shall earn the gratitude of disabled voters and give them a better opportunity to pass judgment on how we have dealt with the matter.

The fundamental difference between my hon. Friend's Bill and the Government's alternative is not only the difference between comprehensive rights and piecemeal concessions. There is also a very real practical difference in the fundamental issue of how the law will work. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that effectiveness is one of the most important measures of any legislation. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill will be effective and enforceable because it creates a disability rights commission, which is not merely an advisory body, but has the powers to ensure that the legislation is implemented in full. It is in that area more than any other that the inadequacies of the Government's alternative approach are most clearly exposed.

It is because we want to outlaw unfair discrimination against disabled people that we want an independent and effective organisation to enforce their rights. It is because the Government want only to make certain concessions that their proposals provide for no such organisation. They suggest only an advisory council—a talking shop—that has no powers to take action on behalf of the victims of discrimination.

The Bill gives the House the opportunity to enrich the lives of 6.5 million of our fellow citizens—the opportunity to make this year truly the year of disabled people's rights. Improving the rights of disabled people will enrich the lives of us all. If we are serious about disabled people's rights, we must show that we are serious by treating unfair discrimination against disabled people on a par with racial or sexual discrimination, which it is, and which disabled people want the House to recognise most passionately. Nothing less than that will do. That is why I commend my hon. Friend's Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill to the House and congratulate him most warmly on the courage of its presentation.

11.30 am

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The Bill is, of course, difficult to speak on, because passions naturally run very high, and people feel very strongly about the issues it addresses. Not one hon. Member fails to understand and appreciate the appalling difficulties under which disabled people labour. However, although it is not easy to speak against the Bill, I intend to do precisely that.

I have never made any secret of the fact that I oppose the Bill and its precursor, the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) last year. I hope that hon. Members will accept that, although I oppose the Bill, I am conscious, as I said, of the terrible burdens under which disabled people labour. Whatever our views on the Bill, all hon. Members want to try to ensure that consistent progress is made—it may be gradual—in ensuring that disabled people are not discriminated against.

Last year, I made a particular point about the costs of the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Kingswood, to which I shall refer, and I also opposed it on philosophical grounds, just as I oppose this Bill on philosophical grounds. The great battles fought in the House over the past two or three centuries and those fought in legislatures in other civilised countries have been over removing discrimination against certain classes of people—women, black people or whoever. On many occasions, minorities have been discriminated against, and we want to ensure that everybody is treated exactly equally.

I object to this Bill and all such Bills on philosophical grounds because they give extra rights over and above the law to a certain type of person. That is unfair on the disabled people themselves, and it is unfair on society as a whole, which will have to bear the cost. It would be unfair on disabled people because it would build up resentment against them and—possibly—have precisely the opposite effect to that intended.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) launched a strong attack on the Government Bill. I think that that Bill goes very far. The hon. Gentleman is wrong that the Government are not minded to introduce statutory

redress—they are. The Government Bill is before us, we have discussed it and it will become law. The Government Bill goes a long way, and it is flexible and sensible.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich) *rose—*

Mr. Leigh: I shall give way in moment.

The Government's Bill is flexible and sensible, and it will take matters forward in a way that the public can understand. However, the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) is unclear—I shall explain why—it is inflexible, and it is unfair in many respects to disabled people.

Mr. Austin-Walker: While comparing the definition of disability in my hon. Friend's Bill to that in the Government's Bill, does the hon. Gentleman agree that, under the Government's definition, an entire range of people who may be HIV-positive, who may have multiple sclerosis or who may have a history of mental illness will not be covered, but that they will be covered and protected by my hon. Friend's Bill?

Mr. Leigh: I do not necessarily accept that point. It is, of course, a point of detail, on which no doubt my hon. Friend the Minister will comment. My hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith), who was in his place earlier, said that the Bill refers to sensory disablement. The Government definition is more sensible because it talks about people not being able to carry out normal activities. I shall return to that, but I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point.

I was making three points about unfairness, inflexibility and cost. We must accept, although it may not be popular and it is a difficult point to make, that the Bill is unfair on employers. I do not necessarily say that it will cost £17 billion. I never made that point. I do not know how much it will cost, but I am sure that even the promoters and supporters of the Bill would not deny that the cost would be enormous, and that the costs would simply be passed on to the public.

The Bill is inflexible because, unlike the Government Bill, it cannot be fine-tuned or amended as attitudes change. Fundamentally, disabled people want attitudes to change in society, so that people realise the enormous problems under which disabled people labour. Over many years, we must gradually change attitudes—precisely what the previous Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), sought to achieve, as does my hon. Friend the Minister. We still have not had any real estimate of the costs of the Bill.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Even though the hon. Gentleman says that the Bill would be unfair to employers, does he recognise and pay tribute to the Confederation of British Industry and the Employers Forum on Disability, which, not only nationally but in Northern Ireland, have welcomed steps being taken to protect the rights of people with disabilities? They are not objecting to the Bill.

Mr. Leigh: As the previous Bill proceeded through its various stages last year—we shall no doubt encounter the same today—much emphasis was placed by business from Britain and America on the costs of the Bill to business. Of course business wants to do its best for disabled people. Business men are as aware as anybody else how appalling it is to arrive at a public, private or commercial building and not be able to enter it easily. But that is quite different from suddenly, immediately, loading enormous costs on every business in the country, including those which employ fewer than 20 people. Business men are worried about that and want the process be gradual.

Before I deal with the Bill in slightly more detail—it will be a relief to Opposition Members that, as so many hon. Members obviously intend to speak, I do not intend to speak for more than about 15 minutes, if there are not too many interruptions—I must make the following point.

It is important that the public realise that the Bill is controversial, that it is opposed and that not one controversial private Member's Bill has become law in 15 years. Therefore, I fear that there is no chance of this Bill becoming law. It is important that disabled people—

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Leigh: Hang on.

It is important that disabled people out there are not under the delusion that this is a serious Bill, that it can and will become an Act of Parliament. It is a highly controversial private Member's Bill. Since I have piloted a successful private Member's Bill through the House, I believe it is sensible to try to get support from all parties.

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Leigh: I shall give way in a moment.

It is a controversial Bill, which will not become law, so disabled people should not be deluded that Conservative Members are wasting time, or killing the Bill, or anything else. I shall not labour the enormous costs involved in the Bill, because the point has been made many times, but it is right that such a Bill should be promoted by the Government and not by a private Member.

Mr. Clarke: It may have been a slip of the tongue—I accept that, in the excitement of debate, such things happen—but the hon. Gentleman said that not one private Member's Bill had been passed in 15 years.

Mr. Leigh: I said, not one controversial Bill.

Mr. Clarke: The Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1985 was very controversial, and was initially opposed by Ministers. However, with Lady Thatcher as Prime Minister, that Bill went through. Is the hon. Gentleman telling me that, despite his former support for Lady Thatcher, the situation has deteriorated even more, and that an even better Bill will not be passed?

Mr. Leigh: The exact truth is that not one Bill which has been opposed on Second Reading has become law. No doubt there were worries about the hon. Gentleman's Bill, he was—presumably—prepared to be flexible, and in the end it became law.

However, it is important that people out there understand. Many worthy pressure groups are under the delusion that many such Bills have a chance of becoming law, when they have not.

It is not in the interests of disabled people to be used as a pawn in a party political—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East knows that his Bill will not become law. He is right to campaign for disabled people; he is right to embarrass the Government. He is a member of the Opposition, and that is what he is paid to do. However, people outside this House should be made

[Mr. Leigh]

aware that his Bill will not become law. I have made my point, and I do not want to labour it. I do not want to fall into the same trap as my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones)

I want to explain my philosophical approach to these issues. As we increase wealth in society and give people more resources, more freedom, more independence and more dignity, we must also increase the sense of responsible individualism, so that society as a whole becomes more responsible and is made more aware of certain people who may not have certain advantages or rights.

Mr. Barnes: I understand the hon. Gentleman's arguments—they have their own internal consistency. Of course, I disagree with them. What surprises me about the hon. Gentleman's philosophical view is that he supports the Government's Bill while opposing mine. However inadequate I believe the Government's Bill to be, it nevertheless contains little bits and pieces that will result in some interference in what the hon. Gentleman might consider to be certain rights and freedoms. Surely, philosophically, he is strongly opposed to that. He certainly objects to that in my Bill, so why does he not object strongly to the Government's Bill?

Mr. Leigh: That is a fair point. My hon. Friend the Minister is continually under pressure from Opposition Members, but very little pressure comes from Conservative Members. I have to tell him that some of us are worried that the Government may have over-responded to the very severe public pressure put on them last year. It is right for me and others of my hon. Friends to give a warning sign. I have looked carefully at the Government's Bill, and I am just about prepared to go along with it. It contains a degree of flexibility that I can live with.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East made a fair point. Not all the pressure on these issues should come from special interest groups—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to argue on behalf of everybody in this country—disabled people and people who do not have disabilities. Opposition Members rightly, from their point of view, argue on behalf of people with disabilities. However, it is our duty to think of the nation as a whole, and also of particular minorities within the nation. That is what I am trying to do.

I want to deal with some of the points about the Bill which worry me. My hon. Friend the Member for Chingford made a good point. Neither he nor I has had an answer from the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East about the meaning of "sensory impairment". However, it is a minor point that can be dealt with in Committee. The definition in the Government's Bill of the ability to carry on day-to-day activities is much more sensible.

My next point, which is much more serious, is about employment rights. The Bill is seriously flawed because it will apply to all companies, whereas the Government's Bill would apply only to companies that employ more than 20 people.

I cannot understand how any sensible, practical person who is interested in introducing sensible legislation could make such a proposal. Presumably the hon. Member for Monklands, West would hope to be the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People if there were to be a Labour Government. How could he suggest that every little business or shop that employs three or four people—about 70 per cent. of the nation's work force—should be covered by the Bill? It does not make sense.

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Leigh: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, as he may be able to answer my point.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman has been generous in giving way, which I appreciate. He said that he did not understand our proposal relating to firms that employ fewer than 20 people. Will he pay due regard to the Employers Forum on Disability, which speaks not only for firms such as Marks and Spencer and Barclays, but for the Lord Chancellor's Department and British Gas? Are they wrong, or is the hon. Gentleman wrong?

Mr. Leigh: I do not know. I can only put a personal point of view and speak from my experience. I think that what I say has a certain element of common sense. If the House does not agree with me, so be it.

Mr. Wareing: Is the hon. Gentleman not confusing our proposal with the quota system? We are not saying that firms with fewer than 20 employees have to employ disabled people. We are saying that a disabled person has as much right to consideration for employment with a small firm as with a large firm.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. Practical difficulties may stand in the way of a small business complying with the Bill. It is easier for a large business.

The Government's Bill sensibly provides a statutory right of non-discrimination. That is a major step forward, something that we have never previously had in law. Under the Government's Bill, disabled people cannot be treated less favourably unless it can be justified. That is sensible, and I do not think anyone would disagree with it. However, that is as far as I am prepared to go.

Let us consider the quota system. I do not want to labour the point, but the system has not worked. The hon. Member for Monklands, West says that it has not worked because the Government have not tried to make it work. I do not know about that, but we all accept that it has not worked. The Bill would reintroduce the system.

I do not like quotas. I am philosophically opposed to them, because they stereotype people, which is the wrong way to proceed. If the system had worked and all businesses had had to take their quotas, there would not have been sufficient disabled people to fill them.

Ms Lynne: Can the hon. Gentleman tell us where in the Bill the quota system is mentioned?

Mr. Leigh: I may be wrong, but my understanding is that the quota system would be reintroduced under the Bill.

Mr. Barnes: The point is that the quota system would not be discontinued under my Bill. It would be discontinued under the Government's Bill. My Bill simply

maintains the existing position. The hon. Gentleman should address himself not to my Bill but to the legislation that covers the quota system.

Mr. Leigh: I expressed myself badly. The Government's Bill would abolish the system, which is the right thing to do.

The Government's Bill is a sensible halfway house. It may be too little for some people and too much for others, but that is the nature of Governments and of compromise. Its aims in relation to premises and services are achievable. It refers to "phasing in". That is sensible.

Of course access to transport should be made more available, especially at terminuses—but to make every vehicle accessible to disabled people would cost an enormous amount. It is one thing to ensure that all new vehicles have low loading so that there is better access for wheelchairs, but to insist that all transport should be made accessible to wheelchairs simply would not work—*[Interruption.]* It is my understanding that that would be the result of the Bill—*[Interruption.]* That is my understanding.

On the question of the enforcement of employment rights, the Government's Bill gives disabled people, like anyone else, the right to complain to the county court or an industrial relations tribunal. That is a sensible halfway house. The problem with this Bill is that it is framed so widely that it will result in considerable litigation, with people appealing right up to the High Court.

A point made many times in the Chamber is that Opposition Members support the Bill because it would create a disability rights commission similar to the Equal Opportunities Commission. That is one fundamental reason why I oppose the Bill. To create a whole new body with investigative powers would be a dangerous departure, and would not help rights for disabled people.

We have two Bills. First, there is the Government's Bill, which has been supported by a substantial majority of hon. Members and will almost certainly become law. It is a sensible and flexible Bill, which will ensure that there is a statutory right to non-discrimination.

On the other side, we have a private Member's Bill whose cost we cannot quantify and whose impact on transport systems and small businesses could be great. It has the potential to create resentment against disabled people, it will not abolish the quota system, and it will introduce new bureaucratic procedures and a whole new layer of administration in the form of a commission. There is no doubt in my mind that the Government have got it right on this occasion, and that we should reject the Bill before the House.

11.49 am

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): In our previous Second Reading debate on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in March last year, I observed that there were hon. Members from all parties who wanted it to succeed, but who unavoidably were unable to be present. I went on:

> "That applies notably to my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), one of the few hon. Members significantly to have legislated as a private member for disabled people".—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 540.]

Typical of him, he was honouring a commitment to Africa's poor. Today he is not only here but speaking for the Opposition, and I most warmly welcome him to his first full debate on the Bill in that role.

It was in 1991 that I drafted and first promoted the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I moved its Second Reading on 31 January 1992, when it was talked out by Robert Hayward, then the Member of Parliament for Kingswood. Earlier that day he had explicitly stated that he would not be talking the Bill out, and disabled people everywhere felt badly cheated by what they saw as a gross deception. Five days later, Robert Hayward made a personal statement of "unreserved apologies" to the Speaker and the House for misleading Parliament.

That did not, however, alter the fact that my Bill had been delayed indefinitely by the most crude of blocking tactics. In fact, it was not until February 1993, by which time the Bill had been approved at all stages in another place—due not least to the abiding support of Lord Snowdon, my noble Friends Lord Ashley and Lady Lockwood and of Lord Rix—that I was able to seek a further Second Reading debate for it in this House.

It was then blocked again, not this time by a Government Back-Bencher but from the Treasury Bench by the Government themselves, notwithstanding the unanimous approval by the House of a motion standing in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), calling for the Bill's urgent enactment.

Then came the good news. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), who had won the seat from Robert Hayward only three months after the latter talked out my Bill, also won a high place in the ballot for private Members' Bills for the parliamentary Session 1993-94. Without hesitation, he agreed to reintroduce my Bill, and I have already paid tribute to his dedication in promoting it in the face not only of further obstruction but also of prevarication and blatant dissimulation by the Government, which resulted in two further personal statements of "unreserved apologies" for misleading Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) has now used his good fortune in the ballot to reintroduce the Bill, and I most warmly congratulate him, on both the manner and content of his speech in opening the debate. His energy, skill and sincerity in promoting the Bill are widely admired.

As my hon. Friend knows, there are those who ask why, now that the Government have been dragged kicking and screaming to accept the necessity of legislation, we do not just welcome them as repenting sinners and work to amend and improve their, by common consent, pallid alternative to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

Only this week, a woman who is well disposed to our aims wrote to me to say:

> "Now that you've won and the Government, at long last, are having to legislate, why don't you simply claim victory and amend their Bill to your liking?"

Of course, nothing would be more agreeable to me than to be able to amend at will the Government's proposals and thus to end a parliamentary battle that I began in 1991. But changes to their Bill on the scale required to make it acceptable to disabled people are just not possible. Even if they were, however, why, having invented the wheel, should we now have to waste time adapting the Government's very poor imitation of one? Rather than attempting to amend the Government's Bill so extensively, with no real prospect of success, why should we not persist in trying to enact our own?

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

Another question posed is: why, even if we are unable significantly to improve the Government's Bill, can we not accept what is on offer as a major step forward after 13 years of systematic obstruction, and then, in the years ahead, build on what their Bill has achieved?

But in the view of disabled people and those who work to help them, the Government's Bill is not a major step forward. In fact, much apart from thinking that it will make life better for them, their view is that the Government's Bill will actually increase discrimination against disabled people. They cite first the Government's proposal to end the 3 per cent. jobs quota, which they argue will undoubtedly make matters worse.

"Rights Now", whose affiliates include the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, cites as well the Government's pointlessly complicated and over-restrictive definition of discrimination. It attacks what it calls the Government's "complete failure" to understand how disability discrimination works and goes on:

"The Government's Bill contains a host of defences and potential justifications for discriminatory treatment which are not present in the legislation on sex and race. The accumulated effect of these loopholes will render it almost impossible for a disabled person to challenge discrimination".

Such pointed criticism leaves scant room for any doubt about what Britain's 6.5 million disabled people think of the assumption that the Government's Bill is a major step forward.

Nor are disabled people alone in rejecting that assumption. The Confederation of British Industry, among other employers' organisations, is opposed to the exclusion from the Government's Bill of employers with fewer than 20 employees. No less than 83 per cent. of all employees work for such employers. It surely cannot be right to let them go on discriminating in any way they choose.

Mr. Nigel Evans I am a little disturbed by the question of quotas. The right hon. Gentleman talked about 6.5 million disabled people, but they are not registered disabled people. Was not the problem under the quota system the fact that relatively few people are registered disabled compared with the 6.5 million figure, and firms found it impossible to fill the quota with registered disabled people?

Mr. Morris: I have given way, but I shall not do so again, because I know that many other Members want to speak, and the House wants to move on as quickly as possible.

I am not alone in that there are 6.5 million disabled people in this country; the Government themselves, on the authority of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, say that this is the number of disabled people in Britain today.

What is wrong with the quota is that it has not been enforced since the 1970s. It was last enforced during my period as Minister for Disabled People. My hon. Friend's Bill provides a mechanism—the disability rights commission—that will assist disabled people to enforce their statutory rights. To do away with the quota is to take away an existing statutory right at a time when disabled people will point out to the Minister that they want more protection, not less.

To resume: it cannot be right either for Ministers who have no experience of running a major private enterprise to tell those who have that the Government know best. I make no apology for quoting again in this debate a big employer in the private sector, who has told me:

"To end discrimination in the labour market, you must not only protect disabled people there but also achieve full equality of access for them to transport and training, among many other facilities and services".

In his view, "piecemeal change" of the kind proposed in the Government's Bill is an attempt to divide the indivisible, represents a profligate waste of taxpayers' money, and calculated to make discrimination against disabled people even more widespread than it is now.

Sir Peter Large—than whom few people can speak with more insight on this subject or have more personal experience of severe disability—has sent me his analysis of the differences between the Government's Bill and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which is no less devastating than the comparison made by Scope, to which I referred when we debated the Government's Bill on 24 January 1995. Sir Peter Large compares the two Bills in all respects, and makes it crystal clear why disabled people and their organisations are wholly right to support our Bill.

If asked to single out the two most important differences, Sir Peter tells me, he would name first the exclusion of education from the Government's Bill; and, secondly, its proposal for a "toothless" national disability council in place of the disability rights commission for which our Bill provides. Referring to the disadvantages faced 25 years ago by children with disabilities, he says:

"I remember being dismayed that scholastically able but physically disabled children were forced into special schools merely because they were barred access by the bricks and mortar of mainstream schools. That still happens today, but your Bill would help eliminate the difficulty".

Turning to the Government's proposed national disability council, Sir Peter describes the provision for a disability rights commission in our Bill as "incomparably superior". Indeed, he regards the commission for which we provide, with its powers to undertake general investigations and assist individual disabled people to enforce their rights, as central to the success of any legislation to eradicate discrimination against them.

"In comparison,"

he goes on,

"the Government's proposal for an advisory council is a wheyfaced ghost of what is required. Not only does it lack teeth: it enjoys no life of its own. It can act only in response to summonses of the Secretary of State. Its subservience is blatantly obvious in that it is specifically excluded by Statute from even daring to offer advice on any of the important issues covered by the Government Bill."

They are but some of the withering criticisms made in Sir Peter Large's submission. They come from the man I appointed over 16 years ago, when I was Minister for Disabled People, to chair the world's first ever committee of inquiry into unfair discrimination against disabled people.

Sir Peter Large's comments are a shaming reminder that, if the Government had acted on the committee of inquiry's recommendations when they were published in 1982, Britain would have led the world in making such discrimination unlawful. Instead, we lag way behind many other countries. They include, among others, New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Canada.

While those countries read and acted on the report of Sir Peter Large's committee, it has taken the British Government 13 years to come forward with what can only be described as a travesty of its recommendations. What the committee urged upon the Government, in 1982, was a Bill to give disabled people full civil rights and equal citizenship; but what they are being offered by the Government, in 1995, as they themselves protest, is second-class rights for second-class citizens.

I shall go on briefly to raise three further issues; first, the mess that the Government have got themselves into by defining disability so narrowly. I give three examples.

If a job applicant's curriculum vitae shows periods of in-patient treatment for psychiatric illness, the employer is entitled to throw it straight in the dustbin, but if instead the CV says that he is still receiving psychiatric treatment, he cannot. How on earth can that be justified?

Again, in the case of a person known to be HIV-positive but who is asymptomatic, the Bill invites employers to "get their discrimination in first", as it were, because once acquired immune deficiency syndrome is diagnosed, the Bill's provisions apply.

My third example is the scope for unfair discrimination against people with genetic disorders who are as yet "pre-symptomatically disabled". Has the Minister seen the Genetic Interest Group's admirable submission about his Bill, and will he now meet the group to discuss its well-documented statement of concern?

By its very nature, discrimination is often irrational. Will the Minister now accept that, to be viable, any definition of disability must include people who are perceived by employers to be disabled even if they are not?

I turn now to a fundamental error in the Government's approach to costings. Thus, they treat the costs of public provision for able-bodied people differently from those of providing for disabled people. They see it as quite normal for the providers of services to help their able-bodied customers to enjoy them by installing escalators in shops, amplification at meetings and so on; but provision for disabled people—lifts at stations, induction loops at concerts—is treated differently as a "special" and abnormal expense.

Like most other people, I believe that "normal" provision must now include the needs of disabled people. Otherwise, are we not treating disabled people as being apart from and not a part of society? Even more clearly, is it not intolerable for Ministers to claim that their Bill adds to Government spending on disabled people, when in fact—at the same time—they are cutting by £2 billion their expenditure on invalidity benefit, and inflicting on a huge number of disabled people a cut in income from about £77 a week to £46? That puts in perspective the Government's so-called "extra spending" on the Bill.

I conclude with a question about the speech made from the Government Front Bench by the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) in the debate on Second Reading of the Government's Bill. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) will be especially interested in a quotation from the hon. Lady in that debate.

Referring to the Government's record, she stated:

"Do Labour Members recall how we look after not only the disabled but their carers? . . . What about the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 and the provisions in the Education Reform Act 1988? We have introduced all those measures, but the Opposition do not think that we can be trusted."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 234.]

As the Minister for Disabled People knows full well, that was another gross distortion by the Government of easily ascertainable facts.

It was, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West, legislating as a private Member, who promoted the 1986 Act. For their part, the Government blocked—and are still blocking—the implementation of crucially important sections of that humane act. The deception was used to persuade Members of the House to give the Government's Bill a Second Reading. It was unworthy of the hon. Lady and demeaning the House for her to misrepresent the facts, and I am sure that the Minister for Disabled People will now want to ensure that the record is put straight.

I commend the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill to the House and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East again for his humanity in promoting a Bill of such profound importance to all disabled people.

12.7 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I do not doubt for a moment the sincerity of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) nor that of the hon. Members for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) and for Kingswood (Mr. Berry). They are sincerely committed to the cause of helping disabled people. I simply wish that sometimes they would give Conservative Members the same credit. The fact that we disagree with them about mechanisms does not mean that we are not equally committed to outcomes.

It does not help the Opposition's argument when quite serious misrepresentations are made in order to score partisan points in an important debate on an important Bill. It was a total misrepresentation for the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East to claim during his speech—or to imply at least—that there had been no consultation on the Government's proposals. The Government's consultation on those proposals was one of the biggest ever undertaken by Government. One hundred thousand copies of the consultation document were circulated, including, I am glad to say, a braille version. That is an example of the Government's commitment to consultation, and it was extremely misleading for the hon. Gentleman to claim that there was no consultation.

I was also disappointed to hear from the Opposition Front Bench a claim levelled against my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) that he had not participated in the debate in Committee on the Government's Bill, the Disability Discrimination Bill. I am glad to say that the matter was clarified, albeit rather churlishly, by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). I opened the account of the Committee proceedings almost at random and found an important and significant contribution by my hon. Friend, and it is important that it goes on the record that that contribution was made. That was another example of the Labour party seeking to score party points when we should be debating the Bill in a spirit of genuine mutual concern about disabled people.

The question is not whether something should be done; the consensus is that more must be done, which is why the Government introduced their Bill. The question is

[Mr. Peter Luff]

whether this Bill or the Government's Bill should be enacted. I declare firmly for the Government's Bill. It accurately reflects the desire that I have frequently expressed in the House—as I have done in correspondence to Ministers—to see more done for disabled people. I am delighted that the Government have brought forward their proposals, which are more workable, less bureaucratic and more enforceable and will bring more benefit to disabled people. I was staggered by the arrogance of the hon. Member for Monklands, West in implying that he speaks for all 6.5 million disabled people in this country, because he does not.

An article in the *Daily Mail* on 7 September 1994 began:

"Quentin Crewe, in a wheelchair for 40 years, deplores proposed legislation for the disabled."

He wrote:

"The race laws have not done much to eliminate racism, but plenty to provoke more of it. And that is what I fear from disabled legislation . . . It will merely aggravate the taxpayers who have to pay for such fantasies. What's more, in the long run it is far more likely to push firms out of business—thereby decreasing the wealth available to do something useful about helping the disabled."

Mr. Berry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luff: No, because I do not want to detain the House. Some of my hon. Friends' speeches were unnecessarily prolonged by interventions from Opposition Members.

It is wrong of Labour to claim that it speaks for all disabled people. Many of the disabled people to whom I spoke in preparing my speech do not agree with the Bill. A large body of disabled people believe that the Government's proposals are superior to its provisions.

There has rightly been extensive debate about the different definitions used in the two Bills. I have no hesitation accepting that the Government's definitions are more workable and sensible, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister for an assurance in respect of myalgic encephalomyelitis. It is an important test of my belief in the Government's definition that ME sufferers should be encompassed by the Government's Bill. I speak as patron of my local ME support group, and I am anxious that their interests should be protected.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott). It is no reflection on my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People that I regard the Government's Bill as my right hon. Friend's lasting memorial. I was sickened by the way that he was hounded during his handling of the Bill. He was probably the most decent member of a decent Government. His only sin was to refuse to listen to those who shouted loudest. He did what he thought was in the best long-term interests of disabled people. History will prove him right.

It would be more difficult to attack the hon. Gentleman's Bill and to defend the Government if they had a bad record on disability issues, but they do not. I shall not detain the House with that long list but offer two simple statistics. Total spending on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled and their carers has trebled in real terms since we came to office. The numbers helped have increased from 360,000 to 2 million—a wonderful record.

I agree with the hon. Member for Monklands, West that the facilities for the disabled in the Palace of Westminster are a disgrace. There is a trade-off—it is why I support the Government's Bill—between the costs and the benefits to commerce of assisting and helping disabled people to play a proper role in society. There can be no such trade-off when it comes to disabled people lobbying their elected representatives. When preparing my speech, I had to meet one of my disabled constituents some way from the House because of the difficulty in getting here. Part III of the Disability Discrimination Bill will place a statutory duty on the Palace to improve access for the disabled.

As to access to polling stations, I have more sympathy with the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) than with the hon. Member for Kingswood on the view that every rural station should be suitably adapted. Another aspect is the size and type of ballot papers. I remain concerned that the visually handicapped find it difficult to cast their votes accurately.

My underlying philosophical objections to the Bill were expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), so I shall not dwell on them. My starting point is that none of us has rights; we have duties. No human being can effectively have rights unless the rest of society recognises the duty to facilitate them. There is an important legal precedent. Clifford Longley, a long-standing religious affairs correspondent, wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* last May:

"Since its foundation, America has set out inalienable civil rights to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' as a fundamental goal by which all public life is to guided. But America is not Britain"—

making the point that this Bill is copied from American legislation. He added:

"Most English legal textbooks do not have a single entry under 'rights' in their index. Yet in the name of 'equality' between the able-bodied and disabled, the Bill sets out to grant 'civil rights' to the latter—a moral and legal minefield if ever there was one. As there is no general concept of 'civil rights' known to English law, the disabled would enjoy and novel and privileged status given to nobody else. Whatever else that is, it is not a blow against discrimination. Even if it were accepted that the disabled should have such privileges, this is not a political revolution to be shuffled through Parliament when no more than 60 Members are present."

Does the voluntary approach work any better? The balance between the two Bills is important.

I shall give three practical examples of the voluntary approach working. First, I praise the initiative by my local radio station, BBC Hereford and Worcester. Its managing editor, Eve Turner, has launched a competition for buildings and organisations that encourage access. She has the active support of local newspapers, including the *Worcester Evening News*. That scheme is a great credit to all involved. It receives regular radio and newspaper promotion and helps to spread good practice and awareness. It is a model initiative and should be adopted more widely.

Secondly, transport is essential for disabled people. The work of Bill Buchanan, a disability adviser to British Rail for many years, has borne enormous fruit. I hope that his work will continue in BR's new era. Contrary to Labour claims in the context of the Bill, BR is probably the best railway in the world in terms of access for disabled people. That is the result not of any legislative requirement but of persuasion and willingness. One hundred per cent. of InterCity stock is accessible to the disabled, and it has coloured grab-handles to assist the

partially sighted. The continuing problem of slam-door trains on Network SouthEast is disappearing. The new trains offer full access to the disabled. I am told that the number of accessible toilets on BR rolling stock exceeds the number on the rolling stock in the rest of Europe.

Eurostar trains—I am wearing a Eurostar tie today—were designed with the disabled in mind because of British input. They followed the example set by InterCity in the UK, which came as a revelation to our French and Belgian partners. Waterloo International is not only an architectural gem but one of the best stations in the world for access. At least until recently, a disabled person arriving at Midi after travelling from a fine station on a train designed for the disabled had to be physically manhandled off the train in his or her wheelchair and lowered precariously to the platform.

Similarly, facilities at the Gare du Nord are sparse and appear to be an afterthought. British Rail is leading the way in access for the disabled. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It is no use Opposition Members sneering—they cannot gainsay the facts. No wonder my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London said on Monday that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East

"should remember that this country boasts the best provision of disabled access for rail passengers on any intercity system of any country in the world."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 2.]

All that was achieved without legislation. Bill Buchanan has found working with the board of British Rail relatively straightforward, but the leasing companies for rolling stock and the 25 train-operating units represent a new situation.

I am delighted that clause 4 of the Railways Act—one clause 4 which I can support—imposes a duty on the regulator to have regard to the interests of disabled people. I am delighted to say that John Swift QC, the Rail Regulator, has gone further and faster than any of us hoped when that duty was imposed on him in the legislation. I commend the document "Meeting the Needs of Disabled Passengers". This is a product, not of a loose legislative requirement but of a frame of mind.

Mr. Swift is clearly determined to help disabled people. He states that his objectives are

"to ensure no diminution in current standards of accessibility across the rail network; to maintain the impetus for still further progress towards a more accessible rail system. Rail operators will need to bear these strategic objectives in mind when drawing on this Code to compile their own Disabled People's Protection Policies which must be submitted to me for approval."

He goes on in the foreword to the document to highlight the fact that there is a market advantage for rail operators, and for many other private sector operators, in providing properly for the disabled.

Ms Lynne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luff: I have said that I shall not be giving way, as I do not wish to detain the House too long.

Mr. Swift states:

"Millions of people in the UK have some degree of disability, while many more, particularly elderly people, have some difficulty using the rail system. This is a massive potential market for rail travel which cannot and must not be ignored."

The approach adopted there, with a light legislative requirement elsewhere on the statute book and the right frame of mind, is producing the goods, and that is good news for disabled people.

I agree with the hon. Member for Monklands, West on the third practical example with which I shall deal briefly, access to the arts. The House has not debated that issue sufficiently. A lot of good is happening through voluntary activity. I pay tribute to my constituent, Paddy Masefield, a victim of ME, with whom I have worked on a number of issues.

Mr. Masefield would prefer me to support the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons), but his work at the Arts Council shows what can be done by people of good will. He has been on the arts and disability monitoring committee of the Arts Council for five years, and he is now a member of its national lottery board.

The arts is not a side issue. The disabled should be able to enjoy every aspect of life, and not just the ordinary things that we take for granted. They should be able to use restaurants and pubs—and to read menus—and they should be able to enjoy, and participate in, the arts. Access to auditoriums was the great issue of the past decade, and a lot of good work has been done. More remains to be done, however, but the progress is encouraging. Again, that has occurred without civil rights legislation. Clause 12 of the Disability Discrimination Bill will deliver the goods, and it is superior in its effect to part IV of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Are we halfway through yet?

Mr. Luff: We are much more than halfway through, the House will be pleased to hear.

There is a challenge now to get more disabled people working in the arts. The provision for training—whether for performance, technical or management work within the arts—is woefully inadequate. Some establishments offer limited wheelchair access, but that is about it. Other disabilities are just not catered for.

A survey three years ago showed that fewer than 100 people with any disability were working in the whole arts field. The prison service and the police were well ahead of the arts world in that, despite the liberal establishment mentality of the arts world. I am delighted that the employment initiative begun by Lord Rix and continued by Lord Snowdon seeks to change that in the Arts Council. I wanted to go into more detail on that mater, but time is against me.

If disabled people are to succeed and flourish in the arts, they must get encouragement at the beginning of their educational careers. Disabled people who are interested in the arts must be encouraged to develop that interest at school. The biggest obstacle to them is not so much the absence of civil rights legislation as the attitude of many people who teach and encourage young people. They believe that disabled people will be unable to achieve in the arts world. The message that the House should send out is that they can. Some of the greatest historical figures in the arts world coped with amazing disabilities—Beethoven is perhaps the most obvious example. Disabled people have a vital role to play in the arts, but I do not believe that the Bill will help in that.

I shall briefly talk about the role that the Arts Council is playing in relation to lottery funds, because that gives an example of what can be done without legislation and with good will. I was delighted to see that, in the Arts Council's application pack for national lottery funds, the first criterion used in the assessment of applications is:

[Mr. Luff]

"the benefit to the public (including maximum access for disabled people".

The pack then provides detailed guidance to applicants in a helpful way:

"You should pay particular attention to the needs of disabled people, whether as attenders, participants, artists or employees. You should consider the needs of people with disabilities of all kinds, whether related to mobility, sight, hearing, etc. Appropriate disability equality training should be part of your project plan."

That is the right approach, and I commend the Arts Council for what it is doing.

I make one plea to the arts world. It is not often recognised that many people who suffer serious disability are dependent on benefit, and the arts world could do more to encourage discount ticket schemes, not just for students and the unemployed but for the long-term disabled. Why cannot more venues offer a scheme to enable more people with disabilities to enjoy their facilities?

The arts world shows how great achievements can be made for disabled people by voluntary work. I agree that more needs to be done, but I see the mechanism to achieve that in the Government's Bill, but not in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. There are many more matters which I would like to debate, but I feel that I have been on my feet long enough.

Is there a case for a commission, as proposed in this Bill? I believe not. I am unconvinced that the Commission for Racial Equality has helped coloured people. The commission's proposal is one of my principal reasons for opposing the Bill.

I want to draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to early-day motion 574 on access to information for the visually impaired. That motion has all-party support, and I would sign it were I not prevented from doing so by being a parliamentary private secretary. *[Laughter.]* Opposition Members may find this amusing, but I do not. The motion

"welcomes the intention of the Disability Discrimination Bill to tackle communication barriers facing visually impaired people; hopes that the Bill will provide a clear, effective and enforceable right to information; and calls on the Government to support amendments to the Bill to ensure that the potential loopholes and anomalies in the Bill are removed."

I hope that the Committee on the Disability Discrimination Bill takes careful account of that motion.

The dispute in the House is whether we can legislate to change attitudes, and I do not believe that we can. That is my central concern about the high hopes which the Opposition are building in disabled people for this Bill. When I said goodbye to Paddy Masefield following a meeting with him, a taxi was waiting for him. That taxi was fully accessible for disabled people in wheelchairs, because this Government have insisted that all new taxis since 1989 have that facility. There are 7,000 accessible taxis in London as a result of this Government's actions. However, the look on the taxi driver's face and the contempt that he had for a disabled person in a wheelchair were shocking. Yes, we have provided the legislative framework to enable that disabled constituent to get into a taxi, but the look on the taxi driver's face shows that we can undo all that good. I would have been humiliated if I had been that man getting into that taxi. It was a shocking experience.

I do not believe that anything in this Bill will overcome that attitudinal problem, which is still so much a barrier to so many disabled people. It risks exacerbating that hostility to disabled people. That is why I oppose this Bill and support the Government's measure.

12.27 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I am pleased to support the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), which is co-sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), but I stand here with a heavy heart because I know that the Government have no intention of allowing the Bill to get on to the statute book. I do not know what tactics they will use today or in later stages but I remember the disgraceful tactics they used last time. They instructed parliamentary counsel to draft amendments and farmed them out to certain Conservative Members, one of whom had to come before the House and apologise for misleading the House by claiming that the amendment was her own.

Whatever the Government's tactics will be, I have an overriding sadness because I know that they will not accept the Bill. They have introduced their own Bill—they were forced to do so by disabled people's organisations across the country—but what a Bill. We have tried to amend it in Committee, but none of our amendments has been accepted and I doubt that we will get any through in the future.

I am not just sad, I am angry. It is the anger of frustration. I know that the Bill is supported by many people in the House and across the country. Disabled people's organisations and the vast majority of the 6.5 million disabled people about whom we have spoken support the Bill. I am not so angry perhaps as some of the disabled people themselves. Their anger is the anger of pain, the anger of discrimination, and the anger of lack of understanding, as well as the anger of frustration. The country should be angry, too. I make no bones about saying that disabled people are asking for their basic human rights. I do not apologise for saying that over and over again. They are not asking for positive discrimination. They are asking for equality. That is all. They are not asking for privilege or what some hon. Members say that they are asking for. They are asking for equality. The Bill would give them that equality.

The Government's Bill is discriminatory. Let us take the definition of disabled people, which we tried to amend in Committee. The Government would not accept the amendment. The definition excludes rather than includes. It excludes some multiple sclerosis sufferers. It excludes people who have a history of mental health problems, those who have controlled epilepsy, HIV, Huntingdon's disease, mild cerebral palsy or—and I say this for the sake of the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff)—myalgic encephalomyelitis. The list goes on. The hon. Member for Worcester shakes his head, but he can ask the Minister. The Bill will exclude people with ME.

The Bill that we are discussing today includes people, such as those with sensory impairment. Several hon. Members have asked why we want them to be included. Many people who have a hearing impairment or who are visually impaired or blind do not like being lumped together with people with physical and mental disabilities. They see themselves as having different worries and problems as a result of their disability. We will not

succeed in persuading the Government to accept our amendment to the definition, even if the matter is brought back on Report. That is why it is important for us to support the Bill today.

There are other reasons why we should support the Bill. Whatever the Prime Minister says, the Government's Bill does nothing on education. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill provides a right to mainstream education if someone needs or wants it, a right to higher education and a right to training programmes. The Government say that they will introduce some legislation. What legislation? Will it be comprehensive? This Bill is comprehensive on education.

The Prime Minister said that transport was covered by the Government's Bill. I accept that it covers access to train stations and bus terminals, but it does not cover access to trains and buses. Today's Bill gives disabled people the right to mobility. Without mobility, what is the point of the other measures? If disabled people cannot travel to their place of work because there is no transport for them, what is the point of making the buildings accessible in the first place?

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is the hon. Lady suggesting that disabled people should have access to all transport within a given period and that, therefore, existing buses on the road would have to be adapted? How does she expect bus companies such as Ribble Buses in my constituency to afford that?

Ms Lynne: No, I am saying that all new stock should be accessible to disabled people. I carried out a survey last year of new rolling stock and the new train operators in particular. A majority of the new train operators said that the new rolling stock was not accessible to disabled people. We must pass the Bill with a provision to make sure that new rolling stock is accessible. Many of those new train operators said that they could take only one wheelchair per train. If a group of disabled people turn up at a train station, they all want to get on the same train. They do not want to have to wait and get on another. Transport is not totally included in the Government's Bill.

Let us deal now with the disability rights commission, one of the key aspects of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. We want a commission that will have similar rights to the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Rights Commission for women. Why should disabled people have fewer rights than anybody else? That is what the Disability Discrimination Bill—the Government's Bill—proposes.

The proposed national disability council will have no teeth and no power of enforcement and there will be no legal aid for disabled people. What will they do? Go to an industrial tribunal. Big companies will have the time and the money to go through any dispute line by line. Disabled people will not be able to do that, because they will not have legal aid. We need a commission to protect the basic rights of disabled people. We need the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

Firms with fewer than 20 employees will not be covered by the Government's Bill, but they will be covered by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which says that employers will have to comply by making available reasonable accommodation, in a reasonable time scale. The Bill is not asking for immediate action. It does not say that, as soon as the legislation reaches the statute book, everybody will have to comply immediately. Of course not.

The Government said that they could not accept the previous Bill because it would cost £17 billion. That figure has been disputed. I think that even the Government accept that. This Bill takes into account financial considerations as well. That is why there is a timetable. That is why there will be time to implement the measures. Mark my words, civil rights for disabled people will come one day, and the Government must accept that. Disabled people will continue to fight for their rights until they achieve them. It is disgusting that they have to fight for them. But it will happen.

The Government's Bill, if passed, will have to be updated endlessly—possibly repealed, as all other flawed legislation has been. If other countries give their citizens equal rights, why cannot this country? France, Japan, Australia, America, Canada, New Zealand and Denmark do it. Why not this country? It is to the Government's shame that they do not and that yet again we are having to debate civil rights legislation.

Disabled people demand justice and fairness. That is all. I ask the Minister to think again. I ask him not to close his mind or, more importantly, not to close his heart.

12.37 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I apologise to the House for having missed the early part of the debate. Unfortunately, I had to be in a meeting with a constituent, which made it difficult for me to be here. I am grateful nevertheless to have the opportunity to speak in this extremely important debate.

I should like to make my position clear on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I would like it to proceed through to Committee so that the debate on it can continue. I would like certain elements of it to be incorporated eventually into the Government's Bill. Clearly, it would be ridiculous to have two disabled persons Bills going through the House at the same time and coming on to the statute book at the same time. If the Bill is to proceed—some elements in it have considerable merit—at some stage the two Bills will have to be brought together. I am not sure how that would happen, but a mechanism would have to be devised to make it work.

The Bill rightly opens up the important debate about what disabled people need. One thing is absolutely clear—disabled people's present rights are totally unacceptable. I will give the House one example. A severely physically disabled constituent told me about her experience in a restaurant. Because of her disabilities and those of some of her companions, the restaurant manager required them to leave after they had sat down and started their meal. Incredible as it may seem, other diners found that the sight of people with disabilities eating in the same place put them off their food. That is unacceptable and it must be illegal for restaurants to act in such a way.

I hope that any legislation that is enacted will give disabled people powers to insist that, like any other customer, if they have a reservation in a restaurant or have been accepted in, the restaurant cannot refuse to serve them, except on the same basis as it has the right to refuse to serve people who do not have a disability. Clearly, if people are rowdy or drunk restaurants should have the right to refuse to serve them, but they should not be able to do so purely on the basis of disability.

[Mr. Matthew Carrington]

We certainly need tough legislation to outlaw discrimination against disabled people, just as we need legislation to protect other groups. I speak with some feeling on that issue, being beyond a certain age, because one of the problems in my constituency is the considerable extent to which people of mature years are discriminated against, especially in the job market. It is difficult for someone over the age of 40, and even more difficult for someone over the age of 50, to persuade an employer that they should be treated equally with someone younger for recruitment purposes. I want such discrimination outlawed, although I recognise that that would pose serious problems in balancing the rights of the employer and pension entitlements as well as the rights of the person of mature years.

The rights of disabled people are not unique and such rights are not confined to the groups of people covered by previous legislation, such as the Race Relations Act 1976.

Primarily we need, not merely legislation, but a change of atmosphere. We must make it unacceptable for people to discriminate against the disabled, as it is unacceptable for someone to discriminate on the basis of race or colour. That change comes about through a combination of circumstances: through education and through society ceasing to tolerate that type of discrimination, and also through legislation. The great change in racial prejudice and attitudes came about as a result of the Race Relations Act and I hope that a similar change will occur with what will eventually become the Disability Discrimination Act. The details of the legislation will be less important because it should not need to be applied too often. The importance of legislation is that is signals to society that certain behaviour is unacceptable and must be changed—it causes a change in attitude.

The legislation must be careful as it is possible, with all good intent, to create more problems than we cure, which is a great difficulty. I identify that difficulty in the provisions in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, as opposed to the Disability Discrimination Bill, for the size of work force to which it should apply. I do not have any particular brief for the definition in the Disability Discrimination Bill of 20 employees, which may well be too large a work force.

To apply the full rigour of the legislation in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill to a small business employing, say, one person would be likely to cause unintended consequences. The most obvious one is that a small employer would be much more reluctant to take on additional workers because of worries about the additional cost that would be incurred. Such businesses may not wish to discriminate against disabled persons, but the legislation might add another barrier to a small company that was struggling to grow and to increase employment. Therefore, the law should be applied rather differently to a small company. One definition covering all sizes of companies would lead to difficulties and would have the reverse effect to that which is intended.

I am also concerned about an employer's inability to ask questions of a disabled person before employment. I entirely understand why that should be proposed—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) is muttering. I thought that he was about to intervene. I am happy to give way if he wants to do so.

Small companies are likely to be overly cautious about recruitment if they cannot inquire into someone's background at the initial interview. They will be cautious about who they employ and early in the recruitment process they will find reasons to turn down those about whom they have the least suspicion. The effect of imposing the legislation, especially on small employers, may lead to a worse situation for disabled and other people than would otherwise be the case.

A third problem relates to the upgrading of buildings to allow access for the disabled. I understand from the Bill's proposals that if an old building which did not have access for the disabled were to be modernised, it would be necessary to provide access for the disabled. That is entirely good and I do not suppose that anyone would disagree with that.

The consequence of such legislation in the United States, where it has been in existence for some time, is that some older buildings have not been refurbished. The owners of buildings who have found that the extra rental from refurbishment does not compensate for the additional cost of making the buildings accessible, have not gone ahead with refurbishment. I know of buildings in New York whose refurbishment has been delayed to a point where the buildings have seriously deteriorated. The consequences in the United States have been other than those that were intended, and that is a danger in such legislation.

There are benefits in the Bill of which I as a London Member am conscious. One in particular relates to my concern about the Disability Discrimination Bill in relation to poor access to the London underground. We all understand why access for the disabled to parts of the underground system are poor. It is because many deep Victorian stations in the centre of London do not have lifts and installing them would be extremely difficult, expensive and disruptive. However, it is not impossible and as those stations are refurbished, lifts should be installed.

Such a description does not apply to many London underground stations: it does not apply to the five in my constituency which are essentially surface stations. Access from the roadway to the platforms has not been modernised and staircases are still in use. Installing lifts would not be difficult. Clearly, expense would be involved, but it would not be massive. That applies to many stations in the London Underground system. Modernising those stations to make them accessible to disabled people should be a priority for London Underground. It should do that because it wishes to attract more custom, especially from wheelchair-bound people.

The objection that is always raised to that proposal is that, after the disabled person has got on to the underground train, which is another problem, he will not be able to get off the train at another station. That is true, but, equally, the problem is manageable. Careful signing—perhaps colour coding—could be put up. Some stations could have signs saying that they had no exit for disabled people. A disabled person going to work on public transport would then be able to adjust his route to ensure that he would go from one station with disabled access to another with such access. That would enable disabled people to make much greater use of London Underground. The cost would be relatively low.

It is worrying, however, that London Underground does not put a high priority on disabled access, and that the refurbishment, for instance, of the Central line, which does not cover my constituency, but which I know very well, has not improved disabled access. Attempts have not been made even to give partial disabled access to that line.

One of the problems with the underground is that the train floors are some 6 to 9 in above the level of the station platform; in some stations on the Piccadilly line, the floor is 6 to 9 in below the platform. Again, that is not an insuperable problem for disabled access. Trains stop at the same place on platforms. If they do not, it is easy to make them stop at the same place every time. It would be relatively simple to have ramps to the doors to enter trains. Equally, the new design of trains should enable wheelchair access to trains straight from standard-height platforms without too much difficulty. Once on the train, wheelchairs would need anchor points, but, again, that problem could easily be overcome.

I understand that, under the Bill, London Underground would be under much greater pressure to institute changes in its system to give at least partial disabled access. I would greatly welcome that, but the Government's Bill pushes the whole problem to one side, which is worrying.

I wanted to mention the effect of, as I understand it, both Bills on listed buildings. We inhabit one listed building—this House. Access to such buildings is important for disabled people. As was said in an earlier part of the debate, which I regret that I missed, access for disabled people to the Palace of Westminster is a scandal. It is extremely difficult. Many disabled constituents come to visit me here and getting them into the Galleries and on to the principal floor of the building is possible, but difficult. For any large number of disabled people, it is an extremely lengthy business because only one small lift provides access to the principal floor.

That highlights the fact that it will be difficult to adapt many listed buildings. The problem involves balancing the needs for the conservation of listed buildings with rights of access. I am not sure that that balance has been achieved in the Bill. A considerable amount of flexibility is needed, given the nature of listed buildings and the access that is desirable, and the alternative ways of providing access to those buildings for the numbers that are necessary. We would need to consider the desirability of having a blanket requirement so that public buildings would have be accessible to disabled people regardless of the importance of the building and its integral nature as an artistic structure.

The issue of whether we should have a council or a commission has been raised. I shall not dwell on that subject at great length as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. One problem with having a commission is that it is difficult to say clearly at this stage whether existing commissions—I am thinking particularly of the Commission for Racial Equality—work effectively. There is a strong case to be made that the Commission for Racial Equality is not effective in achieving its aims.

A council such as is suggested in the Government's Bill might be more effective than the Commission for Racial Equality, with which there are enforcement problems. Something of a more educational and advisory nature would not suffer the opprobrium frequently attracted by the Commission for Racial Equality. The opprobrium could be directed more towards the Government, who would have the enforcement role normally played by a commission. That might allow a council to do the job more effectively than a commission. That is something that we need to debate and it is one reason why I am keen for the Bill to proceed. Such debates are needed and, by running the two Bills in parallel, we can have effective discussions.

Although the Government have gone an extremely long way towards meeting the needs of disabled people, I am happy to see the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill proceed. At some stage a decision will have to be taken on whether parts of that Bill should be included in the Government's Bill. I believe that certain elements should be included, and I have tried to outline one or two of them. The Government have made great strides and I should like to see some sort of compromise reached. I am certain that we need vastly to improve the rights of disabled people.

12.56 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), not only on his fortune in the ballot, but on choosing the Bill and on the excellent way in which he presented his arguments to the House earlier in the debate.

The Bill is close to my heart because it is in direct line of succession to the Bill that I introduced on 18 November 1983. It might be useful for the House to recall some of the events at that time because some Conservative Members have said that the subject is not a party political one, and we should not make party political points about the Bill.

When I entered the House of Commons in 1983, I naively thought that problems of discrimination against disabled people could not conceivably be regarded as party political. Who on earth could justify discrimination against disabled people? On 18 November 1983, I found that 210 Conservative Members of Parliament felt that they could justify no legislation against discrimination against disabled people. On that occasion, only four Conservative Members voted for the Bill.

The hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), who was at that time the director of the then Spastics Society, was one of those who supported the Bill. Its other Conservative supporters were the hon. Members for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) and for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), and Mr. Martin Stevens, a predecessor of the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington)—who, I am pleased to say, supports the Bill, as did his predecessor.

In 1983, the argument that the Government used most—they used a number of arguments—was that education and persuasion were quite sufficient to deal with the problems of discrimination. Cost was another factor used. My Bill—the Government seem to pluck figures out of the air—was supposed to cost £300 million.

I remember going to a meeting of the all-party disablement group around that time, where I was told by a former Minister, who is no longer a Member, that my Bill was intended to undermine the Government's economic policy. I wish it had, but it was a forlorn hope, given the extreme Prime Minister of the day.

The Government's Disability Discrimination Bill is a sign of success. I know that the Opposition are attacking it because it is perfectly true that it is insufficient and late,

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

but it is a signal that, over the years since that Second Reading in 1983, the campaigning of disabled people and their organisations is beginning to succeed.

The Government are now providing part of a meal. They have offered disabled people an aperitif. The main course is in my hon. Friend's Bill, and perhaps it will be consumed as a result of the debate. I hope that it will become law, as it is long overdue. However, the main course and the dessert will undoubtedly arrive after—if not before—the next general election, when there will be a Labour Government.

Mr. Barnes: My hon. Friend mentioned his Bill dealing with discrimination against disabled persons in 1983, and in my opening remarks I recognised his pioneering work. The attention of the House should also be drawn to the fact that my hon. Friend introduced a ten-minute Bill on the same subject in 1987, and also sought amendments to the Employment Bill in 1989 to cover many of the areas addressed by my Bill. My hon. Friend has done some serious, pioneering work from which everybody else has benefited, including myself.

Mr. Wareing: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I certainly recall the debate in 1989 on the Government's Employment Bill, and the fact that I tabled an amendment which would have alleviated discrimination—in fact, outlawed discrimination—against disabled people in employment. I am glad that at least that amendment is now partially accepted by the Government.

The great change that has taken place since 1983 has been in the Government recognising the need for legislation. That is a success, and so far, so good. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East and other hon. Members have mentioned the restrictive nature of the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill.

I am concerned that a person will still suffer discrimination under the Government's Bill—not under my hon. Friend's Bill—if they apply for a job with a business which employs fewer than 20 people. I cannot see the logic of that. It is nothing to do with a quota system. My hon. Friend's Bill is not proposing that businesses must employ a certain quota of people, but that a disabled person should have just as much right to apply for a job with, for example, a small law firm as he would with Marks and Spencer or one of the larger businesses.

I am also concerned about the lack of opportunity for disabled people to enjoy the right to further education.

In my previous incarnation, I was a lecturer. I recall that disabled youngsters, and even disabled mature students, had to tailor their studies to their ability to get to a classroom. For example, if French classes were being held on the top floor, a student could not study French, and instead had to study perhaps Latin, where the classes were held on the ground floor.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Did my hon. Friend notice the large number of disabled students who came to the House yesterday as part of the disabled lobby? They raised important points about inadequacies in provision within the education system which result in discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Wareing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. There is no doubt that many disabled students are having to study in old buildings where provision is wholly inadequate. Even some of the newer buildings have inadequate provision. This is a serious matter. We are not talking just about older people who become disabled; we are talking about disabled students.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East has paid great attention to the political and civic rights of disabled people. It is an important matter. In view of the way that disabled people have been treated by Conservative Governments since 1979, perhaps the Government are not too keen on providing access to polling stations for disabled people. One of the polling stations in my constituency is not only inaccessible to disabled people but is situated over the boundary, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). It is impossible to reach.

It may be argued that materials are available outside the polling stations which allow disabled people to exercise their right to vote. That in itself is discrimination. Many disabled people do not want to be pointed out in that way. Rightly or wrongly, they regard it as a stigma.

I went to Bucharest as an official observer at the first democratic election immediately after the demise of the Ceaucescu regime. Ballot boxes were sent to hospitals so that the patients could vote. We should think about that sort of provision. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East has done a tremendous amount of work, and he should be encouraged to continue. If they do nothing else, the Government should look seriously at that aspect of the Bill.

When I introduced my Bill in 1983, I was made aware of the Government's opposition to it. Even if it had reached Committee, they would have tabled amendments to it. This morning, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) tried to filibuster. It was a disgraceful performance. In 1983, he told me that he had instructions from the Government to kill off my Bill. At that time, I wondered whether a more simple Bill might have been more successful—perhaps one simply saying that unjustified discrimination against disabled people was illegal. Even that would have been slight progress. How can we implement one law for the rich and another for the poor? In establishing a disability rights commission, my hon. Friend's Bill gives force to the consideration of the rights of all disabled people.

Government Members have argued that that will lead to an increase in the number of cases before the court. I argue that my hon. Friend's Bill will result in less litigation. Unlike the body which the Government are proposing, the commission will not only give advice to Government but have a restraining influence on those people in our society who seek to discriminate against disabled people. In most cases, a simple application to the commission will see the grievance redressed.

Poorer people—those on income support, for example—will be able to go to the commission without worrying about the possible expenses of a court case. The Government are correct to give disabled people the right to bring a discrimination case involving their employment before an industrial tribunal. However, poorer people who bring such a case will not be assisted by the provision of legal aid.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House support the Bill and there is a chance that it will pass. Perhaps at this late stage the Government may say that they will allow it to go to Committee, at the very least, in order to consider the issues further.

For far too long, disabled people have been the Cinderella of minority groups in our country. They are an important minority group. A survey conducted some time ago found that 29 per cent. of families have at least one disabled family member. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has often said, one disabled person in a family makes the entire family disabled.

This Bill is not just for disabled people; it is a Bill for the whole nation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East has said, we are all potentially disabled. Any one of us could have a car accident, be involved in some natural disaster or be afflicted by a serious disease. We must all take part in the campaign on behalf of my hon. Friend's Bill. I wish him well, and I hope that the legislation will pass. The door has been wedged open for disabled people, but it is time to push it wide open and assure disabled people in this country the full basic rights that we all enjoy.

1.13 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I listened very carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), and I hope that what I am about to say will help us to find some common ground. Unlike other politicians throughout the world, most hon. Members on both sides of the House—perhaps contrary to the conventional wisdom—are not in politics to enrich themselves. They are here to improve the lot of people in this country and to improve this country's standing in the world.

I trust that there is, in the important and sensitive area that we are discussing, some common recognition of the basic decency of most people's sense of purpose in becoming elected to the House, and in forming an opinion about the way to legislate for the plight of the disabled. Nevertheless, we differ in our assessment of the way in which such progress can be attained.

We are primarily divided by a conflicting opinion of what the state can and cannot achieve. The line across the Floor of the Chamber divides those who believe in socialism from those who believe in capitalism, and those who believe in equality from those who believe in diversity. Increasingly, hon. Members on either side of the line have markedly differing opinions of the respective place and priority of rights as distinct from duties.

The motives behind the Bill are undoubtedly genuine—no one questions that—but there are potentially grave problems with the statutory execution of rights. Duties are a requirement on the individual that helps general well-being, but rights, and the exercise of rights, more often than not, involve a cost. That cost could fall on some other individual. To demand a right or to exercise a right can mean that someone else has to pay the price for that right to be exercised.

Rights are therefore part of a much wider equation, and they are a part of a calculation of benefit and cost, in which calculation the cost will fall on people other than those to whom we wish to give advance and improvement. Indeed, it is in the nature of such rights that other people will have to pay for them.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Does my hon. Friend agree that, at the very least, there should be a general duty on all of us not to discriminate unreasonably against a disabled person in any aspect of life? On the matter of cost, will he acknowledge that there is an enormous cost to our society in excluding disabled people and denying ourselves the contribution that they can make?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Duncan: I fully agree with my hon. Friend, which is why I support the Government Bill, not the Bill that we are debating. I shall discuss the distinction between the two.

In most cases, the accelerating bandwagon of people demanding rights in many new areas should be resisted, but I believe that the wish to grant rights to disabled people is well-founded, and bridges the philosophical divide that I have described.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is an increasing tendency in society to demand rights without their equally important accompaniment—responsibilities?

Mr. Duncan: Yes. I also agree with what my hon. Friend has just said. We need to strike a balance that will work between rights and costs and rights and duties.

We all wish to remove the distasteful part of human behaviour that adds insult to injury by compounding the unfortunate circumstances in which a disabled person is placed. We all want to remove those habits, attitudes, decisions and horrid inequities that take unacceptable advantage of someone's existing disadvantage. That is a laudable and proper purpose of legislation. More than any other demand for rights, a demand for fairness in treating the disabled is legitimate.

In answering that demand, we must make good law. One does not get something done well, or indeed at all, simply by wishing for it to be done, sticking one's intentions in a Bill and sending it off for Royal Assent. We cannot legislate to make everyone a millionaire. We cannot house everyone in a palace. We cannot pass a law to make everyone healthy. We could not even do what the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) wanted to do when he tried to abolish poverty in old age by presenting a Bill called the Poverty in Old Age (Abolition) Bill.

In passing any law, we need to assess the real context in which that legislation will work, and we are duty bound to assess the displacement effects of the law we make. By "displacement" I mean that for every action there is a reaction. A minimum wage would minimise the number of jobs. High taxes slow or reduce demand. The intrusive exercise of rights could remove bit by bit opportunities that such rights were designed to enhance.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Will the hon. Gentleman get to the nitty-gritty and say which rights he has that he believes that disabled people should not have?

Mr. Duncan: It is important to view the matter in context, and not be carried away by wishful thinking that

[Mr. Duncan]

risks not working in practice. Any law that is self-defeating is not worth making. This legislation, of all that which we have made or might make, should not contain the seeds of its own destruction. We must get it right. If we pass legislation that will not work in practice—or, worse, which will partially rebound against the interests of the disabled—a great load will weigh on our conscience.

Mr. Berry *rose—*

Mr. Duncan: I will continue, because other hon. Members hope to speak, and I want to get to the nitty-gritty that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The House has a unique opportunity to compare two Bills containing similar conditions and progressing almost in parallel. The Government's more confined, sensible and understandable definition is more workable and practicable than the hon. Gentleman's Bill. One Labour Member said that he would like everyone to be included in the definition of disabled.

Mr. Berry *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Duncan: That renders absurd the whole notion of a distinction between the disabled, who should have rights not to be discriminated against, and the able-bodied. The hon. Member for Kingswood shook his head when I stated that an Opposition Member wanted everybody included. I cannot refer in detail to the proceedings of a Standing Committee that has not yet reported to the House, but a Labour Member said just that.

The hon. Gentleman's Bill is wrong also in its view of employment legislation. The Government's Bill will replace the unworkable quota system that, although not mentioned in the hon. Gentleman's Bill, would none the less remain. The Government's Bill would clearly extend rights, without exception, to 83 per cent. of employed people. Only small firms with 20 employees or fewer will be exempt from some provisions of the Government's Bill—rightly so, because some costs would not allow small firms to remain in business, which would deny opportunities to work even to the non-disabled.

The Government's Bill offers better access to goods, facilities and services and is practical. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) mentioned over-legislation in respect of transport. Diminishing public transport would be an absurd consequence of a badly worded Bill, and have precisely the displacement effect that I mentioned, which would be detrimental for everybody.

The hon. Gentleman's Bill does not make sensible proposals for education, but the Government's Bill contains many realistic measures—and the Education Act 1993 covers most of that area.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East, who is not in his place, mentioned polling stations. One of the polling stations in my constituency at general elections, or any other election, is a caravan. It is a rural constituency, where peculiar buildings are used for that specific purpose. To make them all subject to this legislation is pushing very good intentions to the point of utter silliness.

No one can question the genuine concern of Opposition Members to improve the position of disabled people, but some rather distasteful elements have begun to creep into some of the political positioning attached to the campaign for disabled rights. I merely observe that those demanding more for the disabled—much of it at someone else's financial cost—and those who try to turn that against the Government's position on the issue are not morally superior to those who, from equally proper motives, question the basis of such costs, the practicality of implementing the legislation and whether it would permanently benefit the disabled.

Clearly and understandably, it is a rich source of political acclaim for someone to appear to champion the cause of the underprivileged, but there is a very fine dividing line between doing just that and milking such a cause for the dividend it furnishes the politician, rather than the dividends it furnishes to the disabled.

It would be a mistake, in the interests of the disabled, for this Bill to be enacted. Its passing into law would be a pyrrhic victory. It would be a victory, all right, but a victory for the popularity of its political backers. It would come at a high cost which would be paid for in future years by the disabled. Soon after the initial rejoicing had settled, we would find that the demands, strictures and vexed litigation would all provoke a backlash against the disabled. That must be avoided.

I urge the House to congratulate those—including the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry)—who have advanced the cause of the disabled by pressing for this Bill, but then to reject the Bill in favour of cross-party support for the Disability Discrimination Bill, proposed by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Disabled.

2.27 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): I have campaigned for the disabled for many years, and have supported several Bills—including this one—which have tried to gain for them the civil rights they deserve. The Government's policy, planning and research unit estimates that there are about 210,000 disabled people in Northern Ireland, of whom 75,000 are working age; thus, if the legislation reaches the statute book, it will affect substantial numbers in the Province, and many more in Great Britain.

Today I wish to highlight the particular issues which are of concern to disabled people in Northern Ireland. I have had an opportunity to sample opinion on the subject and, in particular, the Northern Ireland Employers Forum on Disability carried out a detailed survey to gather a national picture of employers' attitudes towards legislation for disabled people. The survey covered 20 per cent. of the employed work force in Northern Ireland, so it is likely to reflect the position accurately.

The survey shows that more than 80 per cent. of employers favoured the introduction of civil rights legislation for disabled persons. Two thirds of employers supported compensation payments for disabled people who have been subjected to direct discrimination. Other employers supported the establishment of a disability commission with enforcement powers.

The Government have been keen to bandy grossly inflated figures which they claim would have been the cost of implementing previous private Members' disability rights Bills. They have also claimed that employers have little appetite for such legislation. The survey does not support that case.

Although I welcome the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill, it falls far short of the mark. There are four particular areas of concern which the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill would put right. First, there continues to be confusion over the definition of disability. Such a definition should include reference to the history or reputation of having an impairment, as that can be a source of discrimination.

Secondly—here I disagree with the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh)—the exclusion of employers with fewer than 20 employees is unfair. In Northern Ireland, some 84 per cent. of firms have 10 employees or fewer. If the figure for firms with 20 or fewer is extrapolated from that, it is likely to be closer to 90 per cent. Therefore, only 10 per cent. of businesses in Northern Ireland will be subject to the Government's disability legislation. That is grossly unfair. If the principle of employees' rights is just, it must extend to all disabled employees. This Bill would rectify that anomaly.

Thirdly, disabled children must be given the same opportunities as other children. If prejudice and discrimination are to be removed from our society, surely the place to start is in the classroom. The Bill would ensure that schools provided access to the standard required of employers. The measures set out in the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill provide little incentive for schools wholeheartedly to embrace equality of opportunity for disabled children.

Fourthly, this Bill would ensure that legislation for disabled people was backed up by a watchdog with teeth. Without a disability commission with enforcement powers, many employers will attempt to circumvent proposed legislation and disabled people would have little power to do anything about it.

1.32 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I commend the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) on the work that he does for his constituents and the particular interest that he takes in the needs of disabled people. When I was a Northern Ireland Minister, I was not responsible for disability matters, but I was responsible for transport policy. I took particular interest in the needs of disabled people for public transport. It is rather good news for Northern Ireland that there are two successful bus manufacturers in the Province, one of which is Wright, Robert and Son of Ballymena. The company has developed the first low-floor bus, which I was able to see. I should like it to be on roads throughout the United Kingdom.

I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) had to say about the London underground, but I felt that many of his remarks were a little impractical. I am sure that, when it comes to public transport, what disabled people need is access to low-floor buses. They are a remarkable invention. I hope that Wrights of Ballymena succeeds in selling large numbers of its product.

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): The hon. Gentleman has a lot of experience of Northern Ireland. The disability commission is very much part of the Bill. In Belfast, occupational therapists are asked to go to the homes of disabled people to assess whether they need various structures put in. The waiting list for such an assessment is sometimes six or eight months. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the disability commission for which the Bill provides would be able to make sure that proper assessments were made and people did not have to wait six or eight months?

Mr. Smith: To answer the hon. Gentleman, I am afraid that I shall have to jump slightly ahead of what I was going to say. What concerns me about the Bill generally is the balance of costs and benefits. I can see the benefit of what the hon. Gentleman has just said. I can see many of the benefits from the Bill, but I am very concerned about the costs that would be placed on employers, particularly small employers. The difficulties would be accentuated in Northern Ireland, because employers there must deal not only with existing legislation that regulates employment but with sex discrimination legislation and fair employment legislation. I would be very concerned at adding yet another burden to employers in a part of the United Kingdom where there is already such high unemployment, but I understand the hon. Gentleman's point entirely.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) on securing a high place in the ballot for private Members' Bills. No one questions in any way his sincerity in introducing the measure—I share his concern about the fortunes of disabled people—but I am sorry to have to tell him that I am not able to support his Bill, for reasons on which I have already touched and on which I want to enlarge.

I strongly believe in equality of opportunity, and that it should extend to all people regardless of race, religion or, indeed, disability. That is the starting point on which we can all agree. There are disabled people whose contribution to society is grossly undervalued simply because of their disability and the fact that able-bodied people look on them in a different way because they are different. I would be the first to recognise that we must try to change those attitudes. I want public attitudes towards disabled people to change. The only question that we must address is whether the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is the most practical way of going about it or whether, in certain circumstances, the proposed legislation could prove to be counterproductive.

If one goes too far, too quickly, one could have the opposite effect to that intended—

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Too quickly?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman queries my suggestion that the Bill would act too quickly. Instead of a gradual evolution of policy, which I would like to see, the Bill is so radical that it would involve a quantum leap forward.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Does the hon. Gentleman realise just how long disabled people have been waiting for a Bill that really addresses their concerns, and does he realise that they are sick and tired of the parsimonious excuses from hon. Members like himself in terms of doing something now to address the issue?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I do understand that; I started my speech by explaining that I understand how disabled people feel, but we must consider people generally. The Bill is a radical measure. It would involve a quantum leap forward. The question is whether it might not have the

[Mr. Smith]

result of alienating some people, for example, small employers, who might take strong exception to its provisions.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does my hon. Friend agree that legislation in relation to disability must be an expression of the values of our society? Does he agree, therefore, that it is essential that we declare unequivocally that discrimination against disabled people is abhorrent, that it is unacceptable and that it cannot be a question of ifs and buts, loopholes, qualifications and saying that some people are to be protected but others not—for example, there might be an exemption for small businesses and in effect we would say to small business men, "It is okay for you to discriminate against disabled people, because you are a small employer"? Does my hon. Friend agree that that really is a very inadequate social statement on behalf of us all?

The Bill which we are debating does, in fact, allow reasonable exemptions and application of the legislation over a sensible and manageable time scale so long as we are moving towards the objective with which we should all agree.

Mr. Smith: No, I do not agree with that, as I was trying to explain to the House. My hon. Friend is right up to a point: of course it is possible for legislation to have a declaratory effect. One should not exaggerate that, however. Up to a point, legislation can change public attitudes, but we should not suppose that it is some sort of panacea. I am arguing that it could be counterproductive to go too far. We need a sensible balance. The Government's Disability Discrimination Bill more nearly finds the right balance. It would not be sensible to go too far or too fast. We need an evolutionary and gradual approach.

Mr. Llew Smith: Is the hon. Gentleman willing to meet groups of disabled people and tell them that their demands are putting pressure on the Government to move too fast and that they must slow down their demands?

Mr. Smith: The Chiltern Cheshire home at Gerrards Cross is in my constituency and, on previous occasions, I have told it exactly that. The home pressed me to support previous measures. I have explained that I understand why it strongly supports this Bill. As Members of Parliament, we must take a broader view and consider what we believe to be the public interest. I have tried to explain to the home why we need to move at a slower pace and have an evolutionary approach.

That is what the Government are about. The Finance Bill, which is being considered in Committee, contains an example that was dealt with earlier this week. Clause 39 deals with company cars driven by disabled people and makes a small improvement in the taxable benefit in kind. That is the sort of approach that I prefer for disabled people, so that we can be sure that we will carry people with us.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) said that the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill and this Bill were based on two differing sets of principles. When I challenged him and pointed out that both Bills involved the creation of new rights for disabled people, but that one—the Bill under discussion—simply went further than the other, he did not demur. The distinction between the two Bills is not one of principle, but one of degree. It is more a distinction in kind than in principle, because both Bills create more rights.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West said that access to the House of Commons was a good example of the sort of issue that we should be discussing and he dwelt on it at some length. I agree. I saw the meeting that took place in Westminister Hall yesterday and I realise that that is a far from suitable venue for such a meeting, yet it is the only practical option available. That example raises all the issues, including the question of what is cost-effective and practical. It would be expensive and might be wholly impractical in some respects to alter an historic building such as this to accommodate the disabled.

Would it not be more sensible to ensure—as I am sure we will—that the new parliamentary building that is to be built over Westminster underground station has the best possible facilities for the disabled, and that it will be possible to gain access from street level via steps, ramps or anything else, to make it as accessible as possible for them, and to provide a substantial room for meetings? Would that not be a better and more sensible approach? I believe so, because the costs that the Bill will impose will, in some respects, be unbearable.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said that the Government's Bill was in some ways against the interests of disabled people. I think that he cited two respects in which that occurred. The first related to quotas, and we have discussed it at some length. The argument seems to be that, by abolishing quotas, disabled people will somehow be disadvantage; yet quotas have never been fully taken up and many disabled people who work have never been registered as such. Perhaps that is because of the stigma that would be attached to them. I do not know why that should be, but it is a fact.

Surely it is better to provide, as the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill does, new rights for disabled people in terms of job and employment prospects. It is difficult to argue that the quota system has benefited disabled people; therefore, it is difficult to argue that its abolition would be against their interests.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe said that, in some respects, sex discrimination and race relations legislation was tougher and more effective than the proposals in the Disability Discrimination Bill. In some respects, he may be right. For a start, there is the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality. The Government's Bill does not provide, as this one would, a disability rights commission. I accept that that is an important difference, but it is not an argument for saying that the Government's Bill disadvantages disabled people. Clearly, it involves a major advance for disabled people, although that is not enough to satisfy hon. Members throughout the House.

If the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill were a Government Bill, it would have to contain an explanatory and financial memorandum. I make no criticism of the fact that it does not contain that: it is a private Member's Bill. If presented by the Government, such a Bill would have to state the financial effects, and those are at the heart of my objection to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East has not told us what the costs would be.

The Government's Bill involves considerable costs to public funds, of which the main one relates to the right of access. That will cost between £30 million and £80

million. In addition to the Bill's financial effects, there is the business compliance cost assessment, which is the cost to the private sector of complying with the measure. I know that there is much dispute about that, but there is no doubt that substantial costs are involved, and that applies even to the Government's measure.

The Government's Disability Discrimination Bill states that the total maximum cost of compliance with the right of access provision is expected to be between £380 million and £1,130 million over the phasing-in period. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill goes much further than the Government's measure and will cost considerably more over an undefined phase-in period. There is the cost to be placed on the taxpayer for adapting public buildings and the cost to private sector employers. The Bill would affect every employer, including those who employ only one or two people, unlike the Government's Bill, which contains an important exemption for small companies.

Nobody who runs a business has to employ people. If too many burdens are placed on an employer, he will find other ways to obtain services. It is possible to buy them in from a larger business, thus avoiding the cost of the legislation. That relates to what my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) said about the fact that, if such new regulations are introduced, it is completely unrealistic to expect that economic behaviour will not be altered. That is my main concern.

Clause 2(c) deals with "reasonable accommodation" and clause 4(e) relates to

"failing to make reasonable accommodation for the known physical or mental limitations of a qualified disabled person".

That provision is rather vague. It is not specific and does not make clear to me precisely who would determine what was reasonable. It could be a bonanza for lawyers, because it would give rise to disputes. The disability rights commission—

Mr. Tom Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for me to point out that, if Conservative Members continue to make long speeches, and if the Minister does not have time to reply, which he might otherwise have wished to do, it is not the fault of any Opposition Member?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): That was not a point of order for the Chair. The current speech is, so far, shorter than a large number of Opposition speeches that were made this morning.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am about to conclude my remarks, anyway. I did not wish to give offence to the hon. Member for Monklands, West by the length of my speech.

I am concerned principally about the costs of the Bill to the taxpayer and to the private sector. I am concerned about the fact that we have not been told what the financial consequences of the Bill are, and that it does not have a compliance cost assessment. We all understand the benefits, but I am worried about the costs.

1.50 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): It may be for the convenience of the House if, spurred on by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), I speak in the debate now to make clear the Government's position and their attitude to the Bill. It is a pity that there are still hon. Members who wish to speak. The hon. Members for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), and I think my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), have been here throughout the debate, but have not yet had a chance to speak. I would have liked to speak after them, but, given the passage of time, I should speak for the Government now.

I make it clear that the Government fully support the objective of ending discrimination against disabled people. Disabled people are discriminated against and we need to act to bring that to an end. There are millions of disabled people in this country, and there may be more in an ageing population. As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said, any of us can become disabled at any time.

Discrimination takes many different forms. Of course, an inaccessible environment is discriminating. In addition, although it is sometimes difficult to believe, restaurants refuse to admit people in wheelchairs and ban guide dogs, cinemas refuse to admit unaccompanied disabled people, and pubs do not welcome people with learning difficulties.

Last year, in an attempt to get a broad idea of how disabled people feel about their lives, Scope commissioned research. Its report, entitled "Disabled in Britain: A World Apart", which many hon. Members who are here will have read, illustrates the fact that disabled people believe that they face disadvantage and discrimination when looking for work, and once they are in employment.

The "second-class" label that is often applied to disabled people means that an employer may see a disabled applicant as slower and less productive, even though, very often, that is not the case; an insurer may see someone with a disability as a danger behind the wheel of a car, although that is usually not the case; to the cinema owner, disability may be a fire risk; and to a restaurateur, it could signal a diminishing clientele. Eliminating discrimination is not just about making the environment accessible. It is about all of us coming to terms with disability, removing the labels, and accepting people who are ready and able to take on the rights and responsibilities which the rest of us take for granted. All hon. Members on both sides of the House now readily agree on that much.

In recent years, the Government and the House have done much to try to enhance the independence of disabled people, especially in improvements to the benefit system, in changes to building regulations, and in the variety of legislative action. But far-reaching changes are still needed if disabled people are to share fully in the life of the community. We are embarking on an ambitious task that must be approached in the right way.

That means that a Bill of this sort should be clear, so that disabled people understand their rights, and employers and traders understand their duties. It should be flexible to ensure that the powers exist to fine tune the law in the light of experience, and for the Government and Parliament, rather than the courts or other bodies, to fine tune the law. It should be fair to the whole community, while at the same time asking them to treat disabled people fairly, too. Sadly, the Bill is unclear in that there are too many cloudy generalisations that duck the hard decisions which legislators must make. The Bill is also, which seems strange when considered in the light of my previous comment, inflexible in that there are no

[Mr. William Hague]

powers to amend the provisions of the Bill, if it should prove to be unworkable. It is unfair in that too little regard is paid to the ability of the rest of society to adapt to the Bill's requirements and to existing initiatives and arrangements that are already working well.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hague: I shall give way once to my hon. Friend, but I must respond to the points that have been made.

Mr. Howarth: I know my hon. Friend's abhorrence of discrimination and I congratulate him on his personal achievement hitherto. He said that his task was ambitious. It is to shift the British establishment, which always moves slowly, grudgingly and gracelessly—in Yeats' image, it only ever "Slouches towards Bethlehem".

Will my hon. Friend explain why the Government regard it as fair to introduce a new discrimination as between employers of 20 employees and employers of 19 employees? Which organisations have asked him to introduce that discrimination? Will he explain why there should not be a disability rights commission that would enable the disabled and the disadvantaged in our society to sustain the legal rights that we would wish to establish for them?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is becoming well known for the literary quality of his interventions, and we have just had yet another outstanding display from him. He asked about the proposed exemption from the employment right—although not from other aspects of the new rights—for small employers with fewer than 20 employees. He will know that the Government and I are following the example already set in the US legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, with which he and I are closely familiar. The motivation of the Government is the same as that of the US Congress.

We believe that small employers would have great difficulty in implementing such legislation. We do not want the legislation to be counter-productive, which it could be without the exemption. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government's Bill contains provision to change that number in the light of experience and we would want to see what happens over time. My hon. Friend also asked about the commission, but I shall come to that subject later in my remarks.

In his speech introducing the Bill the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) said—I think with a smile—that the Government's Bill hardly applied to anyone. I think that he was suggesting that he thought that the Government's Bill would apply to fewer people than the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. He is right about that.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the number of people who would be covered by the Government's Bill. As I have been explaining in Committees elsewhere in the House, any or all of the 6.5 million people counted in the survey of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys could be included in the Government's definition. One problem of his proposed legislation is that he does not know how many people would be covered by it—although I think that he thinks that it would cover 6.5 million people. The aspects of his definition covering a reputation for being disabled or an association or relationship with a disabled person could bring in large numbers of people and cause the figure to increase well beyond the 6.5 million counted as disabled in the OPCS survey.

The hon. Gentleman does not know, we do not know and no one will ever know how many people would be covered by the Bill because its definition is so broad. In fact, it is so broad that it would damage the credibility of the law and lead people to say that the legislation was not just about protecting disabled people against discrimination.

Mr. Barnes: If my Bill is drawn so widely that the numbers cannot be known, the logic of that seems to be that the Government's Bill is so narrow in scope that the numbers can be known and have been taken into account in cost assessment. May we therefore know to how many people the Government's Bill would apply so that we can judge whether there should be a Bill covering a far wider number, even if the Minister does not think that that number can be quantified?

Mr. Hague: I do not think that that was a logical argument, because, of course, the only way in which to know for sure how many people are affected by any definition is to conduct a comprehensive survey based on it. That has not been done for either Bill. It is clear that any or all of the 6.5 million people counted in the OPCS survey in 1988 could be in the scope of the Government's definition. The problem with the definition proposed by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East is that it would undoubtedly include people who are not disabled or may never be disabled, which is extremely dangerous territory.

The hon. Gentleman also made special reference to Northern Ireland. There has never been any question of excluding Northern Ireland from the Bill. The reason why we wrote into the Bill that implementation in Northern Ireland would be by negative resolution procedure was that one of the hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland saw me and suggested that that would be better than an affirmative resolution, which would take longer to bring into force. As I hope all hon. Members know, including the hon. Gentleman, I have since made it clear that we shall write Northern Ireland into the Bill and I propose to do so in Committee to remove any doubt.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East justified bringing the Bill forward on the basis that it would put pressure on the Government. I not sure that, now that we have reached the stage when the Government are producing their own legislation, it puts pressure on the Government or anyone to introduce legislation such as the hon. Gentleman's Bill. Conversely, in introducing his Bill, the hon. Gentleman has illustrated how it is possible to take a good argument of considerable merit about helping people and ruin it by taking it too far. It is not surprising, therefore, that when organisations of and for disabled people met in December to consider whether such a civil rights Bill should be introduced, a large proportion of the 22 organisations around the table expressed the wish that a civil rights Bill should not be introduced this Session, but that hon. Members from all parties would work with the Government on the Disability Discrimination Bill, which I have introduced.

In the light of those factors, the Government do not support this Bill. We recognise, however, that it would be a most unusual step for the Government to ask the House

to vote against the Second Reading of a private Member's Bill. I have not asked my hon. Friends to do that today, as is readily apparent from the number of my hon. Friends present. Nevertheless, I make it quite clear that the Government intend to ensure that our Bill to end discrimination becomes law and that this Bill does not. We do not intend to provide the additional parliamentary time, which the Bill would undoubtedly need if it were fully examined, went through all stages and became law.

I shall explain in more detail why the Bill is not satisfactory. The first question that we must ask when proposing new legislation is for whom we want to legislate. I expect that the initial public reaction to that question, if we were to ask people in the street, would be that the Bill should cover those with an obvious physical disability—the wheelchair symbol comes to people's minds. But we know that disability goes much further than that, so it is important that we find a workable definition of disability; one which covers all people who could be regarded generally as disabled.

The Government do not think that the definition of disability in the Bill is workable. It embroiders the concept of the generally disabled, making the gateway so wide that many other people who would not be generally accepted as being disabled would be eligible. We would not have a credible law if we brought within its ambit people who are not or who may never be disabled. Yet the Bill proposes that. It extends its protection to people who have a relationship or association with someone with a disability, creating vast uncertainties for the courts. There are millions of people who provide support for elderly parents who are likely to have disabilities. We cannot possibly say that they all count as disabled people without making the law a laughing stock.

The second aspect of the definition that is wrong is the use of the term "major life activity". What exactly does that mean? I assume that the intention is to protect people who would be regarded, in the everyday sense, as disabled. However, the very phrase suggests that the activity in question is specific to the individual. That could lead to giving legislative protection where a person's disability impedes his pursuit of a highly individual aspiration.

The term "major life activity" has been taken from the Americans with Disabilities Act. The difference is that in that Act there is a regulation which provides an illustrative list of those activities, while there is no power to do the same in this Bill. How are people expected to know? I understand that the intention is to publish a code of practice, which would no doubt offer guidance—but it would not be legally binding. The courts ultimately would need to interpret it and their interpretation may be wider or narrower than Parliament intended. There would be no power for the Government or Parliament subsequently to correct that without further primary legislation. The ability to do that is one of the first tests of a piece of legislation, and at that first hurdle the Bill would fall.

The Bill also covers people reputed to be disabled. How many people have to believe something about someone for that person to have a reputation? Does the employer or service provider have to be one of them? To expect employers and service providers to operate that provision efficiently is unrealistic. There would be endless litigation turning on the meaning and understanding of "reputation". While I understand who the promoters of the Bill intend to cover, the net has been cast so wide that almost anyone could qualify as a disabled person in particular circumstances. Such an approach undermines the credibility of the Bill and would quickly bring it into disrepute if it were enacted.

The doubts about the definitions used in the Bill bring me to a wider concern.

Mr. Alfred Morris: When the Minister has finished his demolition job on a Bill, the principles of which have been debated in this House for more than 40 hours, will he tell us whether the Government are prepared to allow the Bill a Second Reading today or whether they will vote against it?

Mr. Hague: In fairness to the right hon. Gentleman, I do not know whether he was listening earlier. I hoped that I had made the Government's position quite clear. The Government do not support the Bill and I am in the process of laying out—the right hon. Gentleman called it a demolition job—the reasons why we believe that the Bill is flawed and why we do not want it to be enacted. I explained earlier that it would be a most unusual step, not taken for seven years or so—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman will continue not to know the answer to his question if he does not listen to me. Now we know why he did not hear me before—it is because he does not listen. I want to make it absolutely clear that it would be highly unusual for the Government to ask the House to vote against a private Member's Bill or to put a Whip on such a Bill. We did not think that we should do that on this occasion and we have not done it.

I also made it very clear that the Government intend to ensure that our Bill, which we believe will be more effective in ending discrimination against disabled people, becomes law and that the Bill before us does not become law. I also said that the Government would not provide any additional parliamentary time for the Bill beyond that which arrives in the normal course of events—which I fear may be inadequate given the extent of debate that we would have to have about many of the matters that I am now listing.

Mr. Berry *rose—*

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman did not get an opportunity to speak in the debate so I feel that I should give way to him. After that I must continue with the remainder of my speech.

Mr. Berry: Will the Minister advise the House which organisations of or for disabled people support the Government's Bill in preference to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that many organisations of and for disabled people counselled Labour Members not to bring in a civil rights Bill this Session. I referred to that point earlier.

The crucial point that we have discussed in Committee during the proceedings on the Disability Discrimination Bill is that we are trying to bring in a law which will work for the whole nation. It will encourage millions of people to change their attitudes and beliefs and to act according to those attitudes and beliefs. We must have regard to the views and attitudes of many people who have never before expressed views about those matters.

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

Question put, That the Question be now put:—
The House divided: Ayes 177, Noes 2.

Division No. 69] **[2.10 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Colley, Ann
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Gapes, Mike
Garrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alfred Morris and
Mr. Colin Pickthall.

NOES

Dover, Den
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Geoffrey
Clifton-Brown, and
Mr. Alan Duncan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be read a Second Time.

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 0.

Division No. 70] **[2.22 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Roy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carrington, Matthew
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Fraser, John
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'd, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kean, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Colin Pickthall and
Mr. Alfred Morris

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Mr. Derek Enright

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Remaining Private Members' Bills

NATURAL DISASTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to raise a genuine point of order. There will be widespread anger in my constituency, indeed throughout Strathclyde—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. What is the background?

Mr. McMaster: I wish to draw your attention to Standing Order No. 94E, which is a new Standing Order covering Scottish Business. It says in paragraph (2):

"On the order being read for the second reading of a bill so certified, a motion may be made a member of the government (or, in the case of a private Member's bill, by the Member in charge of the bill), 'That the bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee'".

Will you confirm that it would be in order for me today to lay such a motion to refer the Bill to the Scottish Grand Committee?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 February.

TRANSPORT OF ANIMALS FOR SLAUGHTER BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why cannot the Government find time—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No questions to the Government through the Chair.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 March.

DOGS (FOULING OF LAND) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

PREVENTION OF FRAUD (REGISTRATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 February.

ENERGY-SAVING MATERIALS (RATE OF VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [20 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 24 March.

WELFARE OF CALVES (EXPORT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 March.

OLYMPIC SYMBOL ETC. (PROTECTION) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Nicholas Winterton.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

PROTECTION OF CALVES (EXPORT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 March.

BUILDING SOCIETIES (JOINT ACCOUNT HOLDERS) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. French.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

INSURANCE COMPANIES (RESERVES) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [27 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 17 February.

CHARITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 15th February, the Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Lang relating to the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1995, the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995, the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995 and the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1995 not later than three hours after the first such Motion has been made; and the said Motions may be entered upon and proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Pools Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

2.38 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I had hoped that I might catch your eye during the previous debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but unfortunately that was not to be the case. Some of my best speeches are speeches that I have never given. In fact, all my best speeches are speeches that I have never given, None the less, I am extremely grateful to be able to speak in this important debate.

I come from a small business background and the convenience store that I own sells both national lottery tickets and pools coupons. Indeed, I am probably the only Member of the House who has sold a national lottery ticket and given out prizes at the same time. Obviously there are more losers than winners with the national lottery and with the pools, but the debate is about whether the pools companies are the biggest losers of the lot. Will the pools industry survive? I refer hon. Members to an article in *The Observer* of 22 January with the headline, "Pools wiped out by lottery." One analyst at Barclays de Zoete Wedd believes that the decline of the pools is, "likely to be terminal." So the issue is very important.

The pools industry obviously faces serious consequences because of the introduction of the national lottery. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and I were members of the Standing Committee which considered the National Lottery etc. Bill and the subject was discussed at length. The Government said that they would always keep an eye on the effects on the pools industry.

It was impossible to get away from the massive publicity that came with the introduction of the national lottery. Camelot allocated a budget of £34 million for marketing and promotion within the first six months, of which a considerable amount would have gone in launch costs. That is a large amount compared with the £9 million that the pools companies and scratch-card distributors spent in 1993.

At the time of the launch, the slogan "It could be you" was on every street corner, in every paper, on the radio and on every television channel. One could not escape it. Yet the pools have only now been allowed the opportunity to advertise on television. They have also just been allowed to operate a roll-over system so that there is an accumulator on the unearned winnings from previous weeks. That is good, but not half as good as it ought to be.

Pools companies have to pay extra sums to the Government and the good causes, amounting to about 8 per cent. more per year than the national lottery has to pay. Let it not be thought that I object to the success of the national lottery, because I do not: it is a good thing and it provides much money for many good causes, as hon. Members may have seen from an answer in *Hansard* last week.

I urge those organisations which give away money to good causes to have regard for rural areas and small towns, which may not be able to get funds from any other source, and to consider them for national lottery money.

A flutter on the national lottery is harmless. I have certainly played and, although I live in the Blackburn area, the luck that seems to reside there has not yet rubbed off on me—I have won £10 and I suppose that I should declare that. The national lottery should be given a fair crack of the whip.

On 14 January 1993, the Select Committee on National Heritage published a report containing the following conclusions:

> "The Committee recommends that the Lottery and the pools should be treated equally . . . in the marketing of their products . . . in the ability to roll-over jackpots, and in the way the pools are promoted to clients who do not wish to exercise the use of skill and judgement."

I would add to that list equality in the amount of voluntary and obligatory payments that the companies make.

Littlewoods is by far the largest of the three pools companies, which also include Vernons and Zetters. All were established well before the second world war, are independent and compete with each other. Between them, they employ about 4,500 permanent employees and about 80,000 part-time employees, spread throughout the length and breadth of the country.

There will not be one Member of Parliament who does not have pools collectors living in his or her constituency. They are the backbone of the industry and for many people, especially the elderly and infirm who find it difficult to get to stores to pick up and return coupons, pools collectors are an essential resource. In many respects they are like social workers and become good companions to the people whose coupons they collect. They provide an essential service and we must be careful to do nothing to endanger what those 80,000 collectors do.

That work has certainly been endangered by the introduction of the national lottery and the unfair competition that has been built into the system. That is amply illustrated by recent job cuts by Vernons, which announced in January that it would shed 95 full-time jobs at its Liverpool headquarters. The blame for that rationalisation was laid firmly at the door of the 12.5 per cent. reduction in revenue since the start of the national lottery. Other estimates put the reduction at more than that.

The three pools companies, Littlewoods, Vernons and Zetters, handle between them about 9 million entry forms a week, have an average of 13 million customers and pay out prizes totalling about £5 million a week. That shows that the industry is too important to be left to wither on the vine because of the unfair provisions relating to the national lottery.

The revenue generated by the industry is distributed in five main ways: by voluntary contributions to good causes, and through prizes, operating costs, taxes and profits. The companies distribute about £100 million a year to good causes, which include the Football Trust and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. I have had representations from the hon. Member for Mossley Hill about those two organisations.

The funding for those worthwhile organisations was made possible by a reduction of 2.5 per cent. in the pools betting duty in the 1991 Budget and by the proceeds of a donation of 5p in every pound taken by the pools company as stake money. The foundation distributes more than £65 million a year for the improvement and creation of community facilities which would otherwise remain inferior or would not exist.

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

I have just received a document containing details of the foundation's grants for the period 1 October to 31 December 1994. It is a weighty document. The grants are spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. I have also been given a list of the recipients in Lancashire for last year. I note that groups in my constituency which have received funds from the foundation include the Wharrey sports club, Salesbury bowling club, the *Longridge News* playtime and the Ribchester festival, which is an excellent music festival in one of my smaller villages. It received £10,000. In 1993, the West Bradford village hall received £60,000 from the foundation. If it had not received that money, the facility which people enjoy in that area would not have gone ahead. We should be extremely careful about any action which endangers those funds. The foundation gave funds to more than 11,000 organisations nationally.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I emphasise what the hon. Gentleman has said and I know that his view is shared by all parties in the House and throughout the country. Many people appreciate the contributions that the Foundation for Sport and the Arts has made to vital components of community life in our great cities and villages. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that underlying his remarks, with which I fully concur, is the need to treat the pools industry and the national lottery on an even basis, on all fours? Both should be given precisely the same opportunities not just to advertise but in relation to matters such as roll-over provisions: either they should both be allowed to do it, or neither should be allowed to do it.

Mr. Evans: That is indeed the only way to assist the pools to compete fairly into the future.

Since the introduction of the national lottery, income to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the Football Trust has fallen dramatically by some 17 per cent. The Football Trust's income has gone down even more because spot-the-ball competitions have been hit even more harshly by the national lottery.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): As my hon. Friend is a newsagent, he may have noticed that one newspaper decided to drop its spot-the-ball competition when it discovered that it had put the ball in the picture and everyone was winning.

Mr. Evans: I am sure that some readers still submitted entries with crosses elsewhere.

The Football Trust's publication shows the good work that it does in relation to football fields throughout the country. I notice especially that it gave £500,000 to Blackburn Rovers. Irrespective of which football club hon. Members support, I am sure that we all wish that team well in gaining the premier league championship.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I am not sure that I concur with the hon. Gentleman's last remark, but I am grateful to him for giving way. Will he confirm that the income to the pools industry has been declining, and that the contribution to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts has therefore also been declining? Will he confirm that as a result of the decline in their revenue some of the smaller pools companies are actively considering withdrawing from what is a voluntary arrangement?

Mr. Evans: I understand that that is the case. Vernons is seriously considering the possibility of withdrawing voluntary contributions, which would be an great shame as they have done a lot of good. I congratulate Sir Tim Rice on the hard work that he has put in as chairman of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts.

The hon. Member for Mossley Hill mentioned some of the problems and inequalities faced by the pools companies in relation to the national lottery. I was trying to get through my speech without mentioning the words "level playing field", but it is just too difficult. I congratulate the Home Office on allowing the pools companies, rather belatedly, to advertise on radio and television and I urge the Independent Television Commission and Radio Authority to get a move on so that the pools companies can advertise as soon as possible. Broadcasting is the most powerful medium to sell any product and the sooner it can be done, the better.

The Bingo Association of Great Britain has also contacted me. It wants the same sort of ability to advertise because its turnover has suffered since the introduction of the national lottery. The take-out from the pools companies is part of the problem. The pools companies pay 37.5 per cent. in pools betting duty, 2.5 per cent. to the Football Trust, and 2.5 per cent. to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. In addition, 5p in every £1.05 is taken in stake money. We should compare that with the fact that the national lottery pays 12 per cent. in betting duty, and 25 to 28 per cent. to the "good causes". The disparity of 80 per cent. is vital, especially to the smaller pools companies. That matter must be dealt with.

The roll-over is another contentious issue for the pools companies. It is a complex issue. Those companies must wait for the national lottery to roll over before they can start to trigger their own roll-over. They have only a limited time to use the roll-over, after which it is lost and they have to wait for the national lottery to roll over again. I hope that we can consider the roll-over issue again. We should consider either freeing up the ability of the pools companies to roll over far more freely or stopping roll-over altogether. Many hon. Members have made representations about the enormous prizes generated by the roll-over and those who considered the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 in Standing Committee never thought that prizes would ever get up to £18 million, so perhaps there is a case for examining that matter again.

The other point concerns retail outlets. Pools coupons placed in retail outlets are restricted to weekend football matches. They should be allowed to include some mid-week sporting occasions, which pools coupon collectors are able to have on their coupons. To have a division between pools collectors coupons and shop coupons seems strange. I hope that we will consider that matter.

National lottery customers can pick up their small winnings immediately from the retail outlet where they bought their ticket. I know that the pools companies would like the opportunity to allow small winnings to be paid through the retail outlet where a coupon has been picked up. I hope that we shall be able to consider that, too.

The final issue of concern is the imbalance between the lottery and the pools companies in relation to the subsidy that Camelot can add to the jackpot to make the prize more appetising. The problem for the pools companies is that if they decided to add a subsidy it would be taxed at a prohibitive 37.5 per cent.

I am not saying that the pools companies should not be doing more to help themselves. They should certainly be using new technology far more. The problem for some of the pools coupon collectors is that they have to get coupons in by Thursday when the matches are on Saturday. I know from experience that, with the national lottery, Saturday night fever occurs on Saturday night and people come rushing in to buy tickets. By far the vast bulk of the money is taken on a Saturday night. If the pools companies were able to adapt more to new technology, they could increase the amount of money that is coming into the pools net.

There must be seen to be free and fair competition—the competition principle is extremely important. I always thought that competition would be introduced into the arena where the pools had a near monopoly. Now that we have a national lottery, we do not want to see the pools wither on the vine and the national lottery to be left with a monopoly.

We know that there will be a problem with mid-week games and that the national lottery expects to take vast sums of money. That will further deplete people's funds—they cannot spend the same pound twice. People are already taking their money from the pools and putting it into the national lottery, so something will have to be done about the extra competition from the mid-week games.

We must consider the equalisation of out-take between the pools and the lottery. We need to remove the restrictions on the pools roll-over. Section 56 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 should be amended to permit the collection of small winnings from shop premises. Also, Camelot should be prevented from manipulating its prize money or the pools should be allowed to do the same.

The subject is an important one. Over the past few days, knowing that this debate was to be held, many hon. Members have spoken to me on the subject. They will be keenly awaiting what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say to show that we care about the future of the pools industry in this country.

2.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): I have listened with great interest to the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on the football pools and the national lottery. By virtue of his retail experience, my hon. Friend is uniquely qualified to introduce the subject. I know that today's well-attended debate is of importance to a number of hon. Members. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be interested in what has been said in the debate.

We share the regret over the job cuts in Merseyside. No one can be complacent at the prospect of 95 jobs lost and others in the pools industry being at risk. However, although much has been said about the national lottery and the dip in the pools' fortunes, we need to be cautious in drawing firm conclusions about the long-term impact of the national lottery on any aspect of consumer spending.

Another consideration is that, although the football pools' turnover might have been affected in the first three months—my hon. Friend produced evidence to show that it has—the pools have still to take advantage of the new marketing opportunities afforded to them. The House had the opportunity to discuss many of the issues raised during the passage of the National Lottery etc. Bill, as a result of which important changes were made.

The Government have made significant changes to the regime under which the pools operate, giving them greater freedom to promote their business. The age limit has been reduced from 18 to 16. In addition, for the first time, roll-over of prizes has been allowed. We have removed a major impediment to the promotion of the football pools in allowing the distribution of football pools coupons through shops and other premises. The pools companies are working hard to exploit the opportunities afforded to them by those new outlets. They have been enterprising in using public houses as an additional outlet. There is nothing in the law to prevent that; there are no restrictions on the sort of premises that may be used.

I have an announcement which I hope will be welcomed by my hon. Friend. It relates to the issue of pools coupons in betting shops. We have considered the representations from the pools promoters and bookmakers to allow betting shops to pay out pools winnings. That would be in line with the bookmakers' normal business activities, so we propose to introduce an order to effect that change. We shall consult on the proposal in the near future and, at the same time, detail our proposals for fruit machines in betting shops.

The Government have allowed sponsorship of television and radio programmes to give the pools access to the media, and the pools companies are already taking advantage of that freedom. For example, Vernons is sponsoring the holiday programme "Wish You Were Here" and we have gone further to relax the ban on broadcast advertising.

Those are significant relaxations. My hon. Friend has welcomed the Government's decision to lift the ban on broadcast advertising by the football pools, which came about as a direct result of the Government's desire to remove unnecessary restrictions and regulations. The advertising rules were under review as part of the Government's wider deregulation initiative.

Unlike other forms of gambling, football pools are allowed free access to non-broadcast advertising and the Government think it right that that should be extended to all the media. I am pleased that the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority have already written to canvass views on revised broadcasting codes, which would permit the football pools to advertise on television and radio.

Despite all that, my hon. Friend is a fervent supporter of the pools and would like the Government to go even further to help the industry, which he says is unfairly treated in comparison to the national lottery. It is important to make clear the Government's position. We do not accept that the football pools are in the same position as the lottery. The national lottery has been set up under separate legislation and a tight regulatory regime. The Director General of the National Lottery has a statutory duty to protect the interests of all participants

[Mr. Nicholas Baker]

and to ensure that the lottery is run with all due propriety. The football pools are a commercial gambling operation, which are run under entirely separate legislative and regulatory arrangements.

Although there are similarities in the way in which the two games are played—both are low-stake, long-odds games for large weekly prizes at the soft end of the gambling spectrum—the lottery is determined purely by chance, whereas the football pools are a form of pool betting, in which, like betting on horses and greyhounds, there is scope for the exercise of skill in forecasting results. That is a crucial difference, since pools companies may operate lawfully only because they are not lotteries.

My hon. Friend's main theme is the difference in tax regimes between the lottery and the pools.

Mr. George Howarth: I welcome the announcement enabling the pools companies to pay out in betting shops, which will go some way towards balancing opportunities with those of the lottery. However, the argument that the pools is a game of skill as opposed to a game of chance does not hold any water whatever. If anybody could win the football pools by skill, he or she would have to have terrific insight into events several days hence.

Mr. Baker: I am not prepared to offer a judgment on that, but I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. He is no doubt experienced.

My hon. Friend's main theme is the difference in tax regimes between the two operations. Taxation of gambling is, of course, a matter for the Chancellor to consider. The rates of duty applied to different forms of gambling are varied and reflect a wide range of policy considerations. National lottery duty was set at 12 per cent. with the aim of being fiscally neutral—it was simply designed to replace the revenue which might otherwise have been lost when people bought lottery tickets instead of other taxable goods.

Pools betting duty is set somewhat higher at 37.5 per cent. However, there is a fundamental difference between the lottery and the pools. The pools companies are run primarily for commercial gain, while the national lottery primarily raises money for good causes. Of lottery turnover, 28 per cent. goes to good causes such as the arts, sport, charities, heritage and projects to celebrate the new millennium. Although pools companies also make generous contributions to sport and the arts, to which I pay tribute, they form a much lower percentage of their turnover and are not the main reason for their existence. The Government welcome and recognise the pool companies' generosity.

In his 1990 Budget, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, ihtroduced a 2.5 per cent. reduction in pool betting duty, on condition that the revenue forgone by the Exchequer was given to the Football Trust. The trust uses that money to improve the safety and comfort of fans at football grounds and to implement the recommendations of the Taylor report following the Hillsborough tragedy.

Football grounds have been transformed in recent years from old, dangerous and uncomfortable grounds, often with inadequate facilities and uncovered terraces, to a position where our stadiums are among the finest in the world. Altogether, some £387 million has been spent so far on major ground improvement schemes, of which £121 million has been contributed by the Football Trust. The trust also grant aids essential ground and safety improvements with funding from the pools companies' own "spot the ball" competitions. All told, that represents a major investment in the future of football in this country.

In his 1991 Budget, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) introduced a further 2.5 per cent. reduction to help fund the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and to supplement the pools companies' own contributions. Sport and the arts have benefited considerably from grants provided by the foundation. In the three years since it was established, the foundation has already made awards of more than £200 million for almost 12,000 projects. The foundation is now considering extending its funding of arts and sports revenue costs. That is welcome news.

The pools companies deserve much credit for their support for the foundation. Their contribution to sport and the arts is a clear example of how the private sector can help to enhance the fabric of our communities. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has reaffirmed the Government's commitment to retaining both these reductions. We certainly hope that those arrangements continue.

I should make it clear, however, that the difference between the total contributions to tax and good causes made by the pools companies and the lottery is actually very slight. I welcome the opportunity to set on the record the true comparison that should be made.

First, 5p of the payment made by the pools companies is, in fact, a donation from the pools players in addition to their stakes, so that for every £1.05 played by the player, 5p is paid to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. Removing that element takes the pools companies' total contribution down to just over 40.4 per cent. Of that amount, 5 per cent. is paid to the FSA and the Football Trust in return for a reduction in the pool betting duty—it is effectively a donation by the Treasury, not the pools companies.

Secondly, the percentage of revenue which Camelot, the lottery operator, will contribute to the good causes can only be estimated at present, but it is likely to be about 27 or 28 per cent. of total revenue over the period of the licence. That would give a comparison of 39 to 40 per cent. to tax and good causes from the lottery and 40.4 per cent. from the pools, after adjusting the equation as I have just shown.

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 13 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Primary Schools

1. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per pupil in primary schools in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the figure for 1978-79, at constant prices.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): In 1979-80, the amount spent per pupil in primary and nursery schools, at 1993-94 prices, was £1,086; the amount spent per pupil in 1992-93 was £1,657. Figures for 1978-79 are not available. That represents a massive 52.5 per cent. increase in real terms, despite the fact that, in practically every year, the Labour party has said that the amount was being cut.

Sir David Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those are impressive increases in expenditure per pupil in primary schools in Wales? Is he satisfied that those increases have been accompanied by comparable increases in standards?

Mr. Redwood: In some cases they have, in some cases they have not, which is why my hon. Friends and I have been busy urging all schools in Wales to raise their standards, especially those where results are still disappointing. We have made a massive commitment, through votes in the House, to ensure more money for local government in general and for education in particular. Much extra money is being spent and we should like to see further progress with standards.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I welcome the general figures, but I reserve judgment about recent years' increases in expenditure. Will the Secretary of State turn his attention to one specific matter affecting the education of primary school children in Wales? Large parts of Wales now have access to S4C, Welsh-speaking television, but not to Channel 4, including its educational programmes. That is a big issue in Gwent, including in Islwyn. [*Laughter.*] It is true and it is clearly accepted in the House. Will the Secretary of State take steps to ensure that all educational programmes are available to all primary school children throughout the Principality?

Mr. Redwood: I cannot imagine why the hon. Gentleman is interested in Islwyn at the moment—I wonder whether he has ever been there or campaigned there. The issue is one for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage and I shall ensure that he sees the question and the point behind it. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that some people are worried about access to both television channels in parts of Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: I suspect that the party of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—the Liberal Democrat party—has a slightly greater interest in Islwyn than the Secretary of State's party. Given the increase in school numbers of a further 8,000 pupils next year, why has the Secretary of State cut expenditure on education? He has made a complete shambles of the local government settlement. He is browbeating education authorities to spend their balances when each and every one of them is doing just that to protect their education services. He is bullying schools about their balances when all they are doing is following the Government's instructions.

Is it not now clear that enormous damage is being done throughout our education service in Wales—teachers are protesting, pupils are protesting, parents are protesting, governors are protesting and politicians are protesting? Is it just the Secretary of State's arrogance that makes him believe that everyone else is wrong and he alone is right?

Mr. Redwood: That long speech fell flat. In 1991-92, there were 26,633 teachers in Wales and in 1993-94 there were 26,752—an increase. Every year, the Labour party—through its councils and in the House—has threatened big cuts in teacher numbers. I am not cutting expenditure. I asked the House to approve increased money for Welsh local government and it did so on 8 February. The hon. Gentleman cannot produce a single shadow pound over and above my settlement.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend accept that what matters most is outcomes in education? Does he agree that outcomes in education in Wales are exceptionally good, particularly compared with those in England? Is that not a result of the methods used in Wales, which are often not child-centred or project teaching but whole-class teaching and more traditional methods? Would he recommend those methods to some of our English schools?

Mr. Redwood: I join my hon. Friend in welcoming traditional methods. I think that too much child-centred learning spoils the child and spoils results. I fear, however, that we have a long way to go in Wales, as in England, in raising standards generally. The pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools has remained the same—22.3—since 1988-89, so there is no evidence of massive cuts in teachers. I hope that governors support them, and that they all get on with the job of raising standards.

Local Government Finance

2. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on his local government settlement for 1995-96.

Mr. Redwood: I have received a number of representations on the settlement, which was debated and agreed on 8 February 1995.

Mr. Ainger: Is the Secretary of State aware that his claim that schools can meet the teachers' pay rise from their accumulated balances is completely without foundation? Is he aware that this morning I spoke to head teachers of secondary schools in my constituency, each of

whom said that they would be unable to meet the pay rise without cutting staff and equipment budgets and, in some cases, going into deficit? Does he now accept the argument of the Secretary of State for Education: that unless the teachers' pay rise is fully funded by central Government, it will be disastrous for the education service?

Mr. Redwood: I think that the hon. Gentleman has probably switched his question. I imagine that he originally intended to ask about the police—a big increase in the settlement took care of that problem—but he is wrong in what he said. There is money in the settlement to pay for good teachers and to meet the increase in teachers' pay that we have accepted from the recommendations of the review body. I identified in the debate a number of ways in which that money can be found, not only from balances in schools, and the hon. Gentleman should remember that the total settlement approved was £87 million higher than in the current year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, as a result of good settlements in previous years, most local authorities have accumulated substantial balances, which, along with aggregate Exchequer grant, should be very helpful to them?

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend is right. There are balances in the counties and in the schools, and an extra £600 million, or 30 per cent., has been made available since 1991, which is well above the inflation rate.

Police Funding

3. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the current allocation of money for police forces in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I had a number of representations on the police settlement. I am sure that the House will welcome the £15.1 million increase in the settlement as a result of those representations and my reconsideration of the position.

Mr. Llwyd: I readily acknowledge that the recent settlement is a great improvement for policing. I accept that it is an improvement in north Wales, and that it has been acknowledged to be so.

I remind the Minister, however, that, unfortunately, there is a great and increasing drugs problem in Wales, and the police officers with whom I spoke recently said that tackling it is beyond their current resources. It behoves the Welsh Office to take a strategic approach to that increasing problem, and to give some direction for police officers to follow?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is right that there is a worrying drugs problem. The Welsh Office is co-ordinating work on how best to tackle it. The £15 million extra for the police, in addition to the original settlement proposals, is very helpful in that respect.

I should like to pay tribute to the excellent work of the north Wales police in relation to the Owens family. I am sure that the whole House will join me in saying that we are delighted that the family is reunited and that we are grateful to the police and the medical staff who helped.

Mr. Sweeney: Will my right hon. Friend note the considerable relief and pleasure in the Vale of Glamorgan at the substantial increase in funding for South Wales police? Will he further note that the action taken by him and our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary was necessary because of the deplorable underfunding of South Wales police, and that we are grateful for his action now?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right. I had wanted local government to do the decent thing by the police; it had plenty of money to do so, but it chose to spend it on other things, so, with regret, I took the matter out of its hands. The House approved my proposals, which will lead to many more policemen on the beat, especially in south Wales, but perhaps throughout Wales. I think that is what the public want.

Mr. Michael: Does not the Secretary of State recognise that everyone will regard his regret as lacking in sincerity? The funding shortfall for the police force in Wales—particularly South Wales police—is due to the failure of the Secretary of State and his colleague the Home Secretary to provide the money. Is it not curious that this year, when the need to set an SSA has forced clarity into the allocation of funds, he has finally come up with the money that we have been telling him to allocate for two years?

Mr. Redwood: There was money in the original settlement that was left to the discretion of local government to spend. I freely accept that it was uncomfortable for me to defend for many months the proposition that Labour local government should do the decent thing and give the right answers when the House had voted freely to make the money available. Local government refused to give that money to the police and wasted it on other things. That is the scandal and I am glad that we have resolved it—although I wish that local authorities had resolved it themselves.

Inward Investment

4. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to encourage further inward investment into Wales.

Mr. Redwood: I intend to promote Wales vigorously as a centre for inward investment. Low inflation, low interest rates and a skilled and flexible work force are their own advertisements, but I intend to ensure that the world knows about them and that more investors will come to Wales.

Mr. Evans: Wales has always had a good inward investment record that is envied by all. What does the Secretary of State think would happen to inward investment if Britain went down the cul-de-sac of devolution or signed up to the social chapter and introduced a minimum wage?

Mr. Redwood: Extra taxes, which could result from devolution, would be extremely damaging to inward investment in Wales as it would go elsewhere in the United Kingdom that was not similarly burdened. It is vital to Britain that we do not have the social chapter. That is why we get more than our fair share of inward investment into the Community and why we wish to carry on in that happy state.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Are not major proposals for inward investment from abroad dealt with mainly by the Invest

in Britain Bureau, which is a responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry, the industry Department for England? Where does the Welsh Office fit into the structure?

Mr. Redwood: The right hon. Gentleman is misinformed: the bureau helps the whole of the United Kingdom. He should know that the Welsh Development Agency is also strongly involved in the promotion of Wales and that it works closely with British agencies. The success is there for all to see. Why has Wales done so well if the right hon. Gentleman is right in saying that the structure does not work?

Mr. Jenkin: Does my right hon. Friend think it likely that Britain's failure to participate in a single European currency will threaten the flow of inward investment into Wales?

Mr. Redwood: The Government have made it clear that we do not foresee a single currency in 1995, 1996 or 1997 and that we would not join one in those years. We obviously do not think that it would damage our inward investment prospects during that time, and that is the Government's clear decision.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does not the Secretary of State recognise that the continuing deep Cabinet split over the issue of a single currency is extremely damaging to the future of inward investment in Wales? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said that it is quite possible to have monetary union without political union, or will he follow the Euro-sceptic line in Wales, wrap himself in the Union Jack and totally disregard our needs?

Mr. Redwood: I am very happy with the leadership that the Prime Minister has offered in his speeches and interviews on the subject, which made the situation absolutely crystal clear.

The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that it is certainly not putting off inward investors. For example, Ringtel, the first serious Taiwanese investor in Wales, announced today that it will create 100 jobs. I hope that he welcomes that news. It shows that inward investors do not take what is written in the newspapers as seriously as Labour Members. Investors recognise that Britain is the right place in which to invest and that we have the right policy for trade with Europe and the rest of the world.

Mr. Morgan: What will be the impact on inward investment from Europe, now that the United Kingdom, which is supposed to be united, is governed by a Tory party that is clearly disunited? The Secretary of State has come out blatantly as a member of the anti-Europe party within the Cabinet and has made clear his visceral antipathy to anything European—even European investment in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: I am not sure that there was a question amid that ranting. We are all Europeans. Britain is in Europe geographically and by its membership of various European institutions. We benefit from those institutions and from the strength of our position as world and European traders. I am much in favour of that, as I trust are Opposition Members.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Americans are the leading investors in Wales, accounting for 25 per cent. of inward investment? Interestingly and by contrast, the figure for the Japanese is 7 per cent.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The American relationship is crucial to our success. The Americans have been the leading investors in Wales for many years, increasingly followed by the Japanese. We welcome investors from all over the world but recognise the importance of the American link to our current and future prosperity.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Is it not also crucial that the Americans and Japanese see Britain as a continuing member of the European Union? When the Secretary of State is ready to parade his anti-European prejudices, would it not be helpful if he paused and reflected on that fact and perhaps bit his tongue?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman did not quote anything that I have said, so clearly he does not have a juicy quotation to sustain his point, which was of course a non-point. We benefit from membership of the European Union, NATO and, through the EU, GATT. All are important to our security and trading prospects, and we must get the best from them by negotiating for Britain in the right way. Many Opposition Members would give in before negotiating. We want to stand up for Britain and get the right deal, so that inward investors still come to us.

Planning Policy Guidance

6. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which planning policy guidances operative in England he intends to extend to Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): My right hon. Friend will shortly issue for consultation draft planning guidance covering PPGs 9, 13, 15, 23 and 24.

Mr. Wardell: I am delighted to hear that news. In England, the Department of the Environment issued PPG 13, which was a major step forward in strategic planning, in March 1994, but a vacuum has been created in Wales by the Welsh Office? Unless those PPGs are introduced quickly, the people of Wales will have every right to suspect that the Welsh Office is in danger of becoming a second-rate Department.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome, although my announcement is not new. It is common knowledge that, on a point of principle, we should reflect carefully on anything issued by the Department of the Environment before deciding what guidance to issue in Wales. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not agree that we should merely replicate every measure taken by the Department of the Environment. I do not know of any evidence to suggest that any Welsh interest has been disadvantaged.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Why has PPG 9, which was issued in England in October 1994 in time to comply with the European Union habitats directive, resulted in estuaries such as the Rivers Dee and Severn enjoying one mode of protection on the English side of the boundary and different, outmoded protection on the Welsh side? Why is the Welsh Office in effect acting illegally, in failing to apply planning guidance on the EU habitats directive? Is

it because of the Secretary of State's well-known antipathy to Europe, regulation and the protection of the environment?

Mr. Jones: I certainly do not accept the hon. Gentleman's wild claims. We have been carefully considering the matter, and draft guidance will be issued shortly.

Private Rented Housing

7. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the role of the private rented housing sector in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We have received expressions of support for the Government's policy.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend aware that a recent survey showed that tenants much prefer private landlords to public landlords? Is it not time that we encouraged the private rented housing sector, which in Wales accounts only for one third of the average among countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development?

Mr. Jones: I very much share the concern expressed in my hon. Friend's question, but I am happy to reassure him that the issue is being dealt with. In the past four years, we have spent about £19 million in Wales pursuing exactly that objective, which has succeeded in securing more than 1,200 additional new homes.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

8. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he made to ensure that the cuts in the Atomic Weapons Establishment were not disproportionately made in Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): My right hon. Friend was consulted before the recent decisions about the Atomic Weapons Establishment were taken. The rationalisation will be made possible by the completion of work on Trident warheads. Cardiff has not been singled out. The Atomic Weapons Establishment in Cardiff will close in 1997, Hunting-BRAE, the operating contractor, will withdraw from Foulness in 1998 and component production at Burghfield will transfer to Aldermaston in 1999.

Mr. Jones: The Minister should recall that I raised the question of disproportionately low Government defence expenditure in Wales in October. As AWE has announced a 15 per cent. reduction in its work force across Britain and a 100 per cent. reduction in its work force in Wales, how does the Minister intend to advance the cause of Wales against that bias in defence-related industries?

Another topical issue is the official service residences, over which Sir Sandy Wilson has recently got into hot water. There are 78 such residences throughout the world, yet not one in Wales. What will the Welsh Office do about that bias against Wales?

Mr. Richards: Rationalisation of AWE was necessary because the Trident programme is coming to an end. It is outrageous that a Labour Member should talk about bias against Wales in defence expenditure, because if Labour Members had had their way at any time during the 1980s all those jobs would have disappeared years ago.

Unemployment

9. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest figures for unemployment in Wales; and what was the figure in December 1992.

Mr. Richards: In December 1994, the seasonally adjusted number of persons on the claimant unemployment count in Wales was 109,000, some 8.6 per cent. of the work force, compared with 133,200, or 10.5 per cent. in December 1992. That represents a fall of 24,200 or 18 per cent.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, which will be welcomed by everyone, except the professional pessimists on the Opposition Benches. Does he agree that that decline would not have taken place if we had had a national minimum wage, if we had signed the social chapter or if we had left the European Union, as recommended by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) in 1983?

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. With his interest in the subject, he will not have failed to have read the latest CBI Welsh industrial trends, which show that new orders are increasing at the fastest rate since they were first published in 1978, that output is well above the UK average at some 6.3 per cent. and that optimism—generally and about exports—is at a record level. Those trends are supported by British chambers of commerce, Dun and Bradstreet and Touche Ross.

Mrs. Clwyd: Given the well-established link between unemployment and poverty, will the Minister comment on yet another report which shows that, under his Government, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer? The top tenth of the population are now 60 per cent. better off than they were in 1979, while the bottom tenth of the population are 17 per cent. worse off than they were in 1979. One child in every three is living in poverty. What are his Government going to do about that?

Mr. Richards: The hon. Lady raises an interesting point: the link between unemployment and poverty. She may care to know that in my county of Clwyd, unemployment fell in the past year by some 15 per cent. yet Clwyd county council, through its Clwyd welfare rights unit, employed an additional seven people in September to give advice on benefits. That unit cost some £800,000 to set up.

I have with me a glossy leaflet put out by the Clwyd welfare rights unit and published quarterly by Clwyd county council. It describes these seven employees as the Magnificent Seven, and goes on to say:

> "You may have bumped into some of the new officers when they recently took part in a treasure hunt to acquaint themselves with their new surroundings".

I think that will suffice.

Wales Tourist Board

10. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent by the Wales tourist board

last year under section 4 of the Promotion of Tourism Act 1969; and what is his assessment of the return on this outlay.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The payments made in 1993-94 were just under £4.1 million. During the year £5.1 million of assistance was approved for new projects by the Wales tourist board to secure £30.6 million of investment and create or safeguard 525 jobs.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend is obviously well aware of the significance of the multiplier effect, which turns a relatively small volume of investment into a substantial return to the public purse. In view of that, does he have any plans for boosting the tourism potential of Cardiff following the construction of many the projects related to the Cardiff bay barrage?

Mr. Jones: I am pleased to acknowledge my agreement with my hon. Friend about the relevance of the multiplier factor, which is important to tourism and to the regeneration of south Cardiff, which is estimated to have achieved the creation of more than 20,000 jobs. I am sure that my hon. Friend joins me in condemning the opposition to that by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, who would much rather have the money spent on a Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Flynn: How does the Minister react to the news today that a publication by the Wales tourist board eliminates many of the main tourist attractions in Wales, including Caerleon in my constituency—one of the top half-dozen tourist attractions? In Caerleon there are Roman baths and barracks. Does the Minister agree about the importance of teaching our children about the time when Europe was united, with a common currency, and how it then went back into a dark age of barbarism when the Euro-sceptics came along with personalities and instincts not dissimilar from those of the Secretary of State?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman has got his allusions very wrong—from where I sit, all the barbarians are facing me. At the same time, I readily appreciate the importance of promoting all parts of Wales. That is what I am sure the Wales tourist board is seeking to do.

Industrial Development, Rhondda

Madam Speaker: Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers: Number—whatever it is.

Madam Speaker: No.11.

11. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to visit the Rhondda to discuss industrial development.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is not very alert when inviting me to his constituency. Perhaps after what has been said he has changed his mind about whether he wants me to visit it. I can however assure him that I discussed industrial regeneration in his area on 26 September with Rhondda borough and other local authorities. I would be delighted to take up his invitation to visit—if he still wishes to invite me.

Mr. Rogers: Those of us who represent valley communities—probably some of the poorest, on any socio-economic indicator, in the United Kingdom—certainly recognise the difficulties of attracting industrial units to our areas. But it is still important to create jobs.

When the Secretary of State comes to the Rhondda, will he take the opportunity to condemn the Welsh nationalist leadership of Taff-Ely council, which bitterly opposes jobs coming to the Rhondda and which has probably used public money to take full-page advertisements to prevent that from happening? Will he come and discuss with us this vicious attack on the people of the Rhondda valleys by the Welsh nationalists?

Mr. Redwood: I would certainly rather the money was spent on schools and education than on that sort of black propaganda—if that is what they are doing. The hon. Gentleman speaks for his constituents when he says that he wants more investment in the area, and I can assure him that there is no divide across the Floor of the House on this issue. I shall work positively with him and with any local councillors who want to do so to attract more industrial investment to the Rhondda and to other parts of the valleys.

The hon. Gentleman might like to know that the Welsh Development Agency is currently working on four possible schemes for his area. I just hope that they come to fruition, because I am sure that they would be welcome.

Mr. Ron Davies: When the right hon. Gentleman visits the Rhondda, will he take the opportunity to discuss with people there the impact that the split in the Cabinet is having on the economic prospects of south Wales? Earlier, he referred to his support for the Prime Minister, but he signally failed to mention his disagreement with the three leading policy makers in the Cabinet—the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the President of the Board of Trade. Given the deep fissure in the Cabinet, is not the Secretary of State now merely on the outer fringes of policy making, in which position he can be of no use whatever to the people of Rhondda or of Wales?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is out to lunch again. He is not describing reality. All members of the Cabinet are central to policy making within the Cabinet. The Prime Minister speaks for us all, and extremely well, on the issues that the hon. Gentleman asks about.

Unemployment

12. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest figure for male unemployment in Newport, Gwent and Wales in percentage terms.

Mr. Richards: In December 1994, the unadjusted male unemployment rate in Newport travel-to-work-area was 11.7 per cent. of the work force. The rates in Gwent and Wales were both 12.1 per cent.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister appreciate that Newport needs new jobs but not from Brown and Ferris, the American waste disposal company? Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate, too, that construction of the project is going ahead by stealth, and that the Secretary of State still has the power not to grant the company a licence? Will the Minister tell his right hon. Friend that, if he is so keen on the project, he should take it to his constituency of Wokingham?

Mr. Richards: All this has been most carefully considered. It is not a matter for me at present. I remind

the hon. Gentleman that much good news has come to Newport recently, including 200 jobs to Electrotech from Thornbury and the 500 jobs that will come to Newport by 1997 from the Trustee Savings bank.

Mr. Knapman: Why is it that the areas most addicted to socialism remain the poorest despite having most public money directed to them?

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We on the Government Benches always demand value for money. We want money well spent on the projects and policies for which it was intended. I have already given an example to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) of what I regard as a waste of money.

Welsh Development Agency

13. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will arrange to meet the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss the implication of the agency's recently announced strategic plans for local communities in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend regularly meets the chairman of the agency to discuss a range of matters.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that the WDA's strategic plans for the regeneration of some of the old industrial towns in the valleys, the old slate-quarrying areas and some of the historic towns of Wales are dependent on enough money being available over a period that goes beyond two years? Given that the WDA is being funded by virtue of the sale of its capital assets, will the Minister give a categorical guarantee that the original funding level promised for the agency for the period through to the end of the century will be sustained and that there will be increased moneys from the Welsh Office budget to achieve that?

Mr. Jones: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that the resources allocated to the WDA, together with the receipts that they will generate, will be most appropriate to achieve what we want. It is in that manner that progress will be made.

Energy Efficiency

14. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for increasing the investment in energy efficiency in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: There are a number of initiatives in the public and private sectors to improve energy efficiency, which I widely welcome. There is the Government's home insulation scheme. I am launching a drive to improve energy efficiency throughout the public sector in our own buildings. There are many private sector initiatives to help save money given the considerable energy bill in Wales.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Secretary of State accept that a proper programme of energy efficiency in homes could produce a reduction in fuel bills of up to 50 per cent. as well as significant reductions in the harmful emission of gases that come from the generation of energy for our homes? Does he accept also that as many as 5,000 jobs a year could be created at a cost of £30 million per annum in the process of getting such a programme into operation?

Does the right hon. Gentleman further accept that it is only through socially useful labour-intensive activity that we can seriously tackle unemployment? Will he undertake, as Secretary of State for Wales, to make such public investment available? While he is at it, will he study the excellent document produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) entitled "100,000 answers", which describes how public investment could transform the unemployment position in Wales?

Mr. Redwood: I have already studied that programme; indeed, we debated it briefly in the Welsh Grand Committee. If only life were that simple. Unfortunately, the programme is grossly under-costed. We must take into account the impact of rising interest rates and rising public expenditure costs on the economy generally if the programme were replicated throughout the country.

Of course the Government believe that there are things that can be done under existing programmes. That is why we have a strong programme of energy efficiency measures, which produce work in the public and private sectors. That is very welcome. It may be difficult reducing each household's bill by 50 per cent., but large reductions can be—and should be—made.

Manufacturing Industry

15. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the prospects for manufacturing industries in Wales in 1995.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Prospects for manufacturing industries in Wales are excellent. Over the past four months, the balance of firms reporting a rise in the volume of new orders in Wales has increased faster than at any time since the Confederation of British Industry, Wales, started its survey in 1978, and at double the United Kingdom rate. About half of Welsh firms say that their order books are above normal levels. Exporters are doing even better.

Mr. Barry Jones: What can the Government do to assist further the beleaguered Raytheon jet workers in my constituency? Does he accept that Raytheon bought Corporate Jets to merge with Beech? Does he understand that Raytheon bought Corporate Jets so that it could eliminate competition and take jobs to America? How can the Government further assist my constituents?

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I readily acknowledge the time that the hon. Gentleman—as well as my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) and others—has devoted to this important problem. He, too, will know that his concern is completely shared by the Government, and my right hon. Friend has made considerable efforts to try to support the prospects of the Raytheon plant in north Wales by securing fresh orders. We will continue to make every appropriate effort.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Disabled People

24. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of the budget of the Office of

Science and Technology is devoted to research into new technology geared to improving the lives of disabled people.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert G. Hughes): Some 0.4 per cent., which is more than £4.5 million. That is in addition to the money spent by the Department of Health, the European Union, by healthcare industries, the United Kingdom drugs industry and medical charities.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister aware that more funding needs to be given to core research into environmental control systems, which will enable disabled people with very limited muscular movement to switch on gadgets with a minimum of effort? Can he tell me whether the Office of Science and Technology is prepared to put funding into that?

Mr. Hughes: That is not dissimilar from other questions from the hon. Lady and, indeed, from some Labour Members. Whereas of course I agree with the first part of the hon. Lady's question—about the importance of that research—the fact is that the freedom of the Medical Research Council to determine how best to commit its money and to decide which projects are backed has served it well for 80 years, and I do not intend to change from that.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Can my hon. Friend confirm that there is very valuable research into assistance and aid systems for disabled people at the Brunel university, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), and that it is low in cost and valuable in terms of production? Will my hon. Friend do all he can to encourage it?

Mr. Hughes: Yes, indeed. Also being a Member of Parliament for a constituency in north-west London, I recognise the very high reputation of Brunel university. It has had that reputation for a long time. The work is important, because we all know how it can transform the lives of people with disabilities, and it is important that as much money as possible goes into that research.

Mr. Battle: I am sure that we all agree that there is no better way to promote a positive understanding of the need for basic research in science and for technological development than improving the quality of lives for people with disabilities. Professor Stephen Hawking is an eloquent testimony to the best technology in the service of people with disabilities.

While the Minister proclaims that that work is important, are not reductions in the Department of Health's budget for near market research, which could enable people to hear, see and move better—not to mention the blocking of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—undermining his best efforts? Where is the Government's overall strategy in that respect?

Mr. Hughes: One thing has always been clear to me in terms of issues related to people with disabilities: playing to the gallery does them no good whatever. What is more important than that is that, last month, the Department of Health announced a new programme—Medlink—amounting to £8.5 million over five years, with the same amount being matched to that from industry. That is the sort of thing that helps, not the empty rhetoric that we have just heard.

Research Council Expenditure

25. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of the research councils' budget was spent on basic research in 1993-94.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt): The relevant information will be published in "Forward Look" in May.

Mr. Gunnell: I am afraid that that is not particularly helpful. Can the Chancellor guarantee that money for basic research will be made available to each research council; that he has no plans to reduce either the total or the individual amounts made available to research councils for that purpose in the next financial year; and that an appropriate amount of consultation is taking place between his Department, the research councils and the research institutions in regard to basic research?

Mr. Hunt: It is not for me to criticise the nature of the hon. Gentleman's question; I must simply answer it.

As for the hon. Gentleman's supplementary questions, he will know that I announced the allocations for the various research councils only a few days ago, in our debate on science. Of course I am strongly committed to maintaining the necessary spending on basic research. It may assist the hon. Gentleman to know that, in 1992-93, 47.4 per cent. of OPSS-funded research and development expenditure went on basic research.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Is it not a fact that there has been a real-terms increase of 30 per cent. in the science budget since 1979? Is it not also a fact that more than 92 per cent. of the science research councils' budget goes on research, whether basic or strategic? Is this not a good opportunity for my right hon. Friend to join me in congratulating the staff of the research councils whose headquarters are in my constituency on the excellent value for money that they provide in administering their budgets?

Mr. Hunt: I not only confirm the statistics given by my hon. Friend, but take this opportunity to congratulate him personally on the extensive representations that he makes on behalf of the five research councils situated in his constituency.

It is indeed a fact that, in 1992-93, 92.3 per cent. of the research and development element of the science budget was directed towards curiosity-driven research. As I have said, 47.4 per cent. of the budget was spent on basic research; 44.9 per cent. was spent on strategic research. That is an important investment for the future of the United Kingdom.

Chemistry

26. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the Royal Society of Chemistry to discuss the role of chemistry in the economy.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I look forward to opening the society's annual congress in Edinburgh this April.

Mr. Marshall: Will my hon. Friend congratulate the Royal Society of Chemistry on organising a conference this very day between practical chemists from industry

and research chemists from universities? Will not that approach help to guarantee the continuation of the £4.4 billion that the chemistry-based industries earn in exports?

Mr. Hughes: I can certainly congratulate the society. The opening words of the programme for today's workshop are:

"Chemistry is the lynch pin of one of the most successful sectors of UK industry."

That is absolutely true, and we want to do what we can to ensure that it continues.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Does the Minister not share the concerns of the Royal Society of Chemistry about, for example, the deterioration in university chemistry laboratories, which is preventing students and researchers from reaching their full potential? Science education will be hampered both by that difficulty at university level and by the pending increase in class sizes at school level. Surely the problem will not solve itself. What discussions is the Minister entering into with the Secretary of State for Education, as a matter of urgency, to ensure that the difficulties are tackled and chemistry can continue to maximise its role in the interests of the British economy?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Lady has asked a compendium of questions. We regard chemistry as extremely important. That is one of the reasons why we were anxious to increase the amount of money made available to the relevant research council. As for education, the fact that science plays a large part in the national curriculum changes the nature of the facilities needed in schools. There is a large programme of refurbishing science laboratories and adding them to schools, and I have no doubt that that will continue.

Sick Leave

27. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what procedures are in place for monitoring the extent of sick leave taken by members of the civil service; to what extent the health of those on extended sick leave is monitored by his Department's own medical officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: General guidance to Departments and agencies on the control of sickness absence is contained in the management code.

Mr. Shersby: What financial arrangements apply to members of the home civil service who are compulsorily retired on medical grounds? Is my hon. Friend satisfied that at the present time such arrangements are not subject to any financial constraints?

Mr. Hughes: To be entirely honest, I do not have the faintest idea, but I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister think that the motive for that question, which he has so abysmally failed to answer, might be to denigrate the work of civil servants? Would it not be far better to improve the morale of civil servants by allowing those who work in the agencies, which will not be privatised but which might be contractorised, to compete on equal terms with private firms which might bid for their jobs?

Mr. Hughes: This is a hoary old chestnut which has been gone over many times in the House. As the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service stated, this is the sensible way to run Government, and will continue to be.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the average number of sick days taken by Companies House staff is eight times the number taken by staff in the legal secretariat, there is some reason to investigate whether that is due to management, morale or an occupational hazard?

Mr. Hughes: Yes, I share my hon. Friend's concern. I have asked for some reports from officials. The permanent secretary in my Department has written to heads of Departments and agencies, and he will write again to ensure that they look carefully at the guidelines to see whether they can be tightened. In my judgment there is no excuse for the high rate of absenteeism in a few agencies and Departments.

Competition

29. **Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps the Government are proposing to increase competition in the provision of services paid for from public funds.

Mr. David Hunt: They are many and varied.

Mr. Ainsworth: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, whereas some Opposition Members seem to have grasped the political advantage of moving away from state monopolies for the provision of public services while others still seem possessed of a union-inspired fear of competition, no such confusion exists among Conservative Members? Will he continue to pursue with vigour his policy to bring down costs and improve services in the interests of the public and not of the public sector unions?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, I am happy to reply in the affirmative to my hon. Friend. This has been a remarkably successful programme and it has produced cost savings of more than £400 million a year, which is an average of 20 per cent. That is excellent news for the taxpayer.

Mrs. Roche: In terms of the provision of services and the bringing down of costs through competition, did the Secretary of State's Department advise the Home Office about the contract for Group 4 to run Wolds prison, because Group 4 did not submit the lowest tender?

Mr. Hunt: In the overall scheme of things, what matters is quality and value for money for the taxpayer. Generally, that can involve improvement in the quality of service. It is important to recognise that many of the savings were achieved as a result of tremendous effort by all the staff involved. That applies particularly where there was an in-house bid. We are in the current year now examining a further £860 million-worth of public services and a programme for another £250 million-with non-departmental public bodies. Value for money and an improvement in quality will result.

Science Investment

31. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about international investment in United Kingdom science.

Mr. David Hunt: I greatly welcome such investment.

Mr. Hoon: Does the Chancellor agree with the recent House of Lords Select Committee report, "International Investment in United Kingdom Science", that British companies are driven too much by short-term financial concerns and concentrate insufficiently on long-term research? If he does agree with that report, what does he intend to do about it?

Mr. Hunt: There has been a considerable improvement in private sector funding for research and development. More remains to be done, and I shall do everything that I can to encourage such investment, particularly in partnership with the Government and the university sector.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge Unilever's huge investment programme in science in the United Kingdom? Will he wish its new venture, Uniruss, well and in particular, my old college friend Mr. Richard Sutton, a member of the Royal Society of Chemistry—this alludes to an earlier question—who will be heading a division of Uniruss in the former Soviet Union?

Mr. Hunt: I welcome any occasion on which I can applaud the work of Unilever, a company which started in the Wirral. I greatly welcome the progress that has been made. It is an example of how Britain is fighting to win at the leading edge of technology throughout the world.

Mr. Skinner: Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for scientific research into the reason why an increasing number of rats are leaving the sinking ship? It has now reached the stage where Ministers are resigning without being pushed.

Mr. Hunt: I should be very happy to institute a programme of research into rats, because I recognise that the hon. Gentleman's depth of knowledge cannot be rivalled anywhere in the House.

Magistrate Applicants

32. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy towards interviewing applicants for the magistracy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My advisory committees always try to interview as many applicants as possible.

Sir Thomas Arnold: May I invite my right hon. Friend to consider increasing, on an experimental basis, the number of members on one or more of his advisory committees so that more applicants can have interviews?

Mr. Hunt: I shall carefully ponder what my hon. Friend has said, but it is important to recognise that it is necessary to have a balance on any committee. However, as he has raised the matter I shall naturally look into it carefully.

Charter Marks

33. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in promoting the charter mark programme.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The quality of service offered by charter mark winners speaks for itself and, ahead of this year's launch, we already have more than 500 expressions of interest.

Mr. Spring: Is my hon. Friend aware of just how much my constituents applaud the award of charter marks to the Suffolk constabulary and the leisure services department of St. Edmundsbury borough council? Can he tell us how customers of public services can be involved in this year's charter mark award scheme?

Mr. Hughes: Following last year's charter mark awards, many people inquired how they could become more involved and how they could put forward the names of public services in their areas that they knew were doing a first-class job. Therefore, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced that we will invite nominations from the public for those services that they regard as excellent.

Appointments (Wyre)

34. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to visit the borough of Wyre to discuss Duchy appointments.

Mr. David Hunt: I would be delighted to visit Wyre.

Mr. Mans: When my right hon. Friend manages to visit Wyre, which he has said he would be delighted to do, and speaks to the borough representatives of the Duchy, will he make a particular point of discussing the education policy of Lancashire county council? Is he aware that this year it has cut the delegated schools budget by £18.5 million, but cut its own administrative overheads by only £500,000? In percentage terms, it has cut the delegated schools budget by 5.5 per cent. but has cut transport and social services by 3.5 per cent. or less.

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend has revealed a disquieting state of affairs. I very much hope that, following representations from him and his colleagues in Lancashire, the county council will now reconsider its approach.

Public Services (Best Practice)

35. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further plans he has in respect of identifying examples of best practice in the delivery of public services.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: As well as the customer nominations for charter marks, we will be talking about charter publications, charter quality networks and seminars, publishing White Papers on the citizens charter and next steps agencies, as well as producing departmental efficiency plans.

Mr. Field: Does my hon. Friend agree that charters have cut waiting times in the health service, improved services and even made the tax man user-friendly? Conservative Members believe that the customer is king,

unlike Opposition Members, who believe that public services should be run for the sole inconvenience of the public.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend puts his finger on an especially important point. The only way in which one can know whether a service is matching up to what it should, is if one has the published information on which to make one's decision. Conservative Members are in favour of publishing the maximum amount of information. Every time we put such information before the House—publishing league tables for hospitals, schools or any other information—it is opposed by the Opposition. That is the difference between the Conservative party and the others.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Would the Minister like to have the total agreement of the Labour party by publishing yet another list? Will he publish the waiting list for patients before they get on to the national health service waiting list, because all that is happening with these famous charters is that everyone is fiddling the figures?

Mr. Hughes: I regret to say that the hon. Lady clearly has not read the new patients charter, which covers that.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I seek your guidance? As you know, on Friday last, the Secretary of State for Defence published a report on the official service residences, which resulted in the departure of Air Chief Marshal Sir Sandy Wilson. That report was highly sanitised and severely edited. It was a shortened report of a larger one which, I understand, cost £100,000. Obviously, because of the brevity, much was omitted; indeed it might be argued that more was concealed than was revealed.

Of particular import to the House, however, is an admission on page 3 of the report, which states:

"Parliament was given wrong information on two occasions in 1994."

Because of the brevity of the report, no mention is made of the occasions on which the House was misled.

We have checked *Hansard* since early 1994, and on one occasion, there was an admission that wrong information had been given to the House, but not on the second occasion. As the House was wrongly informed, surely it is this House, and this House alone, that must be given the correct information. Will you, Madam Speaker, suggest to the Secretary of State for Defence that he come to the House and give us advice on the occasions and the details of when the House had been misled?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed—

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I think that I can clear this up. I have not been told by the Government that they are seeking today to make a statement about the matter, but the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has been extremely helpful to the House. I notice that, on Friday last, he tabled precisely that question to the Secretary of State for Defence, so the entire House will be made aware of the Secretary of State's answer. I am sure that the House will be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for doing that.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will remember that, some years ago, the House debated an important and serious issue, the Single European Act, which was about the transfer of many of the House's powers to international institutions outside this country. One of the subjects that was debated, a very important subject on which we got total assurance from Ministers and the Government, was that immigration policy would be a matter for the sovereignty of the House and this country alone. It now appears that there is some ambiguity about that. If powers have been removed from this House and passed on to foreign institutions as a result of misleading information—and I do not pass any blame on anyone for that—how can this House retrieve that power and that sovereignty for the House and for this country?

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman considers carefully today's motion, which we are about to debate, he will find—and I draw all hon. Members' attention to this—that the matter can be raised during today's debate, and that an answer can be obtained from the Minister who is responding to it.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I doubt that there can be a further point of order when we are debating Europe next.

Mr. Marlow: I was asking how, having passed on this power, the House—not the Government—could set about getting it back?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I'll tell him. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should not have been taken in by Lady Thatcher.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will pursue the matter by means of questions and debate and, if necessary, by defeating the Government on the issue tonight. That is how the House makes its influence known and that is how it must be done—through the democratic process. Today may be an opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to use his influence in this matter.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On 6 February, my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) asked the Minister for Railways and Roads about the reported cuts in Transec, the section of the Department of Transport that scrutinises security at ports, airports, the channel tunnel and airports abroad. The Minister said that no front-line security services were to be cut, despite press reports that weekend. Indeed, he made that point twice. He said:

"There is absolutely no impact on front-line security".—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1995; Vol.254, c.7.]

On Friday, I received a reply to a written question from the Minister for Transport in London to the effect that "inspectorial" and "investigatory staff" were to be cut. Prima facie, that seems to be in complete contradiction to the utterances of the Minister for Railways and Roads earlier in the week. Surely there should be some clarification or a retraction by one of the Ministers so that the House is in no way misled. Has there been any indication from the Ministers that they wish to clarify the position?

Madam Speaker: I have looked at the two instances to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I do not see that, even inadvertently, the House has been misled. Hon. Members must interpret for themselves what Ministers say and not raise such matters on points of order. If the hon. Gentleman feels that there is an inconsistency, I advise him to pursue the matter with Ministers by means of questions or an Adjournment debate so that he can be clear about the matter if he is not clear at the moment.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has the Secretary of State for Education said that she intends to make a statement to the House about the Student Loans Company, in view of today's revelation that a new company is to take over the running of the Student Loans Company's computers and will save the taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds? Last year, the National Audit Office investigated the Student Loans

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

Company, which was a shambles, especially with regard to the number of students having to wait inordinate lengths of time—

Madam Speaker: Order. I do not know what the point of order is for me. It sounds like a point of politics rather than a point of order, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman could raise the matter in an Adjournment debate or ask questions of the Secretary of State for Education during Education questions, which come up in about 10 days. I am sure that an attempt will be made to answer them.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) (Scotland) Regulations 1994 (S.I. 1994, No. 3068) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Europe and a Referendum

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You did not indicate which amendments, if any, might be discussed. I tabled a manuscript amendment relating to the issue of a single currency before the intergovernmental conference. Could you please give an indication whether my amendment, or any of the others, is to be considered?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that I can cope without any further help. I would always announce which amendments I had selected if, in fact, I had selected any. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and the whole House knows that. In this case, in order not to waste the time of the House—I am not one to do so—I have not selected any amendments.

3.39 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the popular assent of the people of the United Kingdom should be sought through a referendum before any substantial alteration of the present constitutional settlement between the European Union and its Member States.

There are two basic reasons which support this proposition. The first turns on principle and the second on practicality.

First, the matter of principle. Throughout the whole debate on Europe, we have heard much of the importance of the sovereignty of Parliament. But sovereignty does not lie with this institution. It lies with the people of this country. The powers that we have are not ours as of right, to give away as we wish. They are vested in us through the democratic process by the people of this country. Those powers should be redistributed only with the consent of the people from whom they come.

Those who argue the case for the indivisible sovereignty of Parliament seem to believe that sovereignty is an item, a single thing which resides in a single place—in a little box behind the Speaker's Chair, perhaps. But sovereignty does not reside in a single place. The people can vest their power wherever it is of benefit to them to do so. I would argue that there should be much more power at local level, some in Westminster and some—where it is beneficial and to the advantage of the people in the country—in the institutions of Europe. The point is that it is their sovereignty we are dealing with, not ours.

That is why I argued for a referendum before the Maastricht treaty was acceded to, and it is why we argue today for a referendum if there is to be any further shift in the constitutional settlement between Britain and Europe.

The second reason for a referendum on Europe has to do less with principle and more with politics. Anthony Sampson once wrote:

"Britain joined Europe not in a fit of absence of mind, as she was said to have acquired her Empire, but by a process of deliberate deception".

If that is so, it will no longer do. The debate about Europe has been a politicians' debate which has excluded the people whom Europe is supposed to serve.

Maastricht was a politicians' treaty, drawn up in the gilded palaces of Europe, couched in language most people could not understand and many Cabinet Ministers did not even bother to read, and passed through the House in a charade of indecipherable late-night procedures and funny hats. Little wonder that many people see Europe as a conspiracy by the politicians and bureaucrats from which they have been excluded.

Those who believe in the constructive continuing development of Europe should, with some humility, recognise that we nearly lost the whole enterprise as a result of that arrogance. Another attempt to take the people of Europe into a process of further integration, either depending on their ignorance or against their will, could be fatal to the whole European project.

Next time, we have to engage our electorates in the debate and carry them with us. If that means that we address their aspirations and anxieties more effectively, so much the better. If it also means that the political classes have to explain the benefits of what we seek to do in terms that they can understand, better still.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the future transfer of power, and he has said that people's sovereignty has been transferred by the Maastricht treaty without their being consulted. As a good democrat, does he believe that we should have a referendum now to agree to those powers which have been transferred?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman is a bit behind the times. The Maastricht treaty has been put into effect, and the right time for a referendum on it was before the treaty was acceded to.

I do not underestimate either the pain or the difficulty which may face us in the process of European integration, not least through the single currency, if that comes—I believe it will. That is why the decisions we make need to be ones which have the positive assent of our people, and not ones which—because they are taken without consultation by one Government—can be as easily reversed by the next when the going gets tough.

We will no doubt hear arguments from all sides during the debate against a referendum. I shall give the most common of them.

First, there is the argument advanced by those who would otherwise share my views on the importance of Europe to this country. They tell me that it will be embarrassing to go into the Lobby with people who wish to use a referendum to wreck Britain's future in Europe rather than enhance it—people such as the hon. Members for Stafford (Mr. Cash) or for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). That may be so, but ideas should not be judged by the company that they keep. It is perfectly possible to disagree about Europe, but agree about democracy.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a minute if he will first let me develop my argument a little further.

To tell the truth—and addressing the hon. Gentleman directly—I have a sneaking admiration for him and his hon. Friends. At least they are honestly arguing the anti-European case in which they so passionately believe. That is more than can be said for those shadowy figures, including some in the Cabinet, who share the same views, play to the same audiences and raise the same scaremongering fears, but hide behind the claim that they really support our infinitely flexible Prime Minister and his infinitely flexible vision of "Britain at the heart of Europe". If a referendum flushed out those closet Europhobes, it would be doing us all a great favour.

Mr. Cash: The right hon. Gentleman made a deliberate slur on me. Without in any way taking umbrage at what he said, I must ask him whether he would accept that I voted yes for the referendum in 1975, yes for the Single European Act in 1986 and yes for the European Economic Area. The reason why I would not support the Maastricht treaty and the Act that followed it was simply that they form the blueprint for European government—the sort of thing that we cannot allow in this country without damaging the very things that the right hon. Gentleman talked about at the beginning of his remarks.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman makes his own point in his own way, and I have no doubt that he will seek to elaborate on it in his speech. If I misrepresented his view, I apologise.

What is unquestionably the case is that the hon. Gentleman's view, which is openly and honestly expressed—and with which I passionately disagree—is held in a hidden, camouflaged fashion within the Cabinet and the Government. It is those people—not the hon. Gentleman, who has been courageous in stating his position—who need to be flushed out. We all know where they stand—they are on the same side and hold the same views as the hon. Gentleman, but are less forthright about such matters. They are content, for reasons at which we can only guess, to hide their opinions within the Cabinet of the present Government.

The next argument to be advanced is that such matters are too complicated for ordinary people to understand, let alone vote on. Frankly, that argument tells us more about those who use it than about the electorate, in which they seem to have so little confidence. Do we really have such a low opinion of the British electorate that we believe that they should be denied the right to vote on issues that the Irish, French, Danes, Austrians, Swedes, Norwegians and Swiss have been allowed to decide on?

Then there are those who say that referendums are alien to our parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman will give me a few more minutes, I shall be happy to give way to him. But I cannot do so at present.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall give way to him in a moment.

There are those who say that referendums are alien to parliamentary democracy. But Britain has had three referendums over the past 20 years without seeming to be much the worse for them. Nearly all democracies, with a few exceptions, have used national referendums at some time or another.

[Mr. Ashdown]

Then there are those who say that we cannot have a referendum because it is impossible to frame the question. That ignores the fact that similar questions have already been posed, debated and answered before in this country—just as they have in no fewer than seven other European countries over the past three years.

The matter of the question is, it seems to me, very simply answered. Parliament should first debate and pass any treaty and then that can be put to the British people for their assent. If, whatever the Prime Minister's forlorn hopes to the contrary, constructive steps forward are proposed after the next IGC which substantially alter our constitutional relationship with Europe, the package as a whole should be put to the British people for their consent.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East) *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make a little progress, I shall give way later.

Lastly, some people who, like me, want constructive, sensible European integration to continue, argue that we had better not have a referendum because we would lose it. Nothing more clearly reveals how far on to the defensive the pro-European voice in the country has been driven by weak leadership, the frightened silence of Conservative Europeans and the withdrawal of Britain's business interests from this vital debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: I give way to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), who was, I think, first.

Mr. Knapman: In view of all that the right hon. Gentleman says and his enthusiasm for referendums, why did so many Liberals not vote for the referendum proposals during the passage of the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Ashdown: It was a free vote at that stage. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] The hon. Gentleman has some cheek, considering how divided and split the Conservative party is on the whole issue of Europe. However, one thing is unquestionably clear—that the words of the motion are precisely the words on which the Liberal Democrats fought the European elections last year, and we fought them on a united basis, which is more than can be said for any single European policy of Conservative Members. The Conservative party is divided from end to end.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: I intend to make a little progress.

The battleground of Europe has been ceded to a tiny minority of the Tory right. What is driving Britain's policy on Europe now is not the long-term interests of the country, but what Lord Howe has recently called—I use his words precisely—the

"short term tactical considerations of party management".

Lord Howe wrote:

"In the search for party unity at any price, UK foreign policy is being dragged into a ghetto of sentimentality and self-delusion."

Exactly. Europe is far too important an issue for Britain for it to be left to an internal spat in the Conservative party and the minor mathematics of the Conservative Whips. The debate must now be widened beyond the confines of the Conservative party, to include the public at large; that is the purpose of the motion.

However, to argue the case for Europe is not to defend everything that Europe does, any more than to be proud of Britain is to defend the archaic, undemocratic way in which the country is governed. Of course Europe can be undemocratic and insufficiently accountable, but it is much less undemocratic and unaccountable than many parts of the quango state created by the present Government since they came to power.

Of course Europe can be too over-centralised, but why does it not stick in the throat of a Conservative Minister who says that, when the Conservative Government have torn the heart out of local government in Britain and refused to allow any form of self-government in Scotland or for Wales?

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): The right hon. Gentleman is giving way to quite a few interventions, for obvious reasons, and I am sure that there will be more.

At least the Liberal Democrat party shares with the vast majority of the parliamentary Conservative party, and the Conservative party outside Parliament, a strong enthusiasm for those European developments. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that many members of the public would accept the second part of his thesis—that, whatever the thoughts about whether there should be a referendum and the effects that it would have on the House, at least the great public debate that would unfold would get us away from the poison against Europe that is seen in *The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Sun* and the *Daily Star,* and we would have a proper, balanced debate, showing the real arguments for Europe?

Mr. Ashdown: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I admire his courage for making those arguments in the House and outside. It appears that he is almost as unpopular with Conservative Back Benchers as I am, and I feel a certain fellow feeling for him in consequence. I will allow one more intervention from the Opposition side of the House and then I shall not give way again as I wish to give other hon. Members a chance to speak in the debate.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. The motion refers to

"a referendum before any substantial alteration".

Who but the Government of the day will decide whether an alteration is sufficiently substantial?

Mr. Ashdown: The answer is: this House. I will now make a little progress with my speech.

Of course, as we have argued on many occasions, Europe's institutions and programmes need reform—starting with the common agricultural policy. But it is sheer hypocrisy to argue one day, as the Government do, that the CAP must be reformed and then to vote the next day against any extension of majority voting to enable that to happen.

There is no such thing as a "steady state" European Union. If the process of European co-operation is not moving forward, it will start to move backwards, as those

who seek to block it know very well. Listen to the words of Sir Leon Brittan, who, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* last week about the single market, said:

"The European market is not an achievement that Britain can assume will never unravel, for the forces of protectionism and narrow national interest will always seek to gnaw away at it".

There is a different, more positive view of Europe, and it needs to be heard more in this country. It is a vision of Europe which is democratic and decentralised and which co-ordinates the things that it should be co-ordinating, such as defence and foreign affairs, rather than interfering where it should not in things that are done better by nations, regions and local communities. It is a Europe which recognises, preserves and celebrates its cultural diversity and its national differences. It is a Europe which is made up of nation states which choose to pool elements of their sovereignty to create something larger because it is in the interests of their citizens to do so.

Perhaps our mistake these last three decades has been to try to sell Europe to our people as a purely economic affair, to be measured solely in pounds and pence, jobs and prosperity. Of course, Europe has brought huge economic benefits for British business and British consumers, as the Chancellor made quite plain only last week. But that purely economic emphasis tends to make people look on Europe as a sort of communal kitty, which we keep eyeing nervously to check that someone else is not taking out more money than we are.

In reality, the European ideal is much bigger than that. For Europe, the idea of European union is the biggest political idea this century and the most important safeguard of our prosperity, peace and stability in the next century. But it is an idea which is now being forced into retreat through weak leadership and the want of people to stand up and defend it.

As nationalism rises within the nations of the European Union and conflict deepens in the collapsed Soviet empire to the east, we will either find the political will to lock ourselves together more tightly in Europe, or we will have neither stability within our borders nor peace around them.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I am sorry, but I must make progress.

The tragedy is that Europe could be losing its strength and cohesion just at the moment when we need it most. Many of the problems which now confront us in Europe are ones that we cannot solve alone, such as the creation of a safe and clean environment, the preservation of peace, the maintenance of a strong economy in the face of the global market and international currency speculation, and the widening of opportunities for our citizens and our children.

Those who see Europe as merely a collection of co-operating states—as so many do on the Government Benches as well as many in the Labour party—should reflect that that is exactly what they argued for in the 1930s with futile, and ultimately disastrous, consequences.

At the end of a thousand years in which Europe has been the engine and the cockpit for war—first on our own territory, then by export elsewhere in the world—can we find a different way? We began this half-century with Dresden and the gas chambers of Auschwitz. We finish it with ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. The question before us—and we had better answer it pretty quickly—is whether we have time to do better than we have done so far. That is why Europe matters. That is why it is time to bring Europe's people into the process of shaping Europe's future.

4 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) started by saying that his speech would be about principle and practicality. Much of what I heard was simply political opportunism. I will elaborate on that point at some length later. First, I will put the debate in the context of the Government's view of Europe and where we will be in the next year or two.

The Government start with the conviction that membership of the European Union is in our national interest—that we are confidently and constructively part of Europe. Much is said about the European Union's problems and shortcomings, and I would be the last to deny that they exist. I will take the opportunity to set out our approach to some of those problems.

Before I start to do that, we should not forget the justifications for joining the Community and for remaining part of it. As the right hon. Gentleman mentioned at the end of his speech, 50 years ago Europe was a continent of ruined cities, exhausted peoples and broken economies. From those ruins, we have created a Europe that is infinitely safer and more prosperous than anything that our forebears could receive—a Europe in which many of the old conflicts have been replaced by co-operation.

The European Community, NATO and free market economies have ensured that Europe acts now as a magnet to the countries of the east and offers the prospect of extending stability and prosperity throughout our continent. A wider Europe is the best instrument for eliminating instability in central and eastern Europe.

Europe is crucial to our prosperity. We are a trading nation and have been for centuries. The single market has been good for trade and good for Britain. Half our visible trade is with Europe. Companies in Japan, Korea and the United States choose to invest in the UK—including in Derbyshire—and to create hundreds of thousands of jobs, because we're in business in Europe.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Name one.

Mr. Davis: Toyota.

Mr. Skinner: When Toyota was welcomed into Derbyshire, hon. Members on both sides of the House claimed credit for this, that and the other council attracting that company to the county. I made it clear to the Speaker and to the House on that occasion that I did not welcome Toyota because it would finish up with a single union deal that would result in a lack of union membership. I have been proved right.

It has resulted also in thousands of car workers losing their jobs elsewhere. The Minister must face the fact that he is dealing with a motion from the same Liberal party that in November 1992 allowed the Government to escape. They were on their knees. The Prime Minister was

[Mr. Skinner]

looking around for allies, and "Paddy Backdown" saved him that night and allowed the Government to continue in office.

Mr. Davis: I must admit that there have been times in my ministerial career when I have wished that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was a Member of the European Parliament rather than this Parliament, but today is not one of those days. I am glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman is not interested in jobs for his constituents.

Mr. Skinner: I was not talking about my constituency. The Minister does not even know what he is talking about.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): On that very point, is the Minister aware that, only two days ago, Toyota announced the employment of an additional 1,300 people, many of whom will come from the constituency of Bolsover?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend makes my point very well.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is the Minister going to mention the referendum?

Mr. Davis: Indeed.

There are other areas where acting together has enhanced our influence in the world. Above all, it provided the collective strength for success in trade negotiations with other big players such as the United States and Japan. That strength clinched us the Uruguay round deal in 1993, which was a real breakthrough in trade liberalisation, opening countless doors for British business.

Not everything is right with Europe—far from it—but, unlike the Opposition parties, who seem to accept everything in Europe uncritically, we recognise that fact. I make the odd exception for some Opposition Members. We have to do two things. First, we must set out our vision of the European Union and secondly, we need to develop a detailed approach to the particular issues facing Europe today.

We have a clear view of how we want to see Europe developing over the coming months and year. The Prime Minister set out our views eloquently in his Leiden speech.

Mr. Donald Anderson: How can the Government claim to be at the heart of Europe if, in advance of the intergovernmental conference, they have said, "No, no, no, no," to the issues to be debated?

Mr. Davis: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should wait and hear precisely the point that I am about to develop.

The Prime Minister set out our views eloquently in his Leiden speech. We want a Europe that does not impose undue conformity, but one that encourages flexibility; a Europe capable of including more than 20 nation states. We want a Europe that is built by nation states, not designed to supersede them; a Commission that is the servant of the Community, not its master; a European Parliament with a defined role which is complementary to national parliaments, not in competition with them. That is why subsidiarity is important. It means that the Community and its institutions work with the grain of history, with the grain of national interest, not against it.

Mr. Marlow: I am very pleased to read that my hon. Friend is on the threshold of becoming a member of the Cabinet, because I think that he would make a very good Cabinet Minister. It is the rule with Cabinet Ministers that they all have their own particular spin on the European issue, especially the single European currency. Would it be possible, to use the Prime Minister's words, to be part of EMU and, at the same time, to have flexibility?

Mr. Davis: I wonder whether my hon. Friend was complimenting me when he said that he thought I was on the threshold of the Cabinet. It is not necessarily clear. Also, I am not entirely clear what my hon. Friend means by flexibility within EMU. Does he mean within monetary union?

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend says that the Prime Minister says that the sort of Europe we want is one in which nation states have flexibility. Would that degree of flexibility be consistent with Britain participating in economic and monetary union?

Mr. Davis: That is the classical hypothetical question, which, as the Prime Minister has said, since my hon. Friend is referring to his words, will not be addressed in this Parliament and quite possibly will not be addressed in the next Parliament.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Did my hon. Friend have the pleasure of hearing the disagreement between Labour Members on the 1 o'clock news, during which Mike Elliott, the Labour spokesman in the European Parliament, appeared to be recommending a common immigration policy and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) immediately slapped him down and disowned him, and said that Mr. Elliott misunderstood the situation? Can anybody enlighten us about where Labour stands on this very important subject?

Mr. Davis: If my hon. Friend will wait—

Mr. Mackinlay: When are you going to mention a referendum?

Mr. Davis: If all hon. Members will wait, I shall come to that issue.

We want a Europe that is outward-looking. Enlargement to the east will underpin stability, prosperity and democracy in central Europe. *[Interruption.]* I note that those on the Front Bench below the Gangway do not think this important, but it is one of the key issues that will dictate the peace of our generation and of subsequent generations. We need to open our markets to our neighbours to the east, and to others around the world. That is because importing their goods is the best way of exporting stability; and exporting our goods is the best way of modernising their economies.

We want a Europe which the ordinary people of Britain can understand and feel comfortable with. That Europe is built on a Conservative vision. It is a Europe committed to free trade and fair competition: a Europe flexible enough and robust enough to encompass the nations to the east. We want a Europe that can advance by co-operation to achieve shared objectives and shared aims.

As the Labour party is making so much fuss, I might add that the Conservative party needs no lecturing about Britain's interest in a successful Europe. I shall take no lectures from Labour Members, given that their leader, in his 1983 election address, called for Britain to pull out of the European Union.

While he was performing somersaults, we pressed hard and successfully for the single European market. We won the argument for bringing our continent together by enlarging the European Union. We helped the EU to throw its weight behind free trade in the agreement on Gatt. Our efforts have helped to bring the EU's spending under better control. We enshrined, for the first time, the principle of subsidiarity in the Community's work, and we set the Community on the long road to reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Dykes: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the striking features of the creation of the single market was the fact that Britain was in the forefront of advancing those policies and, quite rightly, of insisting on the use of majority voting? That was the only way to get through the decisions necessary for harmonisation of the single market. Should not the same mechanism apply to other main areas of decision making?

Mr. Davis: The first half of my hon. Friend's comments was correct. That was precisely why Margaret Thatcher supported the idea of allowing QMV—to push past the protectionist road blocks in the way of a single market. My hon. Friend will find that I return to his second point in a moment.

These achievements have been of major benefit, not only to Britain but to Europe, too. Our domestic debate often shrouds those successes in fog, but when the fog clears, we shall see that most of the significant landmarks of this age will have our fingerprints on them.

These successes have been won by a mixture of hard graft, tenacity and skilful negotiation, and by confidence in ourselves and in our case. They have meant digging in and taking some flak—the right hon. Member for Yeovil should understand that. There may be occasions when we need to do so again: that is not the end of the world. It is called negotiation. It is what all Governments do, and what the British people expect of their Government. Negotiation means arguing hard for our point of view and building alliances where we can. It does not mean biting our tongues for fear that others may disagree with us.

Against this background, let us look at the substance of the Liberal Democrat motion. The 1996 IGC is at the crux of that motion, so it may help if I start by setting out the likely timetable. A study group of representatives of Foreign Ministers will prepare the ground for the IGC. I shall represent the Foreign Secretary. Spain will chair the group's first meeting in Messina on 2 June, and we expect it to meet regularly throughout the second half of this year.

The group will have before it reports from the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission. Others are, of course, free to put their views to the study group. I hope that Committees of this House will do so—

Mr. Mackinlay: Are you going to mention a referendum?

Mr. Davis: We expect the study group to report to the Madrid European Council in December, which in turn may well convene the IGC, to start early in 1996 under the Italian presidency.

The evidence of past IGCs is that mastery of complexity is a key to success in the negotiations, as our Prime Minister has demonstrated. We shall therefore review carefully all the various policy options within our objectives between now and the IGC.

It is a paradox that we are debating vital issues on such an irrelevant motion, albeit a paradox and an irrelevance only too characteristic of the Liberal party. The motion calls for a

"referendum before any substantial alteration of the present constitutional settlement between the European Union and its Member States."

Such a substantial change would require the assent of every member state, and it would not get it.

I shall quote what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had to say during "Breakfast with Frost" in January:

"I do not believe anything is going to happen in that conference that would remotely justify a referendum, I do not think it is going to deal with constitutional matters . . . if anything that involved significant constitutional change were raised in the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference, we, the British, would not accept it, so the question of a referendum would not arise."

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I accept what my hon. Friend has said about the IGC, but would he accept that different factors apply to a single currency? Will he confirm that the option of a referendum on any decision on a single currency remains open to the Government?

Mr. Davis: I was quoting my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and I shall continue to do so. He said on another occasion—this is 1994—

"I made it clear that I did not rule out a referendum. One will have to wait and see precisely what the circumstances are. I think it is wise to wait and see precisely what those circumstances are. I have indicated that in certain circumstances it might be appropriate to have a referendum, and if they are, we will."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 620.]

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): If the Minister is so concerned about paradox, perhaps he will explain to the House the paradox between the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer about a single European currency and those of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Mr. Davis: I shall put an alternative paradox to the hon. and learned Gentleman. During the Maastricht debate, the leader of the Liberal party, the man who is proposing the case that is set out in the motion, said that he did not support the opt-out on European monetary union. Had that opt-out not been available, the question would not have been capable of arising. I hardly think that that is an easy paradox.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): I am interested in my hon. Friend's references to the comments

[Mr. Barry Legg]

of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister during his interview with David Frost. In the interview, on 8 January, my right hon. Friend went on:

"I would certainly keep open the option of a referendum in 1996. But the only reason for anybody offering a referendum on the IGC in 1996 would be if they were prepared to accept constitutional change in the negotiations."

My right hon. Friend then listed examples of constitutional change. Among them was a

"firm commitment to a single currency."

Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government still stand by what was said in the Frost interview—that the option of a referendum is still open on a single currency, and that the Government regard a single currency as a matter of constitutional change?

Mr. Davis: It is a pretty easy question when a Minister of State is asked whether he agrees with the Prime Minister. I think that that is the case still—*[Interruption.]* It bears on what the Liberals are up to. How is it that, in the midst of the real debate on Europe, they can find such a non-motion on a non-issue? I suppose that the answer lies in the point made by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Davis: I shall do so shortly.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that anyone offering a referendum would do so only if he were prepared to accept such constitutional change. That is what the Liberals want. They want a great leap forward to a federal future. That is not what we want, and we are not negotiating for that. It is not what the British people want. The irony is that the Liberals want a referendum to save themselves from themselves.

The Liberal Democrats' unthinking federalism is not just limited to constitutional reform. They would renounce our opt-out on the social chapter. They would increase the cost and burdens on business. Jacques Delors said that the opt-out on the social chapter would make the United Kingdom an investors' paradise. The Liberal Democrats' policies would have precisely the opposite effect. There is little doubt how the British people would react to such a portfolio of policies. It would be less a referendum than a rejection slip—and rightly so. The Government's targets for 1996 do not include that at all.

Mr. Mackinlay: We heard from the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) and the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden—[HON. MEMBERS: "Sutton Coldfield"]—(Sir N. Fowler). Sorry—scout jamboree 1957. The Minister was challenged to clarify whether the Prime Minister's utterances earlier this year are still operational. We listened carefully to what he said; he said, "I think so".

That really will not do. Can the Minister assure us that, when a Minister replies this evening, the position of the Prime Minister will be clarified, as to whether the promise of a referendum is still on the cards, in the circumstances outlined by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West? Can we have that clarification this evening?

Mr. Davis: I read to the House the words of the Prime Minister in December 1994. Those words still apply.

I have never heard my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) referred to before as the hon. Member for the scout jamboree 1957.

The Government's targets for 1996 include entrenching the role of the nation state, through better balanced weighting of qualified majority voting, through developing subsidiarity, through enhancing the role of the national Parliaments.

On qualified majority voting, we need a system that better reflects the population levels of the member states. There is a growing recognition throughout the Union that the existing arrangements are undemocratic. Why should each Belgian vote in the Council represent 2 million people, while ours represents 6 million?

We have made good progress on subsidiarity. In 1990, there were 185 new legislative initiatives. Last year, there were just 47. All new Commission proposals must pass tough subsidiarity tests. The extensive programme of repealing and amending existing legislation is progressing well. We are considering how the process can be moved further in the right direction in 1996.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am concerned that the Minister may not mention referendums at all unless we pursue him a bit and prompt him to give us some answers. I want to ask him the constitutional question.

Given that it may be the case that having a common European currency is of such importance that we may, according to the Government, have a referendum, and the Government are not quite sure, does the Minister accept on behalf of the Government that if—as is inevitably part of the European constitution—powers are handed over from this place to a European decision-making body, it is better that they are handed over with the assent of the people by vote rather than by a decision made, behind closed doors, by representatives of Ministers, who currently take the decisions regularly to transfer powers from this country to Europe as a whole? Is it better that the people decide or that Ministers decide? That is the constitutional question, irrespective of whether we are applying to the single currency or any other specific agenda item this year, next year or over the next decade.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman's memory is becoming incredibly short. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"I made it clear that I did not rule out a referendum."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 620.]

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his speech at Leiden last September:

"People will continue to see national Parliaments as their democratic focus. It is national parliamentary democracy that confers legitimacy on the European Council".

This House, probably more than any other in the European Union, knows how important it is that Ministers in the Council are accountable to their national Parliaments. But we should also be looking at ways to ensure that we can involve parliaments more directly in the Community process. We want the voices of national Parliaments to be heard clearly in the democratic functioning of the Union.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): May I follow the Minister's earlier comments about the referendum to their logical conclusion? The more

slavishly he sticks to the text of the Prime Minister's various speeches, which hinted at different things in different places, the more confused he seems to become.

The Minister described today's debate as something of an irrelevance, saying that the referendum issue would not come up. It would not come up because the Government would not accept any package at the intergovernmental conference that they considered to be of constitutional import. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, if the Government do not get their way, and there are constitutional implications, the referendum will be off the agenda on grounds of irrelevance? What would the Government do in such circumstances? Would they leave open the option of exiting from the European Union on the present membership basis?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman pretends to be the Liberals' spokesman on Europe, but he does not realise that we have a veto on treaty changes. That is the point with which we embarked on this issue, and it brings me neatly to what I want to say next. We shall always push Europe in a decentralised, intergovernmental direction, which is the opposite of the thrust of Liberal Democrat policy.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Davis: In a moment.

If the Liberal party were in power—which is, admittedly, a scenario imaginable only in a world of fantasy politics—it would deliver a European policy unequivocally federalist in tone, strategy and content: a policy that, directly and indirectly, would funnel power away from the nation state and towards supranational institutions.

Let us look at one or two of the Liberal party's policies. Let us consider its policies on national vetoes and sovereignty. The Liberals have made a number of attempts—including some today—to confuse the issue on the question of the national veto; so let me quote from a speech made by the leader of the Liberal party in Torquay little more than a year ago, in December 1993. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman remembers it well. He said:

> "We want to see the European Parliament catch up with the Council of Ministers in power, with equal law-making rights over more issues. And we want the Ministers to make decisions in public without single nation vetoes."

Nothing could be clearer. Now, however, the Liberals try to cover up what they know is an unpopular policy. They talk of a double majority—a mechanism that would make little difference.

Mr. Ashdown: We are used to the present Government saying contradictory things, but the Minister cannot say two contradictory things in the space of five minutes. A few moments ago, he told us that he wanted the veto to take into account populations in Europe. The double veto is designed to do precisely that. Do we take it that the Minister is rejecting the idea, or that he is accepting it? So far, he has said both within five minutes.

Mr. Davis: That was another wonderful demonstration of the Liberal party's ignorance. One option relates to qualified majority voting, to which the veto, by definition, does not apply; the other relates to circumstances in which the common consent of all nations is necessary, to which the veto does apply. One involves majority voting, while the other involves the veto. They are clearly very different.

Mr. Spearing: At the beginning of his speech, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) referred eloquently to matters relating to the will of the people. If qualified majority voting operates—as it does—in regard to all matters relating to agriculture and fisheries, and if the Liberals wish to extend it, it may be impossible to execute the will of the people, the will of the Government or the will of our Parliament.

Does the Minister agree that a veto is not a veto if the treaty compels the taking of action by common accord—and thus, an obligation to take action, which no one can prevent, although it may be possible to prevent a specific method of implementing it?

Mr. Davis: As ever, the hon. Gentleman's facts are correct. The veto is, however, the only way in which the Government can, and always do, exercise their rights on behalf of the people.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the main reasons for a referendum on this issue is that, in the Maastricht treaty, we did not veto economic and monetary union and a single currency? Parliament was whipped through on this issue. The Government were unable to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, and that has put the British people in this mess and in the confusion that has followed. Therefore, it follows that the matter must be referred back to the people to allow them to make up their minds.

Mr. Davis: No, I do not agree with my hon. Friend. He was referring to a single European currency, which was the point of the opt-out. We shall return to Parliament with that point in future.

Mr. Dykes: These are important points, and we must be clear on them. Would my hon. Friend crystallise this matter again? We expect the other member states to come up with proposals for the further steps under Maastricht at the intergovernmental conference which will involve constitutional change and certification of the move to a single currency. Is my hon. Friend saying that the Government will formally veto those suggestions?

Mr. Davis: I am saying that we will maintain our stance against centralising measures at the intergovernmental conference. We will block them if they come up.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Davis: I should like to make some progress.

The Liberal Democrat party has tried to cover its line on vetoes. We have already heard about the rather strange notion of the double majority and Liberals talk about vetoes on executive decisions as if legislation did not matter. The Government want to entrench the position of the nation state, and the Liberal Democrats want to undermine it. When we press a little we discover why that is the case.

[Mr. Davis]

Perhaps the House would like to know where the right hon. Member for Yeovil stands on the issue of the United Kingdom's sovereignty. Speaking in, I think, the Maastricht debate, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I do not believe that the nation state is anything other than a relatively recent historical invention. I do not believe that it will always remain . . . throughout this decade and the next century the importance of the notion of the nation state will decline, . . . At the same time, advanced democracies will witness the rise in the importance of community and regional identity and supranational institutions."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 1992; Vol.208, c. 292.]

There we have the view of the Liberal party. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]. Liberal Democrat Members obviously agree.

On "The Frost Programme" in May 1994, the right hon. Gentleman was more succinct. *[Interruption.]* In that case, this is probably appropriate. He simply said:

"I don't believe in the sovereignty of Parliament."

It would be astonishing for a junior Member to say that, let alone the leader of a once great party which he has reduced to an irrelevant splinter group.

Liberal Democrats know that these policies are unpopular, and that is why they obfuscate and equivocate over them. They try to conceal unpopular policies behind the populist gambit of the referendum.

Liberal Democrat policies are not just unpopular: they are wrong. Liberals are transfixed by an outmoded and increasingly irrelevant commitment to full-blooded federalism. That that commitment is outmoded is not just my opinion, because it was reiterated by the Prime Minister of France only a month or two ago. When he was asked, "Should Europe move towards a federal system?", he answered:

"Its time has passed: an enlarged Europe comprising a greater number of states could not be federal."

The Liberals are not just out of touch in Britain: they are out of touch in Europe too. The motion is relevant only if Liberal policies were to be carried out, which is a notion based not just on a hypothesis but on a virtual impossibility.

Labour is little better. Like the Liberals, Labour Front-Bench spokesmen blindly accept whatever is in vogue in Brussels. We know, because they failed to hide it during the European elections, that they would negotiate away our veto. We also know, because the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has told us, that Labour would blindly opt for the single currency. Labour Members never cease to remind us that they would join the social chapter at the first available opportunity. What a choice to put before the British people in a referendum. That is not a question the Labour party wants to be asked, let alone to answer. That is not the price it wants to pay for staying in the European Union.

The changes would not take long to enact—just a few simple signatures on a few simple documents and the next Labour Government, or even a Lib-Lab Government, would be the last British Government who were responsible to this House and the people of the United Kingdom who sent us here. That is a proposition that the British people will never support and it is why they will back the Conservative party and the Prime Minister not in a referendum, but at the next general election.

4.35 pm

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): The motion is curious and ill-defined; it is as notable for what it does not say as for what it does say. Having listened to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), I am still confused about some of the motion and about what it means in practice.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said in an intervention, the motion refers to substantial changes but does not define them. It would be good to hear from the authors of the motion what exactly they mean by substantial changes.

It is clear that, in introducing the motion, the Liberal Democrats have shied away from the debate on a single currency. The motion does not make clear whether a single currency would be the subject of a referendum. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Yeovil would like to tell the House whether it would be included.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: I can clarify that point—indeed, I clarified it last Wednesday with the shadow Foreign Secretary when I showed him the proposed wording of our motion. We wanted to achieve as much support as possible in the House, so I said that the wording could be altered if necessary. He specifically asked me the same question as the hon. Lady has just asked: whether the motion ruled out a referendum on a single currency. I gave the clear answer, "Of course it does not." I do not know whether the shadow Foreign Secretary passed on that information to her. Perhaps he did not, which would explain why she is confused today.

Ms Quin: The confusion arises from the fact that I have had at least three different answers from Liberal Democrats on whether a single currency would be the subject of a referendum. That confusion among Liberal Democrats certainly existed throughout the weekend and this morning.

Sir Norman Fowler: If the motion did include a single currency, what would the Labour party say? Would it support a referendum?

Ms Quin: Our position is clear. We believe that people should be consulted. Whether that would be through a referendum or an election would depend on the timing. This is one reason why the motion does not accord with Labour party policy, a point that I had intended to make later in my speech.

Mr. Marlow: Supposing that, by some mischance, the Labour party won the next election; supposing that the issue of a single currency had not been resolved by that stage; and supposing that two years later there was a proposal for a single currency, would the then Labour Government say that there should be a referendum?

Ms Quin: Three supposes in a row make a tall order. Obviously, we will look at the position when and if it arises—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Hon. Members must settle down and listen to the hon. Lady.

Ms Quin: What I said is good sense, because we do not know what the outcome of these matters will be. It

would be difficult to commit ourselves in advance on what consultation there should be, although the Liberal Democrats seem prepared to do so.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): My hon. Friend has been given the thankless task of explaining why the Labour party is not operating a three-line Whip this afternoon. It will not do to say that Labour's position is, as it were, an option between a general election and a referendum, and we all know why. We have been through this so many times before that it hardly needs reiterating, but a general election is, inevitably, about a hundred and one issues, including the record of the Conservative Government in the past 15 years. It is not about a single currency or major constitutional changes. Only a referendum can address that issue. In all intellectual honesty, my hon. Friend should admit it.

Ms Quin: I must be a masochist, because I welcome the opportunity to explain Labour policy on these matters. No great change may result from the 1996 intergovernmental conference, and the only change may be that of a Labour Government to take us into the social chapter. As that would be a clear issue between the two main parties at the general election, there would be no need for a referendum on that issue. An awful lot depends on what comes out of the IGC process. Although I sympathise with the idea of holding referendums on these issues, I have explained Labour party policy. I do not have the authority to stand at this Dispatch Box and change policy on the hoof, even if I wanted to.

Some interesting discussions have taken place between various members of the Liberal Democratic party on the tabling of the motion. Some are obviously keener on referendums than others. Some are keener on having one on the single currency. There are differences of view. That is why the motion is ill-defined and why a bit of a fudge has been presented to us today.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Is the hon. Lady saying that her view on the referendum is different from her party's?

Ms Quin: No. Often, there can be good reasons for holding referendums. That is my party's view, but it has not committed itself necessarily to holding a referendum on the outcome of the IGCs, as we are talking about conferences that will begin next year and may last up to 18 months. We do not know what its outcome will be.

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Lady has confirmed finally and conclusively that Opposition Front Benchers support the Government's position, stating that there may be a referendum, depending on what is proposed. That is 100 per cent. support for the Government's position. Why did not the Labour party do the same thing when the Maastricht treaty went through the House, so that we could have avoided the terrible turmoil in the House and outside about divisions that are sometimes artificial?

Ms Quin: I confirm the position as I have explained it to the House. That does not mean that the Labour party agrees with Government policy on Europe. Its agreement with the Government is of a strictly limited variety. One of the difficulties of holding a referendum on the Maastricht treaty was that two versions of the treaty were available—the treaty that was available to all other European countries except the United Kingdom, and the version that had been negotiated with two opt-outs by the Prime Minister. That made the treaty a difficult subject to submit to a referendum. That is one of the arguments that I should like to deal with later if I can make some progress.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Quin: It seems as if progress will be difficult.

Many aspects should be taken into account in relation to what sort of referendum we should hold, and what sort of questions we should raise. Many of those aspects need to be decided before dealing with a motion such as this.

Mr. Legg: Will the hon. Lady confirm that Labour's position is that it supports the opt-out from monetary union, which the Prime Minister negotiated at Maastricht?

Ms Quin: We believe that the opt-out did not create any advantage for the Government; it made them seem semi-detached from Europe. No doubt exists in my mind that the nature of the economic opt-out negotiated by the Prime Minister was one of the reasons, if not the principal reason, why London was not successful in its attempt to attract the European Monetary Institute. *[Interruption.]* I hear some dissent to that proposal, but it was reported on German television on the day that it was announced that the European Monetary Institute would be sited in Frankfurt.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): Is the hon. Lady saying, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg), that the Labour party would prefer there not to be an opt-out on the single currency? Is that her position and that of Opposition Front Benchers?

Ms Quin: We have said that, if we had been in government at that time, we would have negotiated our views on the way forward in relation to economic and monetary union. Obviously, we would have taken a different line from the Government. As we know, they talk a great deal about flexibility and other such concepts, but they have done little to tackle unemployment or to try to promote economic growth in Europe.

We wanted those conditions to be attached to moves towards European monetary union. As we have the opt-out—*[Interruption.]* I hope that Conservative Members will give me a chance to explain my views rather than constantly interrupting. Obviously, they are interested not in answers but in making political points.

The Labour party believes that, when it takes office, it will be able to negotiate with other countries on some of its economic priorities, which are laid out in our policy document entitled "Prosperity through Co-operation". I recommend that Conservative Members read it as it would answer the questions that they keep raising and as they seem incapable of understanding the responses that I have already given.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose—*

Ms Quin: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way, as I should like to make some progress with my speech. I have given way many times already, and my original speech has hardly begun. Therefore, I shall endeavour to make some quick progress.

If the Liberal Democrats had wanted to maximise support for the motion, they would have gone about things differently. As from last Wednesday, when the shadow

[Ms Quin]

Cabinet said that it would not support the motion, Liberal Democrats knew that they had a problem, yet nothing seems to have been done to resolve it. I know, through contacting some of the other minority parties in the House, that little progress was made in trying to get their support. I spoke to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) just an hour or so ago. He said that, to his knowledge, the Liberal Democrats had made no contact with his party, and that he had had no information about the motion.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: I would not normally intervene twice in the hon. Lady's speech, but the conjecture that is being dredged up as something to do with parliamentary debate is bizarre. Will she confirm that the essential problem that the Liberal Democrats faced in the past few days, in framing the motion and in seeking as much support as we could get for it, was that her party, which has far and away the largest number of Members of Parliament who can contribute to the cause, is the obvious place from which to gain more support? People outside will not understand why, after the shadow Foreign Secretary said last Monday, "We must take every and any opportunity to inflict defeat on the Government, not least over European policy," the Labour party, when the opportunity arises, officially sits on its hands.

Ms Quin: The hon. Gentleman confirms what I said—that contact, if any, with other parties was strictly limited. I can only repeat that the Social Democratic and Labour party told me that this afternoon.

Mr. Skinner: I have a copy of today's *Evening Standard*. There is further confusion. It has been admitted that a memorandum has been drawn up by the foreign affairs spokesman for the Liberal party, who was angry that he was getting the blame for not having taken part in proper discussions with my hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary. It is reported in the *Evening Standard* that the Liberal spokesman has made it clear to the Liberal party leadership that he has been misled because he was told not to raise the referendum issue with my hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary

"until Russell Johnston and Roy Jenkins had been squared."

That says one hell of a lot. I support the referendum.

Ms Quin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for quoting extensively from the article in today's *Evening Standard*. The two members of the Liberal party to whom he referred are not, shall we say, terribly enthusiastic about the idea of a referendum, which explains quite a bit in the report.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does the hon. Lady agree that one of the problems with having a referendum is that the scene is constantly changing? Only a few moments ago, I received notification from Brussels that plans to ban all passport controls between European countries, including Britain, will be tabled by the Commission later this year. Is she aware that, if Britain objects in any way, we shall face a challenge in the European Court of Justice. The argument is that article 7a of the treaty states clearly that a single market is an area without internal frontiers in which freedom of movement of people is guaranteed.

Does it not mean that the scene is constantly changing when only this morning some of our bright chaps were saying that there was no problem and nothing would happen, while I have here an unambiguous statement to the effect that proposals will be considered to abolish passport controls within the European Union and that, were we to object, we would be taken to the European Court of Justice? The hon. Lady knows what would happen if we were taken to the European Court of Justice on this issue—we should not have a hope.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been very tolerant about mini-speeches disguised as interventions. I know that this is a very important debate but I shall now expect interventions to be brief and to the point.

Ms Quin: Proposals have to be agreed, and I think it is rather doubtful that the ones to which the hon. Gentleman refers will be agreed in that form. When I was travelling recently on the continent, I had to show my passport several times, so it seems that border controls are a long way from being removed. Indeed, I hope that many of the safeguards, which the hon. Gentleman and I would probably think are important, will remain in place.

There are times when the Opposition parties are able to join together effectively to defeat the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) rightly referred to some of the opportunities that arose during the Maastricht debate, when we did not always receive the support of the Liberal Democrats. There have been occasions recently when the Government have been threatened on their legislative programme or in respect of their adherence to international treaties.

Such an occasion arose just before Christmas, when we debated increased contributions to the European Union budget. More recent examples occurred when we debated the European fisheries policy and, of course, when the Government were defeated over value added tax on fuel. We believe that we should take opportunities of this kind, but they nevertheless need to be better prepared in future.

Labour's position on the motion is that we believe that it is essential for people to be consulted on any major shift in our relations with the European Union. We accept that the most likely occasion for such a shift to occur will be at the outcome of the intergovernmental conferences. Such consultation may take the form of a referendum, but, because of the uncertain timing of the next general election and the fact that we do not know whether an election would involve a widespread debate on any significant change in our relationships with the European Union, we are not at this stage committing ourselves firmly as to whether a referendum will be necessary. It is something that we are clearly duty bound to keep under review.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Quin: I am not going to give way; I have done so many times already.

We are sensitive to the fact that people must not feel left out in the cold over the debate on Europe. After all, it was the Labour Government who gave people the previous referendum. After the high-handed way in which the Conservatives have run the country for the past 15 years, we can particularly appreciate the dangers to our political system of ignoring public opinion on such a fundamental issue.

Although this debate is about Europe, it is also about referendums and the role that they can play in our democracy. The right hon. Member for Yeovil said that

some think of a referendum as an alien concept that is not a usual part of the British political system. It is certainly true that referendums have been much more widely used in Europe than in our country, which is rather ironic as so many of the people who are especially keen on the idea of a referendum at the moment are those who distrust European traditions.

However, we need to consider the role of referendums and whether we want increasing use to be made of them and, if so, why. Perhaps we should have a referendum on whether we should have recourse to referendums in future. There are arguments for changing our democracy and for having a different approach.

I do not know whether any other hon. Members listened to "Analysis" on Radio 4 yesterday. People were discussing the revolution in information technology and how it theoretically makes it possible for us to have a more participatory form of democracy—for example, by using technology to give people a say and a vote, either in a consultative way or in a binding way on the Government of the day. That is certainly a very interesting idea. Do we want to follow Switzerland and have referendums with considerable frequency, or do we want to copy the example of California, where there have been many difficulties with the frequent use of referendums?

Mr. Mackinlay: Does my hon. Friend understand that many in the new Labour party would see it as a virtue if we said that people should be consulted on major constitutional issues? What is wrong with that? It was not part of British culture to allow working class people to vote until we changed that in this place. Nor were women allowed to become Members of Parliament until we changed that in this place. It would be a good idea to allow people to decide major constitutional issues as a matter of course.

Ms Quin: I am more than willing for that to be discussed widely within the Labour party. My hon. Friend will know that our democracy commission is examining such issues at the moment. None the less—

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Quin: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman and to many others, and many hon. Members want to speak.

It is much too early to say whether the IGCs and their conclusions should be the subject of a referendum. We do not yet know whether the IGCs will lead to substantial changes, although some people feel that it is unlikely. There is some merit in that line of argument, partly because the European Union has recently been enlarged to include 15 countries and the new countries are still adapting to the European Union. Indeed, the transition process will not have been completed by the time of the IGCs.

We are also talking about enlarging the European Union to include the countries of central and eastern Europe, about which my party is very enthusiastic. I believe that such enlargement commands widespread support in the House. It would be disastrous—certainly for political reasons—if we sent a negative political signal to the countries of central and eastern Europe and, having encouraged changes in those countries, seemed to be turning our backs on them.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend seriously saying that she expects the countries of eastern Europe to be able to meet the convergence terms, which are not only part of the next IGC but automatically part of the arrangements for our move towards a single currency?

Ms Quin: It is unlikely that most of them could meet the criteria, but the Czech Republic, for example, has said that it thinks it might be in a position to do so. There is no uniformity among the countries of central and eastern Europe which are very different and have different traditions.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has made it clear that she will not give way.

Ms Quin: The Labour party has hopes for the outcome of the intergovernmental conferences, and I shall briefly refer to them. Obviously we are keen on the idea of an enlargement of the European Union that would include not only the countries of central and eastern Europe, but Cyprus and Malta. I think that that was the point that the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) wanted me to make.

Existing applications are not thought to raise any economic difficulties, and progress should be possible with them. The Labour party also hopes that we can achieve the reform of the common agriculture policy in the discussions about the IGCs.

Sir Teddy Taylor: No chance.

Ms Quin: The hon. Gentleman shouts from a sedentary position, but he will know that the consequences of trying to adapt the existing common agriculture policy to the countries of central and eastern Europe are so mind-boggling that it would be simply impossible for that policy to continue along the same lines. Therefore, we have a huge opportunity at the IGCs to put forward ideas for a new type of agricultural system in Europe.

We also believe that the IGCs could give a boost to the social dimension in the EU, and that will be far easier in the future with a Labour Government than it has been in the past under the Conservatives. We believe progress can be made also on environmental issues and the economy—crucially on jobs and on promoting economic growth—and that that can be done with a Government who take a different view from the present Government. The programme that we would propose to the IGCs would be positive and realistic, and it would be very much in Britain's interests.

It is impossible to say what the Government's approach will be while the battle is raging between the Europhobes and the Europhiles, even within the inner sanctum of the Cabinet. The Secretary of State for Employment has apparently said that three things have been decided in respect of the IGCs by the Cabinet. The Government will say no to any change in the unanimity rules, there will be no worsening of the formula for qualified majority voting, and no new powers will be given to the European institutions.

[Ms Quin]

I do not know whether the Minister can confirm that that is the official view of the Cabinet, but I questioned the Foreign Secretary on the matter and he seemed to suggest that that was not so. I have written to the right hon. Gentleman to try to get a formal response to clear up some of the confusion arising out of the pronouncements of the Secretary of State for Employment.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) mentioned the difference of view between the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I noticed in one of the newspapers today that the Chancellor is asking the panel of wise men to come up with answers about the implications for Britain of a single currency. I know that the original wise men brought welcome gifts with them, but I am not sure that the outcome of the deliberations by the six wise men will be welcomed by the Chancellor. One thing is true: if it is welcome news for the Chancellor, it will not be welcome news for the shadow Chief Secretary—for the Chief Secretary, rather. *[Laughter.]* I suppose that something which pleases the Government is very unlikely to please us.

The divisions within the Conservative ranks may be entertaining, but they are profoundly bad news for Britain. I believe that Britain has been isolated and marginalised, and that it is losing out as a result. All the events of the past few weeks—indeed, the past few years, as far as the Tory divisions on Europe are concerned—provide ample reason why we need not only a change in strategy towards Europe by the Government, but a change of Government.

5.3 pm

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): I confess that I have found the debate rather disappointing so far. *The Observer* yesterday carried the exciting headline:

"Bring down the Tories tomorrow".

Under that headline was an article by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), which contained most of what he said to us in his speech earlier this afternoon. A sense of impending doom brought me hurrying to the Chamber to make quite certain that I registered my vote—faithfully, as always—with the Government.

In looking to see those who have been rallied by the article to support the Liberal Democrats in their attempt to bring down the Tory Government, we see that, at the last count, there were 11 Labour Members present. So much for the concern of the Labour party to bring down the Government. So much also for the thought that the parties opposite have any common policy at all on the issue of the Common Market or on referendums.

We heard a typical little spat between the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ms Quin), in which some of the divisions in the Labour party became clear.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Renton: No, I am not giving way. Lots of hon. Members want to speak, and I am sure that Mr. Deputy Speaker would like me to make progress with my remarks.

My position is quite clear. I have always been opposed to national referendums. I made a speech on the subject in the House on 22 November 1974—the first time that I won an Adjournment debate on a Friday—and I still recommend its contents to colleagues. The speech contained good historical examples of the way in which referendums have been distorted in other countries, often by the way in which the question was phrased or distorted to get the answer that the Government of the day wanted to achieve.

The hon. Member for Gateshead asked why so many other countries have referendums more frequently than we do. The answer is because they have referendums written into their constitutions. In Ireland, Denmark and Australia, the need to call referendums is a constitutional matter contained in a written constitution.

Mr. Mackinlay: Very good it is, too.

Mr. Renton: What the hon. Gentleman says is fine if we wish to have a written constitution. I do not, for the simple reason echoed by Enoch Powell in a debate in April 1972 on the original European Communities Bill, when he said that the sole responsibility of the Executive is to Parliament and of Parliament to the people. I believe strongly that hon. Members are elected as representatives of a sovereign people to take difficult decisions on their behalf. If we—in the eyes of the sovereign people—get those decisions wrong, they can throw us out at the next election. That is the basis on which our Parliament is formed.

In the years I have been in the House—

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Renton: No. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the number of times he has intervened in the debate during the past two hours, but I do not propose to give way to him. I hope that he will have a chance to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Sir Teddy Taylor: What about Scottish devolution?

Mr. Renton: I shall come to Scottish devolution in a moment, if my hon. Friend can wait.

All of us who have been in the House for a long time have taken difficult decisions on many issues. Those include moral issues, such as capital punishment and changes in the abortion laws, and constitutional issues such as the treaty of Maastricht, the Single European Act 1986 and—before I came here—the treaty of Rome. I agree strongly with Burke, who when speaking to the electorate of Bristol said:

"Your representative owes you not his industry only, but his judgment. And he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion".

That is not a popular view. *[Interruption.]* It is obviously not popular with the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who keeps intervening from a sedentary position. The hon. Gentleman would run in front of people and in front of the opinion of the day, and that is wrong. If the House is to retain respect, we must have the courage at times to follow our own judgment and, having listened carefully, not to be swayed from that.

On the matter of the referendum in 1975, I remind the House that the noble Lord Wilson made it plain when that referendum was introduced—the only national referendum which we have had—that it was not to be

treated as a precedent, and that it would be considered as an isolated referendum—required, of course, to bring unity to the Labour party of the day.

Mr. Cash: It did not.

Mr. Renton: It did not, but that is what it was hoped to achieve. I remember a constituent who was opposed to referendums saying, in plainer language than that we use in the House, "If you have a dog, you don't bark yourself."

Against that background of my opposition to referendums, I should like to talk about one or two instances of what would happen were the Liberal Democrat motion passed today—if there were to be, in the words of the motion,

"any substantial alteration of the present constitutional settlement between the European Union and its Member States"—

in which case, a referendum would be required.

There is one issue over which, under the terms of the motion, a referendum should be required, and which has not yet been touched on in the debate. It involves what Liberals, Labour and Scottish nationalists are currently saying about their determination to have a Scottish Parliament. The current constitutional arrangements—the treaty of Rome, the Maastricht treaty and the Single European Act—are between the United Kingdom, as a unitary state, and the European Union. It is clear that the current argument among Opposition Members is about how much power should be devolved from the House to a Scottish Parliament. It is not a question of whether that should happen, but how much power should be devolved.

As we heard in the debates over the weekend, the Labour party says that it should be possible to hold the line at a Scottish Assembly. The Scottish nationalists are, more realistically, saying that a Scottish Assembly would be only the first step and their ultimate aim would be full independence for Scotland. Either way, those devolution arguments signify a substantial change in the present form of the United Kingdom—as a unitary state. That devolution should therefore be subject to a referendum.

As that devolution would affect everyone on this island, it is clear that the referendum on it should be a national one, not just for the Scots but for the English, Welsh and Cornish as well. Why? Because the Liberals and Labour are both committed to some form of regional government in England that would mean devolution to the English regions to match the devolution to Edinburgh. Logically, they have to be committed to that, because it is the only way of answering the famous question by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about why Scottish Members of Parliament who are unable to vote on many Scottish matters should, once matters have been devolved to an Edinburgh Parliament, vote in Westminster on comparable matters affecting the English.

The only logical answer—as is certainly realised among some Labour Members—is that comparable powers have to be devolved to English regional Assemblies comparable with those that are passed to an Edinburgh Parliament. However, the Labour party shrinks from saying that because it knows that it would be deeply unpopular. [HON. MEMBERS: "Some of us are saying it."] I am delighted if some Labour Members are—I certainly read in yesterday's edition of *The Independent on Sunday* that the shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), was to announce that devolution in England would only involve English councillors sitting on regional bodies—they would not be elected. That would simply create another discussion body like the European Parliament. It would be seen as a fudge and as a means of getting the Labour party off the hook in terms of Scottish devolution.

Mr. Mackinlay: That has nothing to do with the issue.

Mr. Renton: Indeed it has. It is about constitutional change—from a United Kingdom as a unitary state to a United Kingdom that is split into three, four or more regions. The logical conclusion is that the introduction of English regional authorities with powers equal to the Scottish Assembly would constitute a constitutional change that must, under the terms of the Liberal Democrat motion, be subject to a national referendum. I trust that that will be Liberal Democrat policy.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: The right hon. Gentleman seems to be talking about what he wishes the Labour party's policy was rather than what the Liberal Democrat policy is—but that is a different matter. I shall pursue the logic of what he is saying about holding a UK-wide referendum for constitutional change affecting any of the constituent parts of the existing United Kingdom—the obvious one being Scotland and devolution.

The right hon. Gentleman must surely recognise that Scotland has a distinct legal system that creates a different state of affairs. Is he saying that, if the peace process in Northern Ireland leads to a referendum—as the Prime Minister has indicated—such a referendum would have to be balloted in Wales, Scotland and England to decide whether the settlement, if reached—we all hope that it will be—is acceptable? That is the logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman is deeply ignorant of the politics of Northern Ireland. Before Stormont was abolished, Northern Ireland had its own legislature and its own Prime Minister. We know perfectly well that it did, and to make a comparison between what is currently being discussed in Northern Ireland—where Stormont has not sat for 22 years—and the situation in Scotland—where two Parliaments were bound together between Scotland and England under the Act of Union of 1707—is to show an astonishing lack of knowledge of the history of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Renton: No, I cannot give way. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be able to make his own speech later.

The other issue that I shall touch on relates to a referendum on what I can only refer to as the Cabinet's friend: single currency. Obviously, there is already a European Monetary Institute, to which the United Kingdom makes financial contributions. That will probably lead to a European central bank—that is all in hand under the provisions of the Maastricht treaty. We may regret that, although the early stages of the Maastricht treaty passed through the House with a large majority. Those are not key issues of constitutional change—they will happen in any event.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister of State on dancing so elegantly on the point of a pin when addressing the House earlier. I congratulate him on his wisdom in

[Mr. Renton]

frequently repeating the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that the issue revolves around our option to join the single currency some time after 1997. As hon. Members have said that is not a matter for today, but for three years' time.

I understand that, were the motion to be agreed, we could be having a discussion on that subject and a consequential referendum in about 1998. I do not think that we should be too horrified at that prospect; the details of the effects of a single currency are not yet known. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has repeatedly said, it would be foolish to take decisions about that until we have seen the shape of the decisions taken as the European Monetary Institute gets to work in the years and months ahead.

One or two of the probable consequences of an inner core of European countries joining the single currency are that long-term interest rates for those who join will fall by at least 1 per cent. *[Interruption.]* I expected that remark to be popular with some hon. Members. The German long bond rate—

Sir Teddy Taylor: Remember all the promises given when we joined the Common Market.

Mr. Renton: If my hon. Friend will be quiet for a moment, I shall explain to him and he will, hopefully, understand.

The German long bond rate is currently 1.5 per cent. lower than the British long-term gilt rate because there is thought to be no fear of the German mark devaluing. If, and when, a long ecu bond is established, there will be no risk of devaluation to it, and therefore, it is thought—of course it is only a hypothesis at the moment—the long-term interest rate for people who use that ecu bond will be at least 1 per cent. less than the rate of a sterling bond—

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Renton: I will not give way. I told my hon. Friend that I would not.

Mr. Legg: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend also has plenty of time to make his own speech.

Once an independent European central bank is established, that is also likely to lead to lower inflation for its members.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said in the House last Wednesday that he reckoned that, in the last year for which figures were available, almost 100,000 jobs had been created or saved in this country by the flow of inward investment into this country. If we were to join a single currency—it is only a hypothesis—that inward investment would continue.

As for the ordinary tourists, they at least would be aware that, when they went abroad on holiday, if they had ecus in their pockets they would not have to change their money into foreign currencies, and change it back again; they would avoid Thomas Cook or American Express's commission and the difference between the buying and selling rate. *[Interruption.]* I was expecting those remarks to be well received behind me. That could save them 4 or 5 per cent. on the cost of their holidays.

So when the question is asked in the referendum—if that ever happens—if the question were summarised, "Would you like to join a single currency in which interest rates are 1 per cent. lower, inflation is lower, there are 100,000 new jobs in this country every year and you will save 5 per cent. on the cost of your European holiday each year?" it is quite possible that the majority would vote in favour. Certainly that would be a possibility.

I leave hon. Members with the following thought. That would be a particular possibility at a time when Westminster—as we read in the newspapers—is held in very low esteem and it is quite feasible that the electorate would not worry too much about power passing from this Chamber over such issues as money supply to an independent central bank, on which we were represented, of course, but which would be well outside the daily reach and control of politicians.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Renton: I am sure that my hon. Friend will have plenty of time to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In conclusion, I remain opposed to referendums, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, but when we are able to put all the facts, in two or three or four years' time, about single currencies before the British people, I believe that the arguments of lower inflation, lower interest rates, higher employment due to inward investment and the value of an independent central bank may well win the day.

5.22 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): One of the reasons why the House is held in low public regard is that, during a debate of this type, which is of major importance, the place is empty. One of the reasons why the place is empty is that we have not told the public the truth about the issue in Parliament. The truth is that all the party leaders agree about it.

The Liberal party has always been enthusiastic for a federal Europe; the Labour party, as far as I can make out from the latest lunchtime broadcasts, is also very much in favour of a federal Europe; the Government are pretending not to be, in order to deal with certain difficulties that they have, but does anyone really doubt that, if a Conservative Government were in power when the question of a common currency came along, a Conservative Government would go along with it? Therefore, let us not pretend that there is any difference.

On the other hand, there are wide differences of opinion in all parties. We should discuss those seriously because, when we discuss the future of Europe, we are also discussing the way in which Britain is governed. If we change the relationship between the electors, Parliament and the Community—or the Union, as it now is—we alter the rights of the electors, and that is what this debate should be about.

I am deeply disappointed that the Labour party has decided to abstain on the matter. In 1972—23 years ago—I moved, on behalf of the Opposition, an amendment to the European Communities Bill calling for a referendum. Actually, I go back to 1968, when I first mentioned the electronic possibilities for representation that were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin).

The Liberal party was opposed to a referendum then, but I do not make a point about that, because the truth is that people are moving now to a different opinion about the rights of the electors in respect of their Government, and I welcome that; but I am disappointed that the Labour party has decided to abstain tonight, because the Labour party introduced the referendum.

Fifty members of the Labour party who were in Parliament when I moved the amendment in 1972 remain in Parliament. I went through that Division Lobby. The deputy leader of the Labour party and the previous deputy leader of the Labour party, my right hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), voted for a referendum—and so, I might add, did Roy Jenkins and one or two others, because they were then members of a Government that had come out in favour of it.

I wish to say something else about the disgraceful way in which this debate is reported in the press, and commented on in the House, as though there were Europhobes and Europhiles. I was born a European; I shall die a European; I lost relatives and friends in both world wars and I want to see peace in Europe as much as anybody else, and I bitterly resent the idea that, if one objects to the Maastricht treaty and the way in which it transforms the government of Britain, that makes one a Euro-sceptic, any more than hostility to the present Government makes one an Anglo-sceptic. Is it not possible to have a different opinion of the way in which Europe should be governed? I shall discuss that in a moment.

The truth is that a common currency and a central bank would fundamentally alter the constitution of Britain. Why do we call the Prime Minister the First Lord of the Treasury if the Treasury is not at the core of Government? The Chancellor of the Exchequer is only No. 2; he is a Minister of State in the Treasury. If there is to be a central bank, the First Lord of the Treasury will be in Frankfurt. For anyone to suggest that having the First Lord of the Treasury in Frankfurt would not alter the constitution of the country would be deliberately to mislead the public.

Of course, as a result of that, there will be rate capping from Frankfurt, because people in Frankfurt will determine the interest rates, the amount of borrowing and the levels of taxation. I am not working hard for a Labour Government so that the leader of the Labour party, instead of being First Lord of the Treasury, will be the chairman of the British municipal corporation, pleading with Frankfurt to obtain permission to do something about unemployment.

We should consider the matter not only in theoretical terms. The right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) said that, if one goes on holiday to Spain, one will not have to change one's currency. There are 4 million unemployed people in Britain who cannot contemplate going to Spain. The reality is that, if we lose control of tax rates, borrowing and interest rates, we cannot tackle unemployment.

The single currency in Britain has not solved the problem of unemployment in Britain. I might just say to those who think that the single currency is a miracle that we have always had a single currency since the United Kingdom came into being. We have had terrible areas of mass unemployment—what used to be called the "depressed areas", which we changed to the "development areas"—all with a single currency, all with a central bank. So let no one think that a mechanism for handling a currency automatically solves the social problem.

Finley Peter Dunne was right when he said:

> "One of the strangest things about life is that the poor, who need money the most, are the very ones that never have it."

It is a question of distribution of wealth; that is how to tackle unemployment.

I know that this is not primarily an economic debate, but it is a very important debate bearing on economics. Unemployment is the discipline of a capitalist system. It is different in other countries. In Islam, for example, if one breaks the law, one's hand may be cut off; in Russia, one was sent to the Lubyanka or Siberia; but unemployment performs an essential function in a capitalist society. It lowers wages, undermines the unions, boosts profits, limits imports and prevents unemployed people from going abroad to spend foreign currency. Unemployment is the instrument.

We are told that a common currency will somehow bring about full employment. Unemployment benefit in this country costs the electors £26 billion a year in tax. No Government would spend £26 billion a year on unemployment benefit if unemployment was not absolutely central to their policy. A former Chancellor once said that it is a "price worth paying". He meant that it was worth paying £26 billion to the unemployed if it would frighten other people into doing what they were told.

I am from a generation—I make no apology for it—which remembers hearing the voice of Hitler on the radio. When I was a young man I heard him speaking from Nuremberg; I saw Mosley march in the streets of London one Sunday in 1935. Unemployment is the seed bed of fascism. If there is mass unemployment, people will turn on Jews—we have seen the Auschwitz tragedy—and they will turn on trade unions, socialists, communists and gays. Governments try to divert people's attention from the fact that unemployment means that the system is wrong.

We are told that there are 20 million unemployed people in the European Union today. In 1975 I said that, if Britain joined the European Community, there would be higher unemployment, and Roy Jenkins said that it was not possible to take me seriously as an economic Minister. There are now 20 million people unemployed in the European Union. Anyone who thinks that that problem can be solved by taking power away from Mr. George and the Chancellor and sending it to Frankfurt needs his or her head examined.

How will we secure jobs for everyone? We have had full employment—I return to my recollections of the 1930s and of the war. How did we achieve full employment when so many people were unemployed in the 1930s? We did not achieve it through market forces. The Government took unemployed people off the dole and put them into factories to produce guns, tanks and ships. Instead of receiving the dole, people earned a wage and paid their taxes and, along with a little borrowing, that paid for the war. Market forces were not involved: my granny never bought a tank, my dad never owned a Spitfire and my aunt never owned a Sten gun. The Government spent money to achieve full employment.

Think of the things that need to be done in Britain today—homes need to be built, school books need to be printed and teachers, nurses and doctors need to be

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recruited. Why can we not use untapped human resources to meet unmet need? But that is not profitable, and if it is not profitable it is not done. That is why the word "customer" is used so widely. People who have no money cannot be customers. The people who live on the Embankment in cardboard boxes need houses more than anyone else, but they are not "customers" because "customers" must have the cash to turn their human need into economic demand.

Unemployment was also dealt with in a very interesting way during the war. When I was nearly 17 I received a letter from the Government—I probably have it among my papers—which said, "Dear Mr. Benn, will you please turn up on your 17th birthday and we'll give you free food, free clothes, free training and free accommodation if you will learn to kill Germans." The Germans had a similar youth training scheme: "If you turn up on your birthday, Herr Braun, we'll give you free clothes, free food, free accommodation and free training if you will learn to kill the British". If we can use planning mechanisms for the purpose of killing, why, in God's name, can we not use them to meet need in our country? We cannot do it unless we drop the philosophy of putting capitalist profit before people.

I turn to a serious political question. If the Labour party comes to power and adopts a common currency and a central bank—as I deeply believe that it intends to do—how will I explain it to my electors in Chesterfield? I have just been reselected as the Labour candidate for Chesterfield; I am only a prospective candidate, but I hope to live to complete my 50 years in Parliament in the year 2000.

What will I say to the people of Chesterfield before polling day? I am bound to say, "Whoever you vote for, you cannot change our trading policy, our agricultural policy, industrial policy, environmental policy—or, if my party has its way, our foreign or defence policies either". What will the electors of Chesterfield do? The principle of parliamentary democracy is that, by voting, people can change the policies of the incoming Government.

The right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) made a very entertaining and inconsequential speech, as is his wont, but I ask him to address that question. As a Conservative candidate, he must tell his electors that, whoever they vote for, they cannot change the policy of an incoming Government. As a consequence, many people will not bother to vote. Why should they, if the members of all three Front Benches agree and their vote will not change anything?

Alternatively, as Lord Tebbit said the other day, the people may riot. Rioting is the historic way in which the disfranchised drew injustices to the attention of Governments who were not responsible to the people through the ballot box. We are striking a deadly blow at this Parliament and everything that it stands for—all the things about which we boast when we show children around this place.

A common currency and a central bank is the ultimate privatisation. Government is privatised because it is handed over to bankers who are not responsible to the people in their power. I believe that a new political class is taking over Europe which does not have confidence in the public and which believes that Commissioners, bankers, civil servants, Foreign Office officials and, dare I say, Members of Parliament know better than the public. The arrogance of that assumption will ultimately lead to real trouble.

The Council of Ministers is the real European Parliament. I served on the Energy Council for five years and I was its president during the British presidency in 1977. It is the only Parliament in the world which meets in secret and which makes laws in secret. I think that, like the Privileges Committee, it should meet in public; but I will not go into that now. Ministers are reduced to petitioners when they go to Brussels because everything has been sewn up by the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

I hope that hon. Members will not misunderstand me when I say that they could not run communism from Moscow and they cannot run capitalism from Brussels. Both systems will break down. If that happens, I fear that we will return to the sort of nationalism that I do not want to see. It will not solve the problems of nationalism.

One has only to look at the cover of *The Sun* and its headline "Up yours, Delors" to see what I mean. I know Jacques Delors; I met him about 20 years ago at the British embassy in Paris when he was out in the cold and I was a Minister. We had a friendly talk. I fully understand his current position. Why should we blame Delors when we assented to a structure that gave him more power than our Prime Minister?

We see that in the Spanish fishermen issue and in the export of live animals: we are blaming the foreigners instead of blaming the loss of democracy which we conceded. It is not as if the Union comprises a democratic united states of Europe. If the Union was like the United States of America, the first thing that we would do is abolish the Commission. Would the Americans agree to be governed by 15 Commissioners instead of by a President, a Senate and a House of Representatives? Would this country agree to be governed by commissioners representing Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland rather than a Cabinet? Of course we would not. But I suppose that if we preferred to be governed by our own Parliament, we would be called Anglo-sceptics.

The Union does not even comprise the whole of Europe. There are about 50 countries in Europe and the little gang of 15 which is trying to catch them one by one does not constitute Europe. The idea of a convergence between the Albanian economy and the British economy is absolutely mad—although if the Government continue their present policies it may eventuate. Can we imagine a European Parliament where the balance of power is held by the Hungarian greens? Would we accept that? The whole idea is absolutely ridiculous.

Europe needs a new structure. We must harmonise by consent, taking account of the different cultures, histories and religions of Europe. A European assembly should produce conventions to which member states adhere. My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench—crowded as it is during this great debate—must think very carefully about what will happen when a Labour Government are elected. The assumption that the Labour party is united on this issue is totally false. The

Labour party and the trade unions look favourably upon Brussels because they now receive better treatment from Brussels than from Downing street.

Mrs. Dunwoody: They think they do.

Mr. Benn: They do. But when we are there, imagine how trade unions and the Labour party will react when Labour Ministers say, "We're not allowed to do that. We don't have the power. We've been prevented." There will be major opposition, because it will not be acceptable to the Labour party for a Labour Government to make the sort of excuses made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food over the export of live animals.

In Opposition, the Conservative party will become what is fashionably known as Eurosceptic. The Conservatives have the funny idea that Europe is a socialist conspiracy. If it were, I would not favour it—and it is not anyway. Released from the responsibilities of office and the hopes of patronage, many more Conservative Members in Opposition will see difficulties in a federal Europe, as steered through by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin).

The leader of the Liberal party made a speech about the rights of the electorate. I do not need to repeat it because I said the same myself when I moved an amendment in 1972, and I was denounced by Jeremy Thorpe.

Powers are only lent to us. If I am chosen as the Labour candidate for Chesterfield, I will have to tell people there that I will not vote for a common currency or central bank. Whatever my view might be, I cannot do so because I have no moral authority to come to the House and hand over the powers of the electorate. I have said in the past and say again: that would be a theft of public rights.

I want the electorate to know how things stand before a general election. For all I know, after tonight's Division there might be an early election. One never knows—I always live in hope that the Labour party might come to power in the House to which it has been elected. If there is an early election, every right hon. and hon. Member must ask, "Do you regard a general election as a substitute for a referendum, when all the party leaders agree?" How could that argument possibly be made? If the parties disagree, it might be an arguable proposition. It is important to make that clear.

We talk so much about democracy but never discuss it. One principle of democracy is that no Parliament can bind its successor. A new Parliament once could repeal all the laws passed before—but not now. If an outgoing Government assented in Brussels to a law, either against their veto or by voting for it, an incoming Government could not change that law. Tom Paine said that the dead have no right to control the living.

Mr. Renton: What about Edmund Burke?

Mr. Benn: Do not give me Edmund Burke. He was my predecessor as a Member of Parliament for Bristol for six years and visited it four times. His great contribution to democracy was to call the public "the swinish multitude", and that remark prompted Tom Paine to write "The Rights of Man." If the hon. Gentleman wants to make an historical allusion, he should go away and read the national curriculum, and then he might know more.

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Benn: I shall not give way, because I do not want to detain the House—and I have reached the last passage of my speech, which I hope will be better even than the earlier ones.

When I was born in 1925, 20 per cent. of the world was governed from this Chamber. I supported all the anti-colonial movements that were nationalist movements, not because I believed in nationalism as a form of xenophobia but because the upside of nationalism is democracy—you govern yourself, which I favour. I will not sit and watch the House, out of a crisis of self-confidence, hand over its functions to others.

We are told that we are a nation of tradition, and traditionally we have always been governed by foreigners. In 55 BC, we were governed by a Roman—Julius Caesar. He had a common currency in the £sd—libri, solidi and denarii. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) is a Latin scholar and will correct me if I am wrong. The Romans stayed for 665 years and then we got rid of them.

We then had William the Conqueror, who was a Frenchman.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): He was a Norman.

Mr. Benn: Norman, but a Frenchman in modern parlance. After that, we had William of Orange, who was a Dutchman, and the Hanoverians from Germany. Recently, we have had Jacques Delors, who is also a Frenchman. Is there something about this country that denies us the confidence that we can build a society and work with others in Europe?

The only future for Europe is a recovery of self-confidence in Britain, France, Germany and everywhere else. The lack of self-confidence as well as lack of employment led to fascism. Until we rediscover enough self-confidence to govern ourselves and to work co-operatively, constructively and willingly with other European countries, what we are doing today and will do at the intergovernmental conference will be to dig a great grave and put Parliament in it—so that tourists can come to see it and still be told what it once did, although we shall know in our hearts that it is not doing it any more.

5.44 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): That was a vintage Chesterfield speech. Unlike wine, the more recent one of the right hon. Gentleman's speeches, the more vintage it seems to be.

The motion before the House is as premature as it is cynical. It could not be more premature, because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it absolutely clear that there is no question of anything of a constitutional nature being decided at the intergovernmental conference. In any case, that is some time away. It is not a matter on which we need to decide tonight. None the less, points of principle should be clearly stated.

Even the leader of the Liberal Democrats seemed uncomfortable on realising that he might secure allies from this side of the House or the other who might reasonably be described as Euro-sceptics. I will say more

[Sir Terence Higgins]

about that later. What is the touchstone of the right hon. Gentleman's sincerity? He appealed in a populist way to consult the people, but he did not make it clear, despite his profound enthusiasm for and commitment to Europe, what he would do if the referendum result was not one that he liked.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: As democrats, we would accept the decision of the people. That is included in the whole exercise. We would be disappointed, but we and the House would have to work within the parameters that then existed.

Sir Terence Higgins: That is an extraordinary view. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a Member of Parliament, having analysed the right answer, consulted his constituents, weighed up the arguments and become profoundly convinced of a particular view, should than accept a referendum that goes the wrong way? That would totally undermine the approach that we as elected representatives should take, which is why I believe that a referendum is fundamentally wrong.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Terence Higgins: No, I want to deploy more arguments first.

Some people are passionately anti-European and are in favour of a referendum because they believe that the result would go their way. Having lost the argument on the analysis, they see a referendum as their best hope of effecting a policy change. The Liberal Democrats are fundamentally undermining the basis of the House.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) referred to Edmund Burke. We are right to take his view that we come to the House as representatives, not delegates. If a referendum goes a particular way, it is not for us to say, "I've been delegated to vote that way." It is our role to analyse the issues and to take into account our constituents' views. Then, we have a duty to make up our minds. Incidentally, Edmund Burke made his famous statement after he was elected to Parliament, not before—which perhaps undermines it.

We are not here to function as a surrogate calculating machine, to vote the way that our constituents would if they could all press a button. We have a much greater responsibility—to consult our constituents and listen to their arguments, but it is the strength of the argument and not the number of people who make it that is important. Then, we must weigh up the arguments and vote as our constituents would if they had the advantage that we do of listening to debates and analysing the issues.

In introducing the motion, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) effectively read an article which he published in a Sunday paper yesterday, in which he said:

> "We could, at the same time, win a right for the British people to have a part in determining our country's future in Europe."

That is what I do all the time. I have a massive mail bag, I consult my constituents, I have interview nights, I attend innumerable constituency functions, and my constituents have an opportunity to express their view. That is a far more sophisticated way in which to assess public opinion and weigh up arguments than an over-simplified referendum, requiring a simple yes or no response, in which the question is always debateable.

Indeed, it is likely that people would not vote about a single currency, for example, in a referendum on the subject. They would vote a straight yes or no on whether we should be in Europe. That is another reason why some of my hon. Friends favour a referendum. The single currency is a highly complex issue, but, nevertheless, it is suggested that one of the issues on which we should have a referendum should be a single currency.

A point that I was going to make has been a little undermined by the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. I was going to say that, if one went outside and asked people whether they could tell the difference between a single currency and a common currency, I doubt that one in 10 or one in 50 could do so, even though the difference is crucial. I am little unnerved because the right hon. Gentleman, clearly by a slip of the tongue—although he said it two or three times—does not know the difference between a single currency and a common currency. There is a vast difference. It is crucial to realise that the idea that a referendum is a sensible way in which to achieve a real view on such an issue is quite wrong.

In the article yesterday, the right hon. Member for Yeovil said:

> "Other opponents claim the question is too complicated for British people to understand."

Of course, one would sound very elitist if one were to take that view. But we are sent here to do that job; to take into account such complicated issues, to take a view and to vote in the House. That is what is meant by representative parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Legg: I refer my right hon. Friend to the views that he propagated in the House on 30 October 1990, when he referred to the single currency. He said:

> "The imposition of a single currency . . . would rule out for all time the most effective means of adjusting for national differences in costs and prices . . . that in turn would cause widespread unemployment, which would probably exist on a perpetual basis, and very serious financial imbalances."—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 878.]

By any standard, those seem to be the words of a Euro-sceptic and someone opposed to a single currency. If a Conservative Government sought to impose a single currency through a three-line Whip in the House, would my right hon. Friend defy the Whip?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the right hon. Gentleman replies, may I remind the House that I have already drawn lengthy interventions to its attention. Many hon. Members want to catch the Speaker's eye. Interventions of that nature will mean that some hon. Members will be unsuccessful.

Sir Terence Higgins: My hon. Friend quotes my previous remarks, on which I do not renege for one moment. I agree entirely with what I said. However, I think that I made the qualification at the time that it must depend on the degree of convergence. It is absolutely true, as I said then, that we would be giving up for all time the major means of adjusting for differential movements of costs and prices. There is nothing in what I said then inconsistent with the point made by the Governor of the Bank of England the other day, nor—I believe—does it differ from the position of the Prime Minister.

If one goes for a single currency without an adequate degree of convergence, to which I shall refer in a moment, one of three things is likely to happen. We shall have either endemic unemployment on a greater scale in certain parts of the Community, or substantial subventions from one part of the Community to another, or migration from one part of the Community to another.

I am not reneging on the sentiments of the words that my hon. Friend quoted, but all that would follow if one went ahead before adequate convergence. However, it will be a long time before there is such adequate convergence. A referendum in which we asked the first 50 or 100 people in the street what they thought about the convergence criteria would produce some pretty funny answers.

Mr. Spearing: Irrespective of the merits of a referendum, surely the right hon. Gentleman would agree that, even if convergence were statistically achieved, subsequent divergence could occur, creating the very problems that the hon. Gentleman mentioned? So we would be legislating now for people who come after us. I do not believe, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman does not believe, that we have the right to do that.

Sir Terence Higgins: That is why it would be no good if the criteria happened to converge at a particular time and we were to say "snap" and go for a single currency. We must be clear that convergence is likely to be sustained. If, in fact, it could not be sustained, we would, of course, experience the three consequences which I enumerated earlier. So convergence would have to be maintained for a considerable period. At what stage Opposition Members suppose that we should have a referendum, I am not at all clear.

If one took the plunge and went ahead with a single currency at some point when all the convergence criteria and, perhaps, some others, had been met for a reasonable period of time, as my hon. Friend so helpfully reminded us, as I said in 1990, it would be irreversible. How one gets out of a single currency is not the least bit clear. I presume that we would suddenly start printing pound notes again, which would be rather inflationary and a little uncomfortable.

We must recognise that we are considering a very serious issue which should be dealt with in the House. Whatever the referendum is on, the decision will be taken in the House. I was somewhat horrified by the intervention of the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), who said that, if the result of the referendum went contrary to all their profound beliefs, they would none the less go the way of that referendum, even though a referendum, as an instrument of ascertaining public opinion, is fundamentally flawed in the way that I have just described.

The point of timing was raised by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). I have already said that we are discussing matters of the future. We may achieve sufficient convergence in a comparatively small number of countries, which may or may not include this country. It is inconceivable that in the next 15 years or less—probably many more—we shall achieve a degree of convergence throughout the entire enlarged Community, which would enable that Community to have a single currency. The problem depends on how large an area convergence covers. The bigger the area, the more difficult it is to achieve a single currency without the consequences and dangers which I have already outlined.

I suspect that a two-speed Europe is inevitable. We will not achieve a single currency that covers all the expanded area in the foreseeable future, even though it may be achieved among a hard core. In that case, a further difficulty arises of whether we are better off being in the hard core or outside it because countries outside it may find that their economic circumstances are significantly better without a social chapter, and so on. However, I am probably straying a little from the motion.

Some say that a referendum can unite political parties. I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) would agree that a referendum would be a terribly effective means of achieving that objective. I am not sure whether the previous referendum succeeded in immediately and totally uniting the Labour party.

These are difficult issues. I stress that there are timing problems in respect of a referendum. Would it be held before or after an election, or before or after the IGC? My deeply held conviction is that the idea of a referendum is wrong in principle. It is an alien notion, although some have queried whether it is. It is alien in the sense that although there are some precedents in this country, they are not a tradition here—and for a simple reason which my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) pointed out.

Some countries use referendums as part of their constitutions; they have not been part of ours. I believe in our system of representative parliamentary democracy, with Members representing their constituents and taking into account their views. That system is vastly superior. One can understand why a number of countries favour referendums: some of their Members of Parliament do not even represent constituencies. Perhaps some countries in Europe feel that they are better governed from Brussels than from home. Not so with us.

I believe that we should defend our representative system of parliamentary democracy. The idea of a referendum is fundamentally inconsistent with it.

6 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The last two speeches have done much to raise the tone of the debate, in their seriousness, passion and quality of argument. They have come none too soon, because until then the debate had been irrelevant, trivial and, from the point of view of the great majority of people in this country, sickening. Those people have seen the point scoring and the pretence of serious opposition as between the parties as they advance their views and justify their manoeuvrings on this European question.

Today's is an important debate, on which I congratulate the Liberal Democrat party and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). He has made it possible for us to debate whether the British people should be allowed a vote in a referendum before any further significant transfer of power from the British people, their Parliament and their Government to the European Union is allowed.

My amendment, while endorsing the principle of a referendum, would go a step further by calling for a vote before any further transfer of constitutional power. We

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have done quite enough of transferring powers, and we should have had a referendum before we accepted the Maastricht treaty a year ago.

I shall have no hesitation about voting for the motion at 10 o'clock tonight. True, we do not yet have a totally clear picture of what constitutional changes await us. What horrors will emerge from the 1996 intergovernmental conference we can as yet only guess at, but one thing is already crystal clear, and it has been a major theme in this debate. The single European currency proposal is written into the Maastricht treaty, and although we have an opt-out, the decision to join or to stay out will be taken no later than 1999.

A single currency and economic and monetary union with Europe, as the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) made clear, and as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made even more clear, would mean surrendering the Government's and Parliament's powers to determine our interest rates, our exchange rates, our public expenditure and our public borrowing.

In particular, this surrender would mean—I ask my own party to listen carefully to this—the loss of precisely those macro-economic powers that are essential to reducing unemployment and to fostering economic growth, and which are the centrepiece of Labour's economic policy. I refer here to the recent constitutional resolution passed with a two thirds majority at our annual conference, and accepted by the leadership of the Labour party.

I simply do not understand why we do not have a three-line Whip tonight. First, this is an opportunity to force the Government to make a clear choice between the Euro-elitists who want a single currency and are not prepared to allow the electorate a voice or a vote, and—if I may use the term—the Euro-realists, including the Euro-sceptics, who understand that this is a great constitutional issue that cannot be resolved without popular consent. I have no doubt that we could have defeated the Government on this motion tonight.

My second reason for not understanding the position of my party is as follows. Agreement to this motion will ensure that the British people are granted what the vast majority of them want: the right to determine their own future. I have seen many polls—I expect that others have, too—but not long ago the *Financial Times* conducted the largest poll ever taken of British attitudes to a single currency. The questions were asked not just in Britain but in other European countries too.

People here were asked whether Britain should hold a referendum on whether the European Union should introduce a single currency; 64 per cent. supported the idea of a referendum, and 25 per cent. were against it. I could quote dozens of other opinion polls that make the same point.

The third reason why I cannot understand our position is that there is only a hair's-breadth difference between the meaning of today's motion and statements made repeatedly and recently by Labour party leaders. Speaking in Brussels on 10 January of this year, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said:

"The need to close the gap between governors and governed in Europe is now urgent, and we have made clear that where important constitutional arrangements are at stake the people must have their say. As we have said over and over again, if a referendum is necessary for that to happen we will consider it. We can only move forward if we carry the people with us."

The shadow Foreign Secretary has committed himself more recently still either to a general election or to a referendum before adopting a single currency—the same position taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) earlier today. She will understand that the shadow Foreign Secretary is far too intelligent not to realise that it is impossible to hold a general election on this issue. There would have to be a referendum for many reasons, including those put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield. There is such unanimity between the leaderships of the parties that, in a general election, we could never achieve the expression of opposition necessary to satisfy the needs of our people and of their democracy.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the problem with a referendum would not even arise if there were a clear distinction between the major parties in this House? The public remain confused because they are getting confused messages from the two sides of this House. If that confusion were cleared away, the purpose of this place would then become clear, and its sovereignty would become clear, too.

Mr. Shore: Perhaps, but that would involve our being given a free vote so as clearly to express whether we are in favour of or against the proposition.

Mr. Marlow: Even from my peripheral position, I can guarantee that the Conservative party will not go into the next election with a commitment to a single currency. We would dearly love it if the right hon. Gentleman's party went into the election with such a commitment—but it will not. Thus, as neither of the major parties will go into the next election committed to a single currency, is it not inevitable that, even if the Labour party won the election, it would hold a referendum on a single currency?

Mr. Shore: I wish I thought it was inevitable. I think that it has to be argued for and then accepted. Unfortunately, it has not been accepted by the House of Commons today.

I am glad to see the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) in his place. This morning he had this to say in *The Daily Telegraph*:

"I cannot be the only Tory MP who supports our continued membership of the EC but who also believes that there has now developed an overwhelming case for giving the British people the opportunity to vote."

I detect much more sense and wisdom in the right hon. Gentleman's remarks—he has carried heavy responsibilities in the Conservative party—than in those of the Minister this afternoon.

I move on to the basic argument advanced by the right hon. Member for Worthing. There are two overwhelming reasons why a referendum should be granted, the first of which he did not mention. It is that we have an unwritten constitution. We have no special safeguards when constitutional changes, even of the greatest magnitude, are proposed. Countries with written constitutions have entrenched provisions that allow for specially large majorities when there is voting for constitutional change. We have none.

I know that there is a difficulty—we have all faced it before—in adequately defining what is a constitutional issue and what is not. I think we accept, however, that an

issue that is not constitutional, in the sense in which I am using the word, is one that comes within our political process in the sense that the decision made upon it can be changed following a change of Government if that be the wish of the people.

A constitutional issue affects the framework of democracy, including the rights and powers of Parliament itself. I put it to the right hon. Member for Worthing that, when we developed our doctrines of an unwritten constitution and the acceptance of simple majority rule in the House, no one in Britain imagined that we would ever turn ourselves into a sort of province of a new state emerging in Europe. That would never have been allowed to happen without a massive entrenchment of the rights of the British people to preserve the British state, which is conterminous with democracy in Britain.

I turn to my second reason for saying that a referendum is essential. There is vast and still growing cynicism among the British public in their attitude to politicians, and to Government and Parliament in their handling of European issues. There is a deep suspicion that there is a virtual conspiracy not to tell the British people the truth either about what has already been surrendered or about further demands that are known already to be in the pipeline.

I shall not bore the House with the contradictory statements on the meaning and significance of a single currency that have been made by many members of the Government, who have followed one another in the bedlam that we have heard over the past week or so. I shall, however, seek to explain why the cynicism is serious, and why we must deal with it by referring to some recent and important matters that have affected the British people. They were touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield, in his excellent speech.

Did anyone in Britain imagine until the decision was made about the Irish box that there was no power left for the British Government to determine or maintain our right of access to the seas round our island? Did anyone know that we were simply, by a majority vote in the European Council, to have taken from us hundreds of square miles of fishing rights that we had previously enjoyed? Did the British people know that? Did British fishermen know that when the treaties were signed? The answer is no.

An appalling situation has developed over the export of calves for veal. There are many who find it obnoxious that calves should be exported to certain European countries, which treat them in a pretty dreadful way. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food shares that feeling. Instead of saying, "I propose to introduce a small piece of legislation under which we shall prohibit the export of British calves to those countries that do not give them humane and decent treatment", he says, "I cannot introduce legislation. I have no power to do so. Please"—

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): The Minister does have the power.

Mr. Shore: That is arguable. He says that he does not, because the Europeans have legislated in that area and their directive has precedence over any power possessed by Parliament to put things right. As a Cabinet Minister, he urges the protesters to protest in Brussels, Rome and Paris—everywhere except London. It is a disgrace.

My third illustration is more complicated in some respects. The House will be aware that the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), who resigned his position in government two days ago, raised the important issue of what is to be the future of control of immigration as it affects the United Kingdom. The people did not have the faintest idea that our immigration policy—or, much more important, access to the country through the free movement of labour—was as it is in the relevant treaty.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle was drawing attention to the muddle in which we find ourselves over immigration policy because we have abandoned the right to maintain our frontiers against about 300 million fellow Europeans. Under the Single European Act, which passed through the House so precipitately, there is article 8A. A famous sentence reads:

"The internal market shall comprise an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured".

That is a Europe without frontiers.

Article 8a of the Maastricht treaty contains the following provision:

"Every citizen of the Union shall have the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States".

If we open our gates and doors to 300 million fellow Europeans regardless of whether there is a job waiting for any of them at the other end, we cannot let them in and keep others out except on the crudest basis of the colour of their skin, which makes them look different from others who come across the channel by sea or to Heathrow by air.

The words that I have quoted from the treaties are unknown to the people. They are not in favour of a vast swilling of people across the continent of Europe in search of jobs. They rest on the belief that it is better to bring work to people than to cause people to leave their own countries to look for work wherever it may be. That is my third illustration. I could give many more, but I shall not do so.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The bogus nature of my right hon. Friend's third illustration is that citizens of the European Union can already cross frontiers. Indeed, they have been able to do so for some time. The fact that they do not come to the United Kingdom tells us something about our unemployment and the comparative social benefits that they enjoy on the continent.

Mr. Shore: My hon. Friend is mixing up two things. We have always been open to people coming to visit our country. Long may that continue. At the same time, we have clear principles about asylum and the uniting of split families, for example. We are absolutely clear about those issues.

I am talking about a treaty that gives every citizen of a member state the right to reside in another member state, regardless of whether a job is available. That will lead to a continuous search for the best forms of social benefit that are available for the unemployed peoples of Europe. It is the wrong approach. We should be trying to deal with unemployment by stimulating European economies so

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that jobless totals are reduced. We should be trying to bring work to the workers, not leaving workers to go in search of work.

Mr. Whitney: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shore: No. I am coming to a conclusion.

I have mentioned only some elements of the treaties which we have signed which are now coming, as it were, before the British people. It is now inconceivable that we can sign another treaty that transfers any further powers from the House, from the Government and from our people to European institutions, without a clear and precise referendum that gives a chance for our people to say yea or nay.

6.19 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The amendment that I tabled today, in manuscript form, dealt with a referendum in the context of a single currency and a federal Europe. I did that quite deliberately, because I wanted it on the record that it is not just a question of what the Liberal Democrat and the Labour proposals amount to, but rather the sovereignty of this place, as addressed—if I may say so—rather inaccurately by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins).

The bottom line is whether we will be able to govern ourselves. That is the key question. When people come to read the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) without prejudice, they will note that he made some significant points.

The difficulty with the argument made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing is that it begs the question about the continuing existence of our own Parliament. If driven by the Whip—as we were in the Maastricht debates—and if without a free vote we are to be told that we can no longer govern ourselves in principle because a single currency is on the agenda, and if we have not agreed in the protocol that deals with the third stage that we will never veto these matters as regards the rest of the European Community, the reality is that we are back to the question that I put to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister during the confidence motion, when he was good enough to attend for my speech.

I said to him, "What you have done through the Maastricht process is to present to the British people the unnecessary question of whether we must leave the European Community in 1996 or 1999." That is the key question. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing is simply repeating the old notion that those who call for a referendum would undermine the parliamentary sovereignty that they say they want to defend.

Exactly the opposite is our case. What we must consider is this. If we allow a single currency and a central bank, and all that goes with that, in principle within the European Community, and allowing for the assumption that we do not want to leave the European Community if it is possible to avoid doing so, we must not undermine the very basis on which we are here by handing over those powers to central, unelected, unaccountable bankers and bureaucrats in the Commission.

We cannot possibly, in my judgment—when one considers the referendum in 1975 and looks at the young people today, who have not been given an opportunity to consider any aspects of these matters within the context of a referendum framework—avoid the fact that 37 per cent. of today's voters have not had an opportunity to express their view. The fact, therefore, is that we are undermining the very people by whom we were elected to this House.

Furthermore, people say that Members of Parliament—my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing also made the point—would effectively be abdicating their responsibilities. But the fact, as he knows, is that, in order to have a referendum, there must be an Act of Parliament. There is no question of a referendum being foisted on us. It is endorsed by the House beforehand. Hon. Members have the opportunity on 24 February—I hope that hon. Members will turn up to debate the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—to express their view on the principle whether the House will allow a referendum to go ahead.

Looking back over past decades, I find that Conservative Governments have been in favour of referendums. For example, Balfour, in 1911, proposed a new clause to the Liberal Government's Parliament Bill. On that occasion, he said:

"in the Referendum lies our one hope of getting the sort of constitutional security which every other country but our own enjoys".

He was relying on a referendum to support his argument with respect to that Bill.

Sir Terence Higgins: That Conservative amendment was defeated. Does my hon. Friend think that the consequences of that defeat were serious?

Mr. Cash: I do not think it matters. We are talking about the principle whether a Conservative Government—or Conservative Opposition—have or have not from time to time considered the principle of a referendum on a major constitutional issue.

In 1972, in Northern Ireland, there was the border poll. Then there was the Labour Government in respect to the European Economic Community. Ministers on both sides—Cabinet and shadow—participated in those debates. They did not turn away and say, "We are not going to have anything to do with this." Then there was the question of the reform of the House of Lords. In 1978, there was the question of devolution in Scotland and Wales.

I do not believe that, in the past 25 years, there has been a single major constitutional issue facing our Parliament that has not been finally resolved by a free vote or a referendum. Not once have we had such a constitutional issue without there being either a free vote, a referendum or both. But, of course, not with Maastricht. As *The Times* said at the time of the Maastricht debates:

"Parliament can never be undermined by a referendum, since it is Parliament that decides to call one and Parliament that decides to be bound by the result."

That is conclusive.

A further point arises out of the Sheffield university survey, which is getting a good deal of currency at the moment. It was conducted on a private polling basis of Members of Parliament involved in the Maastricht debates. There were a number of questions—21 in all—that dealt with the central issues arising out of Maastricht.

On a national referendum, a question was put that whether there should be a national referendum before the United Kingdom enters a single currency. Some 55 per

cent. stated that they strongly agreed, or agreed, with that proposition. On whether Britain should never permit its monetary policy to be determined by an independent European central bank, 61 per cent. of Conservative Back Benchers said that they strongly agreed, or agreed. On whether economic and monetary union was not desirable, the figure was 61 per cent.

That rather makes my point with respect to the argument made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, because if those are the opinions of our colleagues when they are whipped, what would their position have been had there been a free vote? If they were denied a free vote, one must question the manner in which the whole matter of the fundamental constitutional issue of Maastricht was handled. Was it not just simply, as I said the other day, based on the knowledge, "I know that I am right"?

Is not that now being discovered to be fundamentally flawed, as one decision after another flows in the wake of that treaty? The reality is that only by a referendum can we go back to the people as a matter of principle, whether or not one is in favour of the answers to the question that one will put, and discover what the people outside really think.

There is confusion in the Cabinet. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), today in *The Daily Telegraph*, advocated a referendum on a single currency. He and I have had many arguments about that question, but he is being driven to the inevitable conclusion that it is essential. My right hon. Friend—ex-party chairman that he is, having held all the important positions, as Secretary of State in God knows how many different Departments—has come to the conclusion that our Cabinet is so severely divided that we must go out and ask the people the answers to those questions.

That is not particularly exceptional. Indeed, I presented a petition during the Maastricht process, when I was joint chairman of the Maastricht Referendum Campaign. In those days, there was much vilification of our arguments. I do not mind that. Part of the process here is to be able to take a knock or two when they come along. But the reality is that I presented a petition to the House, with 250,000 names on it, which came from every quarter of the United Kingdom. People feel strongly about the matter; indeed, they feel much more strongly about it than they did then.

We can take a European view of the position. I remember the Maastricht referendum in France, when I helped Mr. Seguin and Mr. de Villiers. The vote in favour squeezed through by 1 per cent., but there is no chance that that would happen now: it would be at least 60 per cent., or even 65 per cent., against—which would have meant no Maastricht. Would that mean that the French would leave the European Community? These are seminal questions.

When I met Hans Tietmeyer recently, he told me that 60 per cent. of German business men opposed the idea of a single currency. We now learn from *Der Spiegel* that 64 per cent. of the German electorate are against it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and others have referred to the state of affairs in the City of London, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) constantly rabbits on about the attitudes of people there. He should consult the Harris survey published a few weeks ago, which showed that, of 250 City executives, 69 per cent.—I think that I am right; it may have been 66 per cent., but it was certainly well over 60 per cent.—said that they wanted a referendum on the single currency.

Those are the arguments on which we are relying. People want to be consulted—and I have considerable sympathy with people who find that they, their Government, their attitudes, their traditions, their businesses and their jobs are being put at risk by a massive experiment. For what purpose is all that taking place?

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I believe that, not only tonight but on other occasions, my hon. Friend has advocated a referendum on the principle of a single currency before the Government decide anything about British participation. That obviously deals with a hypothetical situation with important constitutional implications. Given that my hon. Friend is clearly as committed to the future of the House of Commons and our Parliament as I am, however, would it not be simpler to arrange a free vote in the House?

In circumstances that are not hypothetical—that is, when the Government have already adopted and negotiated a position—should there not be a whipped vote? The Government have a right to expect their supporters to support the actions that they have taken.

Mr. Cash: I have often advocated a free vote on these issues. I put the point to the present governor of Hong Kong. I said, "At the party conference, you keep saying, 'Trust the people'; why do you not at least trust your Members of Parliament?" In fact, the Government had not the slightest intention of giving us a free vote, any more than they had the slightest intention of giving us a referendum on Maastricht. They were frightened silly that we might win. I do not believe that we might win; I am absolutely certain that we would.

Yes, I believe that there ought to be a free vote. I have argued that any referendum should take place before the next intergovernmental conference, however. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield has rightly made clear, the critical issue concerns the single currency: it is the fulcrum of so many arguments about stage 3, the central bank, unaccountability and the survival of our democracy—and thence, by inversion, the status of the House of Commons. That brings us back full circle.

As I said in an intervention on the Minister's speech, our fatal mistake was not vetoing economic and monetary union—which is the single currency in its fulness—when I suggested that we should. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), who served with me on the manifesto committee, will recall my arguing that, if we did not veto EMU at that stage, we would be marginalised.

He may also remember that, at the end of the proceedings, a summary was produced, featuring the words "We are a European Community of independent sovereign states." Someone turned to me—it may have been my hon. Friend—and asked, "Are you satisfied with those words?" I said, "Yes, I am." Then someone—it may have been my hon. Friend, but I would not wish to accuse him of it—said, "I think that we should take those words out."

I said, "You think what?" A Minister was present. I said, "You are going to take those words out of a summary of a draft Conservative party manifesto?" The

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answer came, "We are going to take them out." I said, "In that case, we shall have a vote." My recollection is that I was the only person who voted to keep those words in.

People may wonder why I am so keen to ensure that we do not lose our sovereignty, but that is what happened in the innermost precincts of the Foreign Office. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington has a nice smile on his face, but I must tell him that the smile is now on the face of the tiger. We are not going to give in, irrespective of the agenda that has been set by others.

It is continually put to us, and particularly to me, that it would be foolish now to say what we are going to do. Let us face it: in fact, we shall be spun along until the intergovernmental conference takes place, and then the moment will come. Everything will be wrapped up in the negotiations, and the fundamental argument about monetary union will be conceded. Why? We shall be told, "We made these decisions a long time ago. Now is not the time for us to make a further decision; the matter was decided at Maastricht." I can hear it now.

The real point is that we were deceived over the Maastricht treaty. It may not have been deliberate, but it may well have been fatal. The one thing that the treaty did not do was preserve our ability to remain in the United Kingdom while preserving the integrity and powers of the House of Commons.

I recently had the pleasure—I will describe it as that—of meeting five members of the Bundesbank. They came here at the behest of Chancellor Kohl; they were friends of Mr. Karl Lammers, who tells us repeatedly that sovereign states are no more than an empty shell. They told us that monetary union was at the top of their agenda for the intergovernmental conference. We are being told that it is not on the agenda. Why? Because the Maastricht treaty has already been passed. That is why I want a referendum on the single currency before the next intergovernmental conference.

What do those people propose to do? They propose, they say, not merely to consider the implications and the operational activities, but to build on economic and monetary union. They want a single state based on a single currency. That is the fundamental issue that was dodged at Maastricht, and the fundamental problem that we are dodging through the collusion of those on the two Front Benches. It causes me deep anxiety to find that the position is so fragile.

Then there is the question of the infighting in our own party. I believe that, if we had to make a clear decision—a leadership decision—on a question of this kind, we would resolve it. I dare say that some Conservative Members would be extremely upset if the Prime Minister said no to a single currency now, or said that a referendum would take place. It must be said, however, that, following our membership of the exchange rate mechanism and its debacle, the argument has moved so strongly in our favour that my hon. Friends might reasonably consider that it is time not to redouble their efforts at counter-attack but to subject the arguments to an objective analysis.

I hope and believe that, in my speech to the Young Conservatives on Sunday, I rebutted most of the arguments advanced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is mere camouflage to suggest that monetary union and political union are not effectively one and the same.

When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister returned from the Maastricht negotiations, he made a statement in which he put a number of propositions to the House. I seem to remember that he said that it was game, set and match. He said:

"Let me set out the main provisions of the agreements we reached. The treaty covers economic and monetary union and political union. It follows the structure for which the United Kingdom has consistently argued."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1991; Vol.200, c.859.]

In October 1990, when my right hon. Friend was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he said that we would not have a single currency imposed upon us, that we were opposed to that.

However, by February 1992 the then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), said that the Government did not reject a single currency or the institutions that go with it. Those changes of policy have caused the confusion and the uncertainty, and those problems could be resolved by a referendum.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Many of us who heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) did not find their statements incompatible. The Prime Minister said that we would not have it imposed upon us, and that Maastricht gave us an opt-out, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford said roughly the same thing. What they said was perfectly compatible and logical, and was in this country's interests.

Mr. Cash: I repeat for the benefit of my hon. Friend that, by not vetoing economic and monetary union at Maastricht, we put ourselves in a difficult and dangerous position. The momentum towards a single currency, the political union for which Karl Lammers and Chancellor Kohl repeatedly call, and the monetary union and single currency which Mr. Balladur says there will be by 1997, show precisely what is going on elsewhere in the European Community. The balance of the argument is substantially in my favour, as is the proof of my resistance and that of some of my hon. Friends to the exchange rate mechanism. Look what that did for us.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): The difficulty for the House is that, although, as my hon. Friend says, the balance of the argument rests with the Euro-sceptics in all parts of the House, the views of the majority of those who participated in the debate on the Maastricht treaty were overruled by party diktat and the party Whip. How would a referendum reverse the ratchet effect of European integration?

Mr. Cash: If we are denied the opportunity to make up our own minds in line with the assumptions—the wrong assumptions, I am afraid—of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, there is no option. We have no right to hand over our Parliament, or rather their Parliament. That is the point, and we have no right to hand it over when that issue arises in principle, as it does on this question in the context of running the economy. Public expenditure on defence, hospitals and schools and

other matters will be allocated according to priorities that will be laid down by unelected bankers who have no definition of price stability and cannot guarantee anything.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Which bankers are elected? I have not come across any recently.

Mr. Cash: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman should mention that. I do not say that elected or unelected bankers should run the system. The proper decisions on economic priorities should be taken democratically by those who live in a country such as ours. In one general election after another, the British people have shown their will by exercising their free choice. I am arguing not about whether there should be elected judges or bankers, but about the inherent rights of people in a democratic country.

Mr. Legg: Does my hon. Friend accept that the key point is that these bankers would be unaccountable?

Mr. Cash: That is absolutely right. They are unaccountable, and they may not deliver. All our reserves would be transferred to such people. That is unbelievable, and nobody would know that it was happening, were it not for the fact that it is set out in the Maastricht treaty.

I am concerned that a referendum would turn on a single currency, but after six weeks of debate, people would understand what it was all about. They understand it only too well as it is. Anyone who gets into a taxi or enters a pub will find that people know perfectly well what it is about. I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing that people do not like being told that they are too thick to be able to understand it. They are not.

Sir Terence Higgins: I said no such thing.

Mr. Cash: My right hon. Friend says that he said no such thing, but he was extremely close to it. I was paraphrasing: I shall apologise slightly, although not too much. My right hon. Friend says that, as a Member of Parliament, he has the right to make these decisions, and that, effectively, the average Mr. Joe Public does not. Although we have an important responsibility to discharge, we should also listen to what is being said outside, and opinion polls on referendums are crystal clear.

In general elections, people are asked to vote Conservative or Labour. Do we think that they have examined every detail of our manifestos? The short answer is that, in deciding questions of this kind, people are capable of making up their own minds, and it is extremely patronising for us to suggest otherwise.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I remind my hon. Friend that referendums were held in Denmark, France, Ireland, Norway and Austria, among other countries. Surely it cannot be argued that the British are intrinsically more stupid than the Irish, the French, the Danes, the Norwegians and the Austrians?

Mr. Cash: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. I could not have put it better. Of course, he is right. The Konrad Adenauer Siftung publishes a monthly paper called "German Comments". When the Danes said no on the first referendum, that paper published a carefully considered editorial which said that a dangerous situation was developing in Europe in that elections were being used as a form of protest.

I found that about as difficult to accept as I found the remarks a few days ago of, I think, Mr. Karl Lammers, who said that he thought monetary union was "the purest form of integration." I get a little edgy when I hear people talking about political systems and purity in the same breath. We should be careful about the language we use in that context.

On 5 December last year, a MORI opinion poll showed that 65 per cent. of the British people wanted a referendum. The issue of a single currency should be dealt with in a referendum before the intergovernmental conference. The Government on their own have no right or authority to make such a decision. I shall vote with the Liberal Democrats, although I do not agree with every word of their motion. However, I agree with the principle that underpins it.

6.48 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It is a privilege to follow the last three speakers: the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), and my right hon. Friends the Members for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). Their views are well known and consistent and they always seek to take the high ground. I felt rather challenged by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, who said that one should not become involved in party points and details. When I heard that, I felt like scrapping half my speech.

The principles have been set out. I accept that the hon. Member for Stafford is against the European Union as it is and as it develops. Even if sacks of ecus were delivered personally by Mr. Santer to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, he would reject them because he sees the matter as political and relating to sovereignty. That is a road down which he does not wish to go. I confess that I detected a certain messianic quality in his speech—there was "conspiracy"; there was "deceit"; it was absolutist; we were being let down; it was almost a dolchstoss; they were not listening to us. It was almost, "Let the people speak and they will reject it."

I wonder how far the hon. Gentleman's populism and wish for a referendum would go. Is he willing to listen to the people on capital punishment? He may say that he is not. Is that patronising?

Mr. Sweeney: Surely there is a fundamental distinction between the two issues. One is a constitutional issue, which is irrevocable; the other is something that a subsequent Parliament could repeal or amend at will.

Mr. Anderson: Perhaps the distinction is not as clear-cut as the hon. Gentleman would wish. His point about capital punishment might be true, but what about devolution? If a Parliament were established in Scotland and an Assembly in Wales, is he suggesting that, in practice, it would be possible for any future Government to go back on that? Those changes would have generated their own vested interests in Scotland and Wales.

Does the hon. Gentleman want a referendum on devolution? My understanding is that his party does not. Indeed, Lady Thatcher, whom he admires so much, spoke strongly and voted against referendums for Scotland and Wales in the 1970s. There is always a danger that we might slide from looking at the issue from a point of principle to looking at it in whatever way happens to suit our particular views.

[Mr. Anderson]

I concede immediately that in the 1970s I was critical of my Government's views on devolution. I and others grasped the idea of a referendum not necessarily because we had thought through the principle, but because at the time it seemed the best and last weapon that we could use. Although my party sees no case for a referendum on devolution now, there is a powerful case that needs to be argued. On balance, I would come down against a referendum on devolution.

My point is that there is no easy dividing line—there is a continuum on that and on other issues. The hon. Member for Stafford tends to see everything in capital letters and in black and white, whereas many of us would prefer to step back a little and accept that there may be an argument for a referendum on a matter as fundamental as a single currency because of the effect it would have on a whole series of economic levers that might be taken away from us. However, that would apply when the rules of the game were being changed, and we would need to go back to seek a wider legitimacy than could be attained purely from the votes in this House. Of course the issue is not as simplistic as hon. Members have suggested.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The debate is getting caught up on the principle. There has been a great deal of debate on that and is all too airy-fairy. The key factor is that this place is effective only when there is a clear difference between the parties—for example, the Opposition oppose and the Government propose. Where there is no such difference, matters become rather difficult. That difference has disappeared on the matter of Europe. There may be certain issues in the middle of the debate, but nothing across the board. Surely that is the sector about which the hon. Gentleman might say there is some issue principle.

Mr. Anderson: The essential principle is that, although the great mass of our people are ready to criticise Europe in the particulars, they accept that our future lies in a closer relationship with the continent. They do not want to be part of a marginalised, off-shore island, despite the arguments that have been made. Where, in that continuum, come the various issues such as a single currency or immigration is a matter for judgment.

I am wary of many of the points that have been made, partly because I am concerned about the motives of some of the Liberal Democrats who introduced the motion. I well understand that they wish to be seen in the driving seat—at least, they want the headlines for today. However, on the question of accountability, it is a matter of record that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) produced his own views on a referendum out of a hat. They caused considerable surprise to the then Liberal Democrat spokesman on foreign affairs and also to the Liberal Democrat leader in the House of Lords. There was not much consultation—

Mr. Charles Kennedy: I must correct the hon. Gentleman on a point of fact. The motion states that we want a referendum if any major constitutional change is proposed. That is based on a policy document that has been through all the usual machinery and it was debated and approved at our party conference. It is not fair of the hon. Gentleman to suggest that the party has been bounced; that is not so. As he knows, we do not always win the vote at the party conference, but we did manage to win on this issue.

Mr. Anderson: The point I made was that the fons et origo—the origin—of the Liberal Democrat change of policy resulted not from consultation but from a diktat by the party leader, which surprised many of those who claimed to be speaking on behalf of the party.

My other doubt on the principle of referendums is that traditionally, with the exception of Switzerland, it has been a device used by right-wing or populist Governments—

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Harold Wilson.

Mr. Anderson: I shall deal with that comment in a moment.

First, let us consider the Californian vote on the rights of immigrants. At the time of those referendums it will be the media moguls who will have an interest in, and an influence over, the result. Therefore, we must be wary about the accuracy of the picture a referendum might give of the views of the people at any one time. As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said, referendums have been used to cover up divisions. That was certainly the case with my party in the 1970s. Indeed, when there was an agreement to disagree, those who lost did not suddenly say that they had been convinced of the case; they kept up the fight.

If a referendum on a single currency went against the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and others, they would not say, "The people have spoken, long live the people"; they would keep on fighting—and good luck to them. They disagree with a single currency on principle. It is absurd to suggest that somehow we can turn to the people and consult them like an oracle at Delphi and then say that now the people have spoken we can fold our tents because the decision has been made.

Mr. Marlow: If there were to be a referendum on a single currency and if the people were to say yes, they wanted a single currency and the massive loss of sovereignty that would go with that, that would be their decision and, as a democrat, I would have to accept that. However, above and beyond that, is not economic and monetary union irrevocable? If we were part of a single currency, would it ever be possible to come out of it, whatever I might feel?

Mr. Anderson: The hon. Gentleman and others who lost the referendum in 1975 have consistently fought against Europe since then, as has been their right. There is no finality in such arguments. There are objections of principle to referendums. For example, they are but a snapshot of public opinion at any one time. The view could alter in a month or so. There is no finality.

Mr. Forman: Does not history show that there is nothing irrevocable about any political decision, whether made by a Parliament or by the people through a referendum? Is that not a sobering realisation?

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Any future Parliament, whatever the technical and legal position, can, if it so wills, decide to withdraw. That is the reality of any decision. We should also consider the inflexibility that comes from referendums. A formula will be reached—perhaps, let us hypothesise for a moment, on a single currency—in 1997

or so. If, after negotiation, that formula and package deal is put to the people and the people go against it, what happens? Will it be renegotiated? One cannot negotiate with public opinion.

Denmark faced that problem when, by a small majority, it went against the package. People woke up to the danger of being marginalised. A second referendum had to take place, with a rather spurious inclusion of the Edinburgh package, and the Danish people changed their minds. Inevitably, inflexibility exists. One can negotiate only with a Government. One cannot negotiate with public opinion and have a series of referendums to see whether the result achieved was just about right. In any international negotiation, any national Government achieve the best package that they believe they can achieve at any one time.

As I have said, a referendum, in effect, solves nothing. There is no finality. People advancing both sides of the argument will continue to make their arguments. I agree with the three previous hon. Members who have spoken. The elites of Europe have gone far ahead of the public opinions of Europe—that is one of the great problems and real issues that must be faced. That was part of the problem at the time of Maastricht.

The people who negotiated in Brussels had not bothered to take into account the constraints imposed by public opinion. A number of them either nearly had a black eye, as in France, or had a black eye, as in Denmark. We must deal with that problem as Europeans.

Like the hon. Member for Stafford, I was involved in the French referendum. I suspect that we were on different sides at the time, but I hope that he will at least agree about this matter. I think that it was President Mitterand who said, at the time of the referendums, that the French always answer the wrong question.

In that great debate in France, the Maastricht treaty was hardly mentioned. A great feeling of disillusion existed. The geography of the votes showed that people on the fringes of France felt that they were not being consulted. The farmers were against Brussels because of the agricultural policy, which was not an aspect of the Maastricht treaty.

A general feeling existed against immigrants. After the French referendum, it was reported in *Le Monde* that 85 per cent. of the people who voted no were against further immigration into France. The forces of stability, people who felt that they had been marginalised, and the alienated, voted at a time when they could—

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): So what?

Mr. Anderson: The point that I am making is that the questions posed in the Maastricht treaty were addressed by hardly anyone in that debate. Other people saw the referendum as a means of voting against President Mitterand. It was a vote against the President.

Who can doubt that, in the previous referendum in 1979, part of the response of the people of Wales and Scotland was based on the unpopularity of the then Labour Government, rather than on a true appreciation of whether a case existed for or against devolution? All those other extraneous factors come into it. To pretend that we can have an instant democracy and that the question, "Maastricht or not?" can be put to, and decided by, the people is an illusion, because the answer will depend on who puts it, when it is put and how the question is put.

I accept that those are real difficulties. I very much accept the genuine point made by the hon. Member for Stafford and by my right hon. Friends the Member for Chesterfield and for Bethnal Green and Stepney that there must be ways of addressing the malaise in Europe. People at the helm in Europe must ask, so far as they can, how they relate to the real concerns of Europe. We must avoid the tirade in our popular press, where, alas, the diet over the years has been straight bananas and all the absurdities that arise. It never considers the big issues.

I am confident that the Prime Minister and his friends are doing the country a great disservice. They claim that we can be at the centre and at the heart of Europe, when all their policies seek to marginalise us. If we are to pull our weight in Europe, we must be seen as part of a team. We must be seen properly to understand the issues, fighting our corner, as others do. Europe, however, will neither stop nor go away. Even if the Government pretend, for internal party reasons, that they can muddy matters, and if they play the populist card because of the unhappy conjunction of the next election and the intergovernmental conference, they will do this country a great disservice.

We shall have to accommodate ourselves to that great market and that force on the continent. It will not change and we delude ourselves if we think it that will—self-delusion is the worst of all illusions and delusions—and if we pretend that we can, in isolation, somehow change that Europe, which, with all its faults, is dynamic and will move forward.

7.6 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): I hope that I will not appear too derogatory to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) or to the House if I say that I have the feeling that we are participating in the umpteenth episode of a long-running soap opera, in which the themes, the arguments, the low audience ratings—judging by the attendance in the Gallery—and almost all the actors are the same. One does not speak in such debates only if one resigns from ministerial office or if one is promoted to one of the Front-Bench teams. The rest of us soldier on, putting our views.

If we are really honest, we must admit that the kaleidoscope of the normal displacement in the House has again been shaken up into a different form. It goes across the House and, sadly, across all the parties. We have the same position this evening, which has been achieved by the Liberal Democratic party, for its own reasons, with its motion. Those reasons have been analysed but the motion has produced another manifestation of weird alliances. They started after the Maastricht Bill was given a Second Reading. The cornerstone of the House's true position on Europe will be seen in that Second Reading debate, after which the Bill was given a massive and overwhelming majority—I think that 244 hon. Members were in favour of it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend said that the only key test was the vote on Second Reading, but surely the point is that the Bill was discussed line by line in Committee and people then began to understand it. Surely the key point is what developed as a result.

Mr. Whitney: My hon. Friend confirms the overwhelming view on Second Reading. He pre-empts me. We got into trouble in Committee, but why? The

[Mr. Whitney]

House, led by the Labour party, started playing political games. It would say, "Why not? We are in politics to play games." That is fair enough. I accept that point to a degree, but that is the cause of the problem and the reason why my hon. Friend and other hon. Friends were able to have such an influence.

Night by night and on issue after issue, a motley collection of hon. Members traipsed into the Division Lobby—a collection of people who were united only in opposition to the Government and to each proposition—as the Committee worked its way painfully through consideration of the Maastricht Bill over 18 months, or over whatever time it took, but it seemed like 18 months.

Thus, those in the Labour party who professed to be in favour of the Maastricht treaty voted against it and the standard anti-Europeans in the Labour party happily voted against it. The Liberal party, which is very pro-European, also voted against it. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, we did not."] There are two sections in my party—those who honestly and openly profess their opposition to Europe and those who say that they are in favour of Europe, but not a Europe that anyone else seems to recognise.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I was not a Member of Parliament during the debates on Maastricht and I clearly missed something, although I am getting a re-run now, for which I am deeply grateful. However, I followed the debate very closely from outside. The difference was that the Europe that the other 11, or the other 14, wanted was not that proposed by the Government. Of course, I was delighted that the two main Opposition parties, which, I think, were united on this issue, spoke for all of Europe while the Government spoke for a crazy, opted-out, marginalised version. *[Interruption.]* I speak for sensible Opposition Members.

Mr. Whitney: As the hon. Member acknowledges, he was not a Member of Parliament at the time. I shall not take him through all our debates, but the two main issues were matters of tactics. The fundamentals professed by members of the two main Front Benches are very clear. The performance which occurred night after night, and which I have described, gave rise to the trouble with which we are all now labouring.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman has a reputation for fair-mindedness. I am sure that he would not want to mislead people, especially those who may have missed some of the grinding, delightful minutiae of the Maastricht process, which the occupant of the Chair probably remembers in far more vivid detail than any of us.

The hon. Gentleman should confirm that, during votes on the 10 o'clock motions when we were debating the paving measure, we took a public pasting for supporting the Government but not for being prepared to go along with Labour's tactics. We supported the Conservatives in order to make progress in debates on the Maastricht treaty. The only issue on which we opposed them was the social chapter.

Mr. Whitney: If the hon. Gentleman is asking me to say that the Liberal Democrats' record is less black than that of the Labour party, I am happy to do so. However, this evening's paradox is due to the Liberals. The point that I tried very hard to point out to the leader of the Liberal party, who is no longer in his seat, was outlined by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). If referendums are of such great value and have such democratic validity—I shall not challenge the notion now but shall return to it briefly later—they cannot be a way of picking and choosing.

I do not accept the distinction that some hon. Members have attempted to make in relation to capital punishment. If the Liberal party and other enthusiasts for referendums say that we must listen to the people, it is perfectly fair to ask where they draw the line. There has been an attempt narrowly to define what is constitutional and what is final, but it is pretty darn final if one is on the wrong end of a judgment of capital punishment. That is another demonstration of the paradoxes involved in debating European issues, and especially referendums.

Another paradox, which has been mentioned, is that many of the people who are now very keen on the referendum device are the very ones who defend and, I might almost say, prate about the sovereignty of Parliament. We witnessed a little exchange of this kind earlier involving my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), who is not here at the moment.

My hon. Friend goes around talking all the time about the sanctity and sovereignty of Parliament but wants to use the demagogic device of the referendum, which at a stroke undermines the sovereignty of Parliament. His defence is that he faces terrible pressures, punishments and torture from the Whips. However, that does not seem to have stopped a number of my hon. Friends. One certainly gets the impression that my hon. Friend is optimistic that it is a lever that can be used to his advantage.

If only all the parties acted responsibly in the fundamental matter of our relationship with our European partners, we could have a free vote; but there could not be a free vote for one party and not for another. However, I am confident that, if there were a free vote, there would be no contest—the vast majority of the House wants Britain at the heart of Europe. That has been proved again and again.

Mr. Fabricant: Many people would not argue that we want to be at the heart of Europe, but the question is, what sort of Europe? Are we talking about the free trading body that we thought we had joined or a European Union into which we fear we have fallen?

Mr. Whitney: We have to offer the people the sort of Europe with which the other 14 members would also live. It is not a great deal of use outlining a concept of Europe shared by one or two hon. Friends and perhaps 50 or 60 Opposition Members but not by our 14 partners. The European Union is a partnership. I should be happy to find the highest common denominator—I might even say the lowest common denominator—that would join us to Europe while keeping in mind the fact that we should go a long way to safeguard the interests of Britain at the heart of Europe. I should like the issue tested on a free vote. Most hon. Members have studied the issues in detail and I believe that they would reach the conclusion that I have reached—Britain has to be at the heart of Europe. The minority view would be routed in such a test.

I claim to be a traditional Conservative but I do not wholly share the traditionally Conservative views expressed so elegantly and eloquently by my right hon. Friends the Members for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and

for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton), although I recognise the force of what they said. Any hon. Member who is tempted by the idea of a referendum should consider their remarks carefully. We are all familiar with the dangers of finding the right question, but how can one find a question that does justice to the complex issues? One could make it appear bogusly simple. For example, one could ask, "Are you in favour of Maastricht, yes or no?" In fact, that is a very complicated question.

It was not enough simply to have read the Maastricht treaty—as we are often reminded, even senior members of Government found it hard to find time to read it—because every other paragraph referred to the treaty of Rome, which one had to read, too. Are we seriously expecting the 50 million or so people in this country to read the treaty of Rome? That is not a patronising question; I am stating the facts.

Let us consider the views of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who is no longer here to give us his views, and those of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). The noble Lord Wilson called a referendum not because he believed in the sanctity of a referendum, but as a practical device because of the embarrassing state of the Labour party in 1975. For people like me, the result was good. Two to one were in favour of Britain being in the European Community. Did that stop the right hon. Members for Bethnal Green and Stepney or for Chesterfield? Of course it did not. Would defeat stop some of my right hon. and hon. Friends? Of course it would not.

Examples have been quoted frequently of European countries with their own traditions of referendums. The hon. Member for Swansea, East pointed out that the voting in France was only tangentially related to Maastricht, and was much more related to other matters. It must be recognised that referendums are dangerous and can lead to demagoguery, and reference has been made to the issues in California. We could end up—not surprisingly—with referendums on this and that which would be mutually conflicting. The question could be "Do you want to spend more on schools and health?", to which the answer would be yes. Another question could be "Do you want lower taxes?" Again, the answer would be yes.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is every difference between referendums on issues that he has just been talking about—as take place in California—and on constitutional issues that are irreversible by any future Government?

Mr. Whitney: I have covered that point, and I am sorry that the hon. Lady was not listening. There are distinctions, but there is not a clear line between one and the other and we must approach the issue of a referendum with great care.

By instinct, I have sympathy with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing. When we can get the right circumstances and some reasonably satisfactory answers to the problems to which I have referred—such as the nature of the question—there could be a tactical advantage in looking favourably at the possibility of a referendum. Damage has been done to the national attitude to Britain's membership of the European Union by a concerted campaign by so much of the media and by a small minority in this House. That minority has been given the facilities of the media, and their voices have been magnified to give the impression that their views carry so much weight.

The media's fixation with straight bananas, the complete misrepresentation tonight from the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney about the real significance of the fisheries dispute, the latest flurry on the common agriculture policy and—most recently—the matter of immigration are examples of what has happened. Immigration has nothing to do with the European Union. As has been said, the suggestion that 300 million residents of the European Union will start flooding into Britain is—if I may use the word—baloney.

It is crucial that the people of this country are again brought to understand the massive benefit of Britain having a positive relationship with our continental partners. They voted for it by a majority of 2:1 in 1975, and the benefits and arguments for us being in Europe in 1995 and onwards are far greater than they were 20 years ago. It is up to those of us—from whatever party—who understand the issues to make sure that the people of this country understand that again, and that they turn away from the negative path down which they are being led by the media and by some Members of the House.

7.24 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I shall place my remarks on the importance of a referendum in the context of monetary union. The issue—despite speeches to the contrary—has gone beyond just being a party-political spat. We are in serious danger of permanently damaging Britain's long-term economic future because of the serious divisions within the Government. It is apparent that there are divisions in the Opposition which might be important if they were to be in government.

Our immediate problem, however, is that the conference next year will determine how this country will progress, and the Government are totally incapable of talking in public or in private in any coherent or comprehensible way about exactly what Britain's interests are, let alone how they will defend them.

It is apparent that any possibility of unity within the Government is totally shattered. The Cabinet is at war, and the party is lining up behind respective champions within the Cabinet. Nobody is talking in code or pulling punches, and the arguments are out in the open. The only real way in which the national interest can be resolved is for the debate to be addressed on the specifics and for us to allow people the freedom to develop arguments according to different points of view.

I wish to divert the suggestion that the Liberal Democrats are somehow being opportunistic in the motion. I see nothing wrong with a socialist or new Labour member being opposed—or committed—to the further development of the European Union. Similarly, I see nothing wrong with a Conservative who believes—or does not believe—that we should go further into the European Community. That is a perfectly legitimate

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

debate, and it should be let out of the constraints that it is currently under, because it is doing, and will do, the country considerable damage.

Mr. Forman: Is the hon. Gentleman implying that he and his party would strongly support and seek to deliver a genuinely free vote if some of the great issues of principle were to come before the House of Commons?

Mr. Bruce: We, as a party, have a free vote and we do not have the same constraints of the Whips system. On the particular point about the referendum, my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) stated our belief that it is in Britain's interests to help shape further integration within Europe, and we must be a part of that. We wish to have a referendum, and we would campaign to persuade people to say yes. Our objective would be to win. If we lost, however, having secured the principle of the consent of the people for a referendum, we clearly could not be seen to reject it, despite it being our party's intention. I hope that that is a clear answer to the hon. Gentleman. We mean what we say.

There should be genuine consultation, and we should listen to people. That is where the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) got into some difficulty. He argued the case for a representative Member of Parliament as if there was no such thing as party discipline and the Whips system. It is exactly because of that discipline that the Government are in such a mess.

Sir Terence Higgins: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we should have a mandatory referendum, as that is the clear implication of what he has just said?

Mr. Bruce: We are suggesting that there should be a referendum to present to the British people the significant constitutional changes, if they are agreed by the IGC, on the basis of whether they support the changes and Britain's involvement—yes or no. To go to the people in those circumstances and then to suggest that Parliament should disregard the result would be a hopelessly cynical exercise, and we would not propose it on that basis. We accept that we would abide by the decision.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman has been talking about the principle of referendums somehow deciding the great issues without all of the divisions which we have, and I take his point. I cannot quite understand how that runs with his party's motion, because the reference to "substantial alteration" is a key problem. We would have to have a big debate before we got anywhere near a referendum about what is substantial and what is not. Should not there be a tighter definition, such as "any alteration, change or decision"?

Mr. Bruce: The issues that we are discussing, such as monetary union, share much common ground. They are significant—the changes and the mechanisms that would be required to make a single currency work are, by any definition, significant. Significant changes are to be made and it would be up to the House to determine them. In our parliamentary democracy, if we are to introduce the doctrine of referendums, short of having a written constitution and many other reforms—which I may support, but which we shall not see between now and next year—all that can be determined is that the issue should be determined in the House and put to the people.

Mr. Spearing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: I am sorry, but I should like to make progress.

We are discussing significant changes that have constitutional implications, which is where the Prime Minister has got himself into some degree of contradiction and confusion.

I shall put the fundamental economic issue into context—it sometimes goes by default, but it seems worth stressing. Since 1972, this country's trade with Europe has expanded dramatically. Exports to the other member states of the European Union increased between 1972 and 1993 from 33 per cent. of our total to 53 per cent. and, at the same time—

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: No, I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

At the same time, our imports have increased from 36 per cent. to 50 per cent. Our trade has expanded substantially and has moved slightly favourably. Those are significant figures.

The City of London clearly has an important role within Europe, and the impact of the development of a single currency will have considerable implications for the City of London. One of those implications has not been widely discussed. There is some debate on whether the development of a single currency would weaken the role of the City of London as a major international financial centre and whether Britain's participation in that would have a significant effect.

We have already sold the pass to some extent because we fought so hard for what the Prime Minister is so proud of, but many of us are ashamed of—his opt-out clause on monetary union. The Prime Minister has effectively ensured that Frankfurt has the opportunity to become the headquarters of any European central bank, should a single currency be decided on. That was not the likely outcome when the debate started three or four years ago.

I can speak with some small degree of authority as a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. When we visited the financial centres of Europe to discuss the implications of the single market on financial markets and financial institutions we were told by numerous people in Frankfurt—including senior officials in the Deutsche bank—that the right place for the central bank for a single European currency was the City of London. We know that they have, to some extent, acted in accordance with that judgment.

Those in Frankfurt expected the British Government to fight for that and did not expect any of the other member states seriously to object to it. They said that if we were foolish enough to suggest that we were not willing to fight for that or did not regard it as a major pitch, they would be more than delighted to take the opportunity presented to them. That is exactly what has happened and what the British Government have done. The Government have already seriously damaged Britain's financial interests and the City of London's role.

The next stage that one must consider is that, if there were a single currency involving the major economies of Europe—with Britain exercising its right to opt out of that single currency—that might lead to, not necessarily the shift of influence from the City of London to Frankfurt, but the fragmentation of London's role as a market across several European financial centres. That would be to the severe detriment, not just of London, but Europe as a whole.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman implies that he is speaking for the City of London, but has not the Governor of the Bank of England spoken out about the disadvantages of a single currency?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman should allow me to complete my speech. I am not suggesting that there are no issues to be addressed. Nor did I claim to be speaking on behalf of the City of London; I was simply describing what I saw and heard, and the implications that it seemed legitimate to draw from that.

The other factor that arises out of our role as a trading nation is the benefit that a single currency could bring in a number of specific ways, one or two of which have already been mentioned. First, it would contribute to the reduction of transaction costs. I know that some people will say that that is not a significant factor for large companies, which are able, one way or another, to reduce costs by speculating on the markets to hedge their bets. They would be less able to do that if there were fewer markets in which to speculate.

However, it has been estimated that the overall transaction costs of trade within the European Union is 0.4 per cent. of gross domestic product—not much short of the entire cost of the common agricultural policy. To suggest that that is not significant and to shrug off 0.4 per cent. of the largest market in the world is to forget that small percentages in European terms are large sums of money. We must ensure that we take advantage of them.

There is a much bigger advantage to be gained from the possible efficiency of a single currency: the dynamic that it creates in terms of encouraging trade, increasing trade efficiency and strengthening Europe's competitive edge over its trading partners across the world. It is estimated that that is possibly worth 10 to 15 per cent. of our GDP across Europe. It would be phenomenal if the truth turned out to be even a fraction of that.

Another factor that is forgotten when one talks about small transaction costs for large businesses is the large proportion of transaction costs for small businesses that are trying to export. In the House during debates on trade we continually bemoan the lack of performance, particularly by many of our smaller companies. There is no doubt that the uncertainty of exchange rates and the cost of exchanging is a deterrent for a small business that does not have the resources to absorb that risk and that operates on tight margins. The benefit to trade for small business is much greater than it is for big businesses which, in itself, is something that we should consider.

Mr. Dykes: Against that background, and without wishing to be unpatriotic, it is sobering to reflect that the pound sterling has lost 90 per cent. of its value against the deutschmark since the war. We would avoid those weaknesses in the future if there were still weaknesses in the British economy. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the great advantages would be for consumers? We talk about the elite, a central bank and the City of London, but it would be a great advantage for consumers to be able to tell immediately the price of consumer durables, services, products or goods—

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend is yesterday's man.

Mr. Dykes: The heckling is in inverse proportion to the intelligence of the contribution.

I am sorry if my intervention is longer than I intended. It would be a great advantage for the consumer in any city, village or town in the European Union to be able to tell the price of a service or product.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is not just a matter of improving consumer performance. It would increase the dynamics of the marketplace. People will know the price and what it means. It will enable them to make rational economic decisions. Many of the arguments advanced against the single market are irrational or conveniently ignore the benefits that can be perceived by anybody who travels, not just abroad, but even around these islands. We can go to Scotland and use Scottish notes, to Ireland and use Irish notes. People understand the face value, which enables them to understand the transactions.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: No; I shall make a little more progress.

I shall return to some of those economic factors, but it is important that one takes on board the issue that I believe that the British people would be willing and able to tackle if they were given the chance to do so, and were treated in the responsible manner in which they are entitled to be treated.

People sometimes speak about sovereignty as though it were an absolute quality, a bit like virginity, which you can give once and never have again. It is nothing of the kind. It is something that every one of us, as individuals, in personal terms, compromises every day, because that is what life is about. It is about how one subordinates one's individuality. Even to have a conversation with someone, by definition, is a compromise: if one does not stop talking, one will never hear the reply, so there is no conversation.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: That happens in the House, too.

Mr. Bruce: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. One does not have to be a Member of the House for long to know that that is one of its major weaknesses.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman is repeating an old saw, because obviously, in common life, one has to maintain a compromise, but we are discussing legislation. Does he agree that it would be illegal, and out of kilter with the treaties, for the House, or anyone, to propose any law that was contrary to the legislation and the requirements of the treaties, as they now are, and as they will be in future? Is not that a loss of sovereignty?

Mr. Bruce: Of course it is a loss of sovereignty, and we have already had an example of it in the House with the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, which is the first British Act of Parliament that was declared illegal because it contravened our treaty obligations under the treaties of Rome and Paris. However, it is a question of what one

[Mr. Bruce]

receives in return for that loss of sovereignty. It is not a matter of—*[Interruption.]* The heckling from behind me completely misses the point that there is obviously no point in diluting one's sovereignty for no purpose, but where there is a purpose, where there is a benefit, where it enlarges and enriches in every sense—

Mr. Spearing: It is only speculation.

Mr. Bruce: We have been in the Common Market and in the Union for more than 20 years, and it is not speculation to say that we have achieved benefits. It may be a matter of opinion; one can quote some objective facts as well, and I did, but the hon. Gentleman did not choose to take account of them.

The reality, nevertheless, is that it is not an absolute matter; it is a matter of the balance and the judgment of the benefit that one obtains from sharing one's sovereignty with people with whom one has twice been to war in living memory. It is not unimportant to keep sight of that fact.

I often say to people who express a xenophobia, sometimes in disturbingly racist terms, saying that they do not wish to be kicked around by the Germans or the French and so on, that the Germans, the French and all the other member states of Europe will be there whatever we do. They will not go away. They have been there longer than we have. Most of us came from there, originally, or via that route—there was no other way to get to this country.

Given that that is the case, we need to appreciate that we have the opportunity to participate in institutions whereby we can influence what they do and ensure that they take some account of our interests. When we did not have those institutions, we finished up fighting one another into the ground on the bloodstained battlefields of Europe. Many of us regard that as well worth avoiding, and we should therefore aspire to play a much more positive role in those institutions.

The Prime Minister has got himself into a complete bind. I find it interesting that the obvious line from Conservative central office is that, if one is unfortunate enough to speak for the Government in some capacity on the issue, and one finds a microphone before one's nose or a camera in front of one's face, one should say, "I am totally in support of the Prime Minister's speech." There is no comprehensive coherence in the speech, and indeed the Minister who replied to the debate had some considerable difficulty proving otherwise.

Let us take the simplest argument. The Prime Minister said that Britain's position should be at the heart of Europe. That was his starting point, but he has now said that there is, in the context of the intergovernmental conference, no need to be concerned about any implications of constitutional change, and therefore no need for a referendum, because there will be no constitutional change as a result of the IGC. He will not accept it. No one believes a word of that, not least the Prime Minister.

We know one of two things. The Prime Minister will either capitulate on things such as the single currency, which he has opted out of helping to shape, which Britain should be at the centre of shaping, or he will try to use a veto, which will result in other member states saying, "We will not allow one member who has not taken part in the process to hold us back", and we shall simply be pushed to the sidelines. We shall suffer either from the consequences of a single currency from which we are excluded, the consequences of which will nevertheless affect us, or from having to sign up for it, having opted out of shaping it.

It is a matter of concern, not just to the United Kingdom, but to the whole of Europe, that the country that has the major financial centre in Europe, and which has a great deal to contribute to the operation of a single currency, including legitimate reservations about timing and adjustments that need to be taken into account, should be marginalised. It is not in our interest or Europe's interest.

It is high time that the Government recognised that it is our duty, never mind in our national interest, to be in there, trying to ensure that the shape of a single currency is one that takes clear understanding of Britain's knowledge, expertise and, yes, national interests. All those things are relevant to the other member states.

If, some time in the near future, there is agreement among the French, the Germans, the Benelux countries, possibly Sweden and perhaps one or two other countries, that they will have a single currency, whether that agreement occurs in 1997—which I think is unrealistic, and I am not sure that anyone seriously accepts that we shall be in that position then—or 1999 or 2001, the question then arises: will Britain opt in or opt out?

Those people who say that we need not sign up to a decision now have an obligation to tell us what options they envisage. If they believe that there is a realistic possibility of our saying that Britain will not be part of that European monetary union—because we want to take the decision to be outside it—we need an explanation of the way in which the City of London will develop, the way in which Britain's trade will develop, the way in which investment will develop, the way in which it will positively benefit the British economy and the alternative arrangements that we can or will make.

Those people also need to explain how we shall benefit from losing out on the advantages that a single currency is designed to bring. Several assertions have been made—for example, that it should help to benefit us in the cause of keeping inflation and interest rates down. I noticed some scepticism among the sceptics about the relevance of that.

Let us first note that although inflation in Britain may be relatively low at the moment, hardly anyone believes that it is under control. The figures that were issued today demonstrate that the upward pressure on inflation is becoming not insignificant. Three and a half per cent. is the underlying rate of inflation, which we expect to come through with substantial additional upward pressure in the system. In those circumstances, Ministers who give the impression that a miracle has happened and inflation is under control because we have managed to keep it low for a couple of years, should read the speeches of previous Conservative Chancellors of the Exchequer who have claimed economic miracles that did not last even until the following election.

We can all benefit from a single currency. Interest rates in this country have been historically, on average, 1.5 per cent. greater than those in Germany. If there is a single

currency, there is a fair chance that interest rates will be lower in Germany and lower still, relatively speaking, here.

That is one of the advantages of a single currency. One reduces the pressure for speculation and consequently one does not need to have such high interest rates to maintain currency stability. The once-proud claim that Britain never devalued under a Conservative Government is no longer sustainable. Britain has secured the current recovery entirely on the back of a 15 per cent. devaluation of our currency. As a result of that devaluation, and the fact that we have no membership of any external arrangement at the moment, many people realise that the pressure on our currency is such that we are forced to maintain higher interest rates than would otherwise be the case. There are therefore real benefits of being part of a single currency.

I wish to comment on the economic implications of the comments of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), who, according to what I saw on the media at the weekend, implied that immigration policy was such that 15 million people were waiting to come into this country because we had ineffective immigration controls.

There is no question of the European Union's external immigration controls being lifted, but there is a desire to ensure genuine mobility of people and capital to effect the proper working of the single market. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle is deluded if he thinks that free movement in Europe will see people queueing to enter a Britain which has opted out of the single currency and the social chapter. I think it is much more likely that, if they can speak French or German, they will queue in Dover to cross the channel to reap the benefits of opting in. It is a preposterous argument.

Mr. Spearing: What about a referendum?

Mr. Bruce: I am confident that the British people will respond to the arguments in favour of a positive vision of Britain in Europe if they are presented in a grown-up and intelligent manner. At the moment, those arguments are not being presented with any leadership or vision. Our fundamental national interests are being sold down the river by a Government who are led by a Prime Minister with no vision—he is interested only in whether he will make it through the week. He is not willing to risk anything within his party—even if it means putting the nation's interests in second place. That disappoints and depresses me and the Liberal Democrats.

I have taken part in a great many debates in the House and it is not often that I see so much real debate about an issue which people clearly feel strongly about. Hon. Members have had the opportunity to express their views honestly with the gloves off. We should take the issue to the people, rather than conduct a rarefied debate which offers them a confused diet of misinformation, half-truths and misrepresentation.

A simple majority in the House can be achieved by winning a minority of the popular vote in circumstances where there has been no adequate consultation following a general election that has been fought on the basis of dozens of issues. The Liberal Democrats believe that a referendum is the only way to ensure that the issue is addressed in an adult fashion which gives everyone an opportunity to have their say.

After proper debate, the British people will recognise that they are in Europe, that they want to be in Europe and that they would like their Government to play a much more positive role. Of course, we must fight to defend our interests in the same way as other countries do. But we will not do that by opting out, by letting others make the rules and then signing up afterwards to what they have shaped. That is not sensible democracy, diplomacy or politics, and it is a disaster for Britain's economic policy. That is why I commend the motion to the House.

7.52 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Although the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is obviously living in daydream land, I will not reply to all the issues that he raised. Hon. Members' speeches tonight have been far too long and I will try to speak for only a few minutes.

If the hon. Gentleman sincerely believes that inflation and interest rates will suddenly decrease if we adopt a single currency, I ask him to read the speech by the Governor of the Bank of England. If we agree to convergence, there will be a flow of capital and it will cost a great deal of money. Once we have secured that magical convergence by dropping pound notes all over the place, how on earth will we maintain convergence? That will be very difficult.

On immigration, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will wake up to reality; he must know the facts about the events in Brussels this afternoon. It is not simply a question of whether the residents of Germany and France will come to Britain; the problem is that, under Brussels's plans, if people gain access to Europe they will gain access to Britain also. People who wish to maintain good relations within the Union are concerned about that fact. I will not take up the time of the House debating it now, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will wake up and read the speech by the Governor of the Bank of England, who knows something about the matter.

The Liberal Democrats have done us a service in enabling us to debate the referendum issue tonight. Although the motion is not terribly significant because it obviously does not cover the issue of a single currency, which was in the Maastricht treaty, and although it is unlikely that any progress will be made at the next conference, we are talking about a significant issue of principle.

It is a sad day for democracy when both the major parties issue a one-line Whip. Those conscientious Members of Parliament who are present know that a one-line Whip does not constitute a free vote; basically, it means a day off. Hon. Members are told, "Please don't come and talk about the issue, just go away." It is sickening that both the major parties have decided to apply a one-line Whip to an issue of this magnitude and significance.

I do not wish to politicise the issue, but it is scandalous that the Labour party decided, before the motion was even published, that its members did not need to attend for the debate. I do not wish to single out Labour Members. It is shocking and disgraceful that hon. Members are dragged here on three-line Whips to debate matters which are of no great significance, yet there is a desire that they should not debate a referendum over Europe.

I was pleased to have a cup of coffee with three Conservative Members of Parliament this morning. I asked what we should do about the Euro-issue and they

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

answered, "Please stop talking." That is a dangerous attitude. Unless we think about the problem, talk about it and seek some solutions, we will not make any progress. Ministers are not dishonest, but both Labour and Conservative Front-Bench spokespeople become trapped and the public are deliberately misled. They become very angry when they discover that has occurred.

During the debate on the Single European Act, Ministers assured me time and again—I am sure in all sincerity—that everything would be all right. The news from Brussels this afternoon is that plans to ban all passport controls in European Union countries, including Britain, will be tabled by the Brussels Commission later this year. If we object to those plans, we will go to court and Ministers know that our chances of winning are very slim.

This is not an issue of little significance. We are talking about the removal of border controls which will apply not only to all residents of the EC, but to all people who visit the EC and to all of those who enter the EC at some time. I believe that, through no fault of their own, people have been misled about that issue.

They have also been misled over a single currency. There is great debate in the Conservative party which I am sure will result in a referendum on a single currency. A decision about a single currency will have the same significance as deciding whether to keep a Scottish £1 note. By that time, convergence will have taken place and we will be linked to the European currency. We will have to decide whether to have a coin bearing the Queen's head, or an ecu.

The people have been misled time and again over agricultural policy. The Euro-enthusiasts—there are even one or two in the Labour party—have told us that the policy will be reformed. However, it gets worse all the time. Hon. Members will be aware that the budget this year will exceed the legal expenditure limits. People have been misled and they are very angry. We should all be concerned about certain tension points in society. People are concerned about corruption. The structure in Europe is riddled with corruption, waste and mismanagement. However, all we do is set up new Departments, organisations and consultancies. The people are helpless to do anything about that situation and that makes them very angry.

The structure of the European institutions and policies invites fraud and corruption. We should be concerned about what is happening to Britain's poor. We often argue about who is to blame for poor people getting poorer. EC policies have a devastating effect on the poor. Hon. Members must recognise that value added tax is a tax on the poor.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman should not blame me.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I do blame him. I blame all hon. Members who voted for a system that does not allow VAT to be reduced. The hon. Gentleman is an expert on Europe and must know what is meant by the amended 6th directive and what we shall be obliged to do.

We should worry also about young people. Hon. Members should go around the country and hear what they are saying. The people who are agitated about the EU are not the elderly but the young. The effect on our democracy should also cause concern. The public are growing terribly angry because there is nothing that they can do. This appalling paper, the *Evening Standard*, published an article today headed

"The law, not the mob, must prevail".

In it, the Home Secretary says that people should protest properly and legally, not break any laws, because that is our long-standing tradition. It was a long-standing tradition for people to protest and for something to be done.

Recently in Coventry, the funeral was held of the young lady crushed to death by a lorry because she wanted to protest against the export of live animals. Some people think that such protesters are silly, but they are not. They feel passionately, but there is nothing that they can achieve through the democratic system. They can write to their Members of Parliament—whether or not they are Liberal Democrats—about something that they think is important, but nothing can be done. Wait until 1 January 1996, when there will be terrible problems in the fishing industry. British fishermen are desperately angry, because everyone else seems to be breaking the law.

There is also the issue of the different European courts—not just the Common Market court but the human rights court. The House should appreciate that the public are made angry that poll tax protesters who were sent to prison are to receive massive compensation. What are the thoughts of people who struggled to pay their tax? What about the drug dealers who are using technical points of law to argue retrospective action and then receive compensation?

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my hon. Friend concede that the European Court of Human Rights has nothing to do with the European Union, which is the subject of this debate? We acceded to it in 1950, long before the European Community was ever thought of, and presumably we could resile from it now if we wished, without compromising our membership of the European Union. It is a complete red herring to introduce the European Court of Human Rights in a debate on the EU.

Sir Teddy Taylor: If my hon. Friend reads *Hansard*, he will find that I mentioned the Common Market court—the European Court of Justice—and the European Court of Human Rights. My hon. Friend's remark does not help. If he walks through the streets of his constituency and talks to people, he will find that they are angry at the decisions of the European Court of Justice and of the European Court of Human Rights.

Let us take the other court. How do my hon. Friend's constituents feel when they discover that female Army officers who became pregnant are to receive substantial compensation, while female officers who decided against having children and suffered consequential distress—or who even had abortions and suffered psychological damage—are to receive nothing? My hon. Friend tends to make flippant remarks. He should wake up to the fact that the public are annoyed. When democracy is abolished, the same always happens—things happen in a rush, and that makes people angry.

The answer is a referendum. It is desperately important to give the public the chance to express their views on how to proceed. The tragedy is that almost everything has

gone. Present policies are creating misery and substantial unemployment. Seeking public opinion is also important for the Conservative party, with which I used to be associated, which now forms the Government.

The Prime Minister is a decent, respectable and honourable person, but he has been placed in an impossible position. He has people banging and screaming at him from both sides. It is difficult to move without upsetting someone, making them angry or being asked silly questions. What can the Prime Minister do? If the public expressed their clear and concise view in a referendum, that would give the Prime Minister the authority to sort out the rebels on either side, and that would be the end of the internal debate.

The House should not think that that problem is only for the Conservative party. If Labour came to power, they would have exactly the same problems—perhaps more. Although Conservative Members are able and colourful, Labour Members probably have more beliefs and are more passionate because of the way that they grew up. Therefore, a Labour Government would face greater problems. The divides are the same, but they care about people.

Today's debate is desperately important. We must wake up to the fact that there is a serious problem. The only way out is to give the people the chance to express their opinion on the question, "Do you want to carry on this way, or do you want to get out of it? Do you want a separate relationship, or do you want the EU developed as the Liberal Democrats would like?" Once that is done, the present debate will be over and the country can get on in a sensible and united way. The present division is damaging the Government and country, and greatly damaging our democracy.

8.5 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is a reflection of the state of public opinion that in today's debate, the Euro-enthusiasts are, broadly speaking, against a referendum, whereas the Euro-sceptics have argued passionately and strongly for one. The view advanced by the Euro-enthusiasts is that people are not worthy to make the fine, exalted judgments that those committed to Europe are qualified to make.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I did not suggest that.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman should not jeer yet because I wish to pay him a compliment.

The only consistency is to be found in the speech of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who opposes monetary union and a referendum—which would be a means of blocking monetary union—and in the Liberal Democrat position. No party can be more enthusiastically, naively and foolishly pro-European. The Liberal Democrats are prepared to prostrate themselves before Europe as though it were a branch of the international Scout movement, yet they support a referendum. It does them credit, to say that the people must be consulted. Criticisms of the Liberal Democrat position are unfair, and I commend that party for tabling its motion and giving the House the opportunity to debate it.

I am in favour of a referendum, as the motion says. As honesty is the name of the game, I admit to taking that position partly because I believe that a referendum would defeat those aspects of progress towards European union to which I object. That apart, I still strongly support a referendum, not on every policy issue—which has been held out—but on basic constitutional issues, such as whether we should change to proportional representation, regional government, or Scottish and Welsh devolution. People have a right to a say on such issues, particularly on whether sovereignty—which sounds a technical word but means the people's ability to control the Government and make them accountable—should be dismantled, shipped to Europe and abandoned. The people must be consulted on such a basic issue. We cannot give sovereignty away on their behalf.

All parties—even the Liberals—are split on Europe. It is childish and silly to pretend that we are united, and on that basis to push European matters through the House on the back of a three-line Whip. When the parties are disunited, a referendum is the only way of deciding. It is illegitimate to push through such proposals on a three-line Whip—using the discipline of the Whips, the lure of career, the quiet word that it will not enhance an hon. Members parliamentary career prospects to vote against the party line, and other covert means to secure a majority for Europe. We all know that such tactics are deployed, and we know they are wrong. It is imperative to allow people to speak because the only way to clarify the issue is through them. It is not the power of Parliament versus the power of the people. The power of the party is being used in a three-line Whip and that is illegitimate.

The sovereignty which we are being asked to give away is not ours to give; it belongs to the people not to us. Indeed, had the people been consulted right at the start of the whole venture on entry into Europe, when the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) promised the whole-hearted consent of the British people, and had they been consulted over Maastricht, we would not have faced such difficulties, which have undermined our relationship with Europe from the beginning. Decisions have been imposed on the people without them being consulted, which has been corrupting. The people have been dragged along grumbling, reluctantly and unenthusiastically behind the elite—the elite have constantly said that Europe was good for them—without getting their consent.

Mr. Spearing: Does my hon. Friend agree that that relationship is also not good for those who advocate a partnership—as they call it—in the Union, because the people of Britain have not been given the chance to say yes? Does he recall that the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, to whom my hon. Friend referred, said that we would negotiate—no more and no less? He went into negotiations and none of the three treaties involved has received a mandate from the Government who put them through.

Mr. Mitchell: I agree with my hon. Friend. It has been corrupting. It has been destructive of democracy, and destructive of commitment to the institutions of this country to misuse them in such a fashion. Membership has been defended and advocated on what amounts to a litany of lies, half-truths and distortions.

The problem is that Euro-enthusiasm—commitment to Europe—is an elite preoccupation, an elite disease in this country. The elite middle class—*[Laughter.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) may laugh, but he is one of the proponents of that point of view. The middle-class, cosmopolitan elite, which feels

[Mr. Mitchell]

itself to be European and international, has a vague contempt for the institutions and the people of the country, especially British industry and its workers who have never been quite good enough. The elite are well-off and in cushioned, insulated jobs so that they do not feel the same threats to jobs or food prices as do the people.

Mr. Radice: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mitchell: I welcome an elite point of view.

Mr. Radice: How does my hon. Friend square his view with the fact that the British trade union movement is in favour of being in the European Union and, indeed, in favour of Maastricht?

Mr. Mitchell: I said that it was an elite preoccupation. The leadership has been persuaded that doors will be open to them in Brussels which are closed in Downing street, and they have been persuaded, especially by the visit of Jacques Delors to their conference, that they may advance their cause through Europe. However, that enthusiasm is not felt by the mass of trade union members, which bears out my point.

This elite disease is highly infectious. It has infected large sections of the media. Europe is the lingua franca, one might say, of the media, especially among the pundits. They like a nice, distant position—say, Brussels—from which they can be contemptuous because it gives them a degree of distance from Britain.

Such an elite is characteristic, too, of political parties. The higher one goes up to the leadership of both main parties, the greater the degree of Euro-enthusiasm. It is stronger in the Cabinet than it is in the 1922 Committee. It is stronger in the 1922 Committee than it is in the rank and file Tory associations. However, the same is true of the Labour party. The further one goes down the pyramid, the lower the flame of the Euro-enthusiast candle burns and the more people know the consequences and the damage that is being done by the European institution and the more they feel resentful about not having been consulted about it.

That is why there is a constant need to deceive and trick people with a litany of lies into believing that damage is success; that failure is triumph; that we are getting our way in Europe; that the institution, which is so good for the elite, is also good for the people. We are told that we must be in there to shape the institution. We have been trying to reshape the common agricultural policy for 20 or 30 years, and what shape is it in now? We spend more money on it now than ever before. We are told that we cannot be left behind in Europe—the argument of the educationally subnormal lemming. We are told that we must be there in the rush over the cliff of monetary union.

We are told through an argument of fear and manipulation that if we do not go along, we shall be on our own and left out. What a terrifying vision of having to decide things for ourselves and not being able to run with the mob. We are told that we shall lose out—after all the damage that this institution has done so far.

Given such arguments and the litany of lies and deceit, it is sad, indeed, barmy that the Labour party has not supported the Liberal Democrat motion on a three-line Whip because we could have defeated the Government and we could have supported the people. The argument is right in principle. We should not now appear cool on a referendum. My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) mentioned a referendum or an election. An election is no substitute for a referendum on such an issue. In an election, a hundred issues or more are considered and it could never be focused on a single issue such as monetary union.

Since the instruments to improve the economy will be taken away from us, the Labour party especially should ask the people's opinion on monetary union before we agree to it in principle. I am happy that the Labour party is moving crabwise towards a referendum. It is right that we should do so. We will get there, but we could have got there a lot quicker if we had supported the motion.

A referendum on monetary union, is especially important because the monetary union argument is being urged forward as a way in which to build European unity without the consent of the people. This drive in Europe to build a stronger, central set of institutions is not legitimate, but inevitably comes from the bureaucracy and the people in power at the centre. They want to see the centre strengthened. However, most of the paths towards that unity are blocked.

They cannot go down the path of getting the consent of the people, because in a referendum or in any other means of attaining consent, the people would refuse to give it. Indeed, the people came very close to refusing it in Denmark and France, where the yes and no votes were within two percentage points of each other. If the question did not receive the whole-hearted consent of the people, it could not therefore be put to them. Unity cannot be achieved by agreements among Governments because that builds a camel, rather like the European Union we have under Maastricht. We shall never achieve agreement among Governments on some effective democratic federal institution with a powerful centre.

Therefore, the democratic roads to union are closed to those aspiring to union. The only path left open is to try to build union through monetary union, which builds union from the top down; through economic forces without the consent of the people. It builds union in a way that no other set of nations have ever done before. Normally, nations achieve political union before monetary union. Monetary union is impossible—effectively—without political union.

If we go down the path that Europe wants, we shall be imposing on the back of monetary union a central bank to operate the finances, a Committee of Ministers at the centre to manage the economic policies and there will have to be one economic policy and one interest rate. What is more, monetary union breaks the mainspring of a national economy on which the nation rests. It builds union covertly—secretly—without the consent of the people. That is the agenda which is now at issue.

In this situation it is essential that people be consulted, because although the elite may find the damaging economic consequences tolerable—because they are testimony to our enthusiasm for Europe: a step towards unity—and they are prepared to put up with them, the people, on whom the sacrifices and the economic dislocation will fall, must be allowed to give their consent first.

There is no way of building monetary union which is not damaging to the mass of the people, especially in this country. It is rather like the state of perfect virtue—we are all in favour of it, it sounds very nice, especially with

regular brushing of teeth, motherhood and apple pie. But how do we get to the reign of perfect virtue? The same applies to monetary union: the process of getting there is so damaging that it rules out any benefits to be had from it.

The only way to achieve monetary union is to cross the exchange rate mechanism bridge, which means putting the nation's head back into the furnace which lost us 1.2 million jobs, most of them in manufacturing. That took place in the period after that tough, dynamic, abrasive Prime Minister of ours forced that poor, weak, wilting woman, his predecessor, into the ERM, consequently inflicting so much damage on the people of Britain.

Either we return to the ERM, which involves a gradual and irrevocable linking of currencies; or we attempt to go to monetary union overnight. If we do the latter, the stronger economies will inevitably rip apart the weaker ones. That was what happened in east Germany—although, heaven knows, it had the benefit of enormous aid from the west. Germany wanted to destroy east Germany's economic system the better to absorb it into that of dominant west Germany.

These, then, are the choices: long-term ERM anorexia or instant east Germany. They are the only two ways of reaching monetary union.

May we impose either alternative on the British people? Do we not have an obligation to tell them what is likely to happen—in my view, what is certain to eventuate—and to ask them whether they want it? The British people already have experience of the ERM. The elite Euro-enthusiasts remained enthusiastic about the exchange rate mechanism right to the bitter end—right to the day when George Soros, who has done more good for the people of this country and for its economy than the past three Chancellors combined, forced us out of the ERM in such humiliating circumstances.

People have also seen the benefits that have attended our being forced out. If they looked at Italy, they could see even more such benefits. The Italian economy has done much better than ours. Not only was its devaluation greater, but the Italians had the astute idea of destroying confidence and devaluing the lire still further by sending so many of their politicians to gaol. I commend that idea to the Prime Minister; his party looks as though it needs the same treatment in some respects.

In any case, the consequences for Italy of leaving the exchange rate mechanism and devaluing were that it has been able to turn a hefty balance of payments deficit into a massive balance of payments surplus in just over two years. Fiat is now in profit, and Italian manufacturing and exports are doing well.

Mr. Fabricant: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's argument, but surely he is not suggesting that devaluation is the panacea—or is Labour party policy still the same as it was in the 1970s?

Mr. Mitchell: I am saying that one cannot make the maintenance of an externally determined exchange rate the be-all and end-all of economic policy in a democracy. To do so, one must sacrifice every other instrument of management to maintain the exchange rate at a particular level. That applies whether a country enters with its currency overvalued or at a competitive rate, because circumstances change and exchange rates have to change with them; if they do not, they strangle the economy.

The fact that our exchange rate was so overvalued and maintained by high interest rates for so long crucified British manufacturing industry, which recovered only when the process was stopped. The Euro-enthusiasts did not tell us that that would happen. They complained when it did, but until it did, they—particularly the Liberals—urged us to move to the narrower bands. I remember the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) leading huge mobs up and down Whitehall shouting, "Narrower bands now." The popular response was immense.

I shall conclude soon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I can tell from the way that you are leaning forward how passionately interested you are in what I am saying.

Monetary union may never happen. The European Union may have enough sense to avoid it, but if it does happen we shall hear the usual bleat from our Euro-enthusiasts, "We can't be left behind; we must be in there to shape this monstrosity."

That is the prospectus of what we might give away, which is why the people must be consulted. In monetary union, we would give away our ability to run our economy in our own way for the purposes of our people—not for the purposes of the wealthy or of the central bankers with their mystique of stable prices, which exist only in graveyards. It is for our people that we have to retain the ability to control our interest rates, exchange rates, money supply, borrowing and public sector deficit or surplus. The only way we can manage the economy for our people is by having a Government who are accountable to them and whom they feel they can throw out.

The ultimate argument for this motion tonight is that the House must consider what the people want. The people are fed up with being deceived and bamboozled and with not being consulted. They are fed up with having Europe imposed on them willy-nilly. They have shown at the polls that they want to vote on and be consulted about this issue. I ask the House to think of the alienation that will result if, once again, we impose on them the panacea of Euro-medicine—higher unemployment, more massive deflation and so on. The people tell the pollsters repeatedly that they want to be consulted. We in this House cannot take a decision, split and divided over Europe as the parties are. Let the people speak.

8.27 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): This evening's debate has moved without hindrance to the issue of a single currency and a European central bank. The last few speakers have all focused on those issues; the House is right to focus on them. The establishment of a single currency, a single interest rate and a European central bank is an issue that goes to the heart of democracy in this country, and to the heart of our constitution.

Time is running short for Her Majesty's Government to say clearly where they stand on this issue. Hitherto, the policy has been to wait and see, but that cannot go on for ever. There will be a single currency—of that I have no doubt. The Maastricht treaty provides for it to be established on 1 January 1999. It will go ahead, with a certain number of states participating. If a country wants to join the single currency, it will have to make the decision no later than 1 July 1998.

[Mr. Barry Legg]

At the start of the year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made some helpful statements. I think particularly of his interview on 8 January with David Frost. As I said earlier when I intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend made it clear that he was keeping open the option of a referendum. He said also that he considered that a firm commitment to a single currency was a major constitutional change.

When my hon. Friend the Minister of State responded to my intervention, things were slightly less clear cut. He said, "I think that is the case still." Some ambiguity seems to have crept in. I hope that it will be made clear later this evening that the Government still believe that the single currency is a major constitutional issue, and that they are keeping open the option of having a referendum on the issue.

Why should doubts have crept in? Were the comments made last week by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he sought to play down the political aspects of monetary union, something to do with the hesitancy that we saw on the Government Front Bench earlier today?

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor recently gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, he seemed to get to the heart of the matters that we are discussing. When he was asked whether there had been a movement in the balance of power between himself and the Governor of the Bank of England in setting domestic interest rates, he did not agree. He said:

"the power"—

that is, the power to set interest rates—

"lies with the Chancellor because the Chancellor is accountable to Parliament and I do not think Parliament would allow the Chancellor to surrender that power."

There we have it. The position is set out clearly by the Chancellor. My right hon. and learned Friend dealt with the importance of a British Chancellor being able to set interest rates and being accountable at the Dispatch Box to the British Parliament. He went on to press the point even harder. He said:

"I think actually one thing which we have retained which, I do not want to get flippant about, is that nobody is arguing that we have thrown parliamentary accountability because I come here and I answer for the decision."

That is what most of us on the Government Benches want to see continuing. We want a Chancellor setting interest rates with the Governor of the Bank of England and being accountable to the House for his decisions.

The provisions set out in the Maastricht treaty would not allow that process of accountability to continue. The establishment of a European central bank clearly takes the relevant powers away from the Chancellor. The European constitution could not be clearer.

It could not be clearer also from reading that constitution that monetary union is not a purely technical and economic matter. Instead, it is of fundamental constitutional importance. It creates a central bank that is unaccountable. The constitution of the central bank has been described as being even harder than the Bundesbank, and we know that the Bundesbank constitution contains provision for the bank to take into account German economic policy—the policy of the German Government—when setting interest rates.

In the constitution for the European central bank, which we passed some 18 months ago, the only criterion is price stability. The running of the bank is placed in the hands of unaccountable officials. Six officials are elected to the executive body of the bank. They are chosen by the Governments that decide to go ahead with monetary union. Once the six officials have been elected, they are no longer accountable. They have an unrenewable term of eight years.

The governors of the domestic central banks join the six officials to set interest rates. However, the governors of the domestic banks, as I think Lord Kingsdown remarked, are really no more than members of a country branch of the European central bank. Power will lie with the six elected officials.

Article 3 of the Maastricht treaty sets out clearly the responsibilities of the six men. They will have responsibility for monetary policy, which means setting interest rates. How will those rates be decided? That will be left to a simple majority of the members of the governing council. The six will have the power to conduct foreign exchange operations. They will also have the power to hold and manage the official reserves of the member states and to promote the "smooth operation" of the payment system. Power will be put into their hands. They will be able to call upon minimum reserves from the credit institutions across the member states of the monetary union.

The six men will be responsible for setting interest rates and monetary policy as a whole. Anyone who considers the constitution behind the European central bank in a pragmatic and sensible way will say that it is not a feasible way in which to run European economic policy. Our lessons from the exchange rate mechanism, to which the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) referred, should still be clear in everyone's minds.

Politicians deciding upon arbitrary exchange rates and expecting their domestic economies to fit in with the rates they have fixed will damage their economies. We need freely floating exchange rates throughout the European Community if we are to get the best that we can from the prosperity of the Community.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) talked of small businesses gaining from a single currency. I think that he is out of touch with what businesses are like these days. I visited a medium-sized business in my constituency which has a turnover of £10 million a year. The company trades throughout the world, with customers in 34 countries. It is a global business.

If the British exchange rate is artificially linked to the deutschmark and irrevocably fixed, the business is at risk. That is what the managing director told me. He said that, if the United Kingdom had not left the exchange rate mechanism in September 1992, he faced ruin in his business. British businesses are global, and they need flexibility. They cannot afford to have the British exchange rate locked irrevocably to the deutschmark.

Currencies are important as shock absorbers to allow countries to adjust to continually changing economic circumstances. In his speech on Thursday night, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer sought to play down the political and constitutional

implications of a single currency. I think that he did a disservice in doing that. He gave two examples of countries that he believed had retained their sovereignty but had linked their currency to another state.

What were the two countries that he selected? The first was Austria, which had linked its currency to the deutschmark. I must tell my right hon. and learned Friend that the size of Austria in economic terms—its gross domestic product—is just under a tenth of the German economy. My right hon. and learned Friend's second example was the Republic of Ireland, which has linked its currency to the pound sterling. Again, I must tell my right hon. and learned Friend that the economy of Ireland is less than 5 per cent. of the UK economy.

It is possible for very small economies that are dependent on other economies to link their exchange rates to those larger economies.

Mr. Sweeney: As an Irishman, I am well aware that, for many years, the Irish pound and the British pound were worth exactly the same. Is it not significant that, despite being a small economy, Ireland chose to separate its pound from the British pound, thereby demonstrating the desire of a particular nation for the symbol of nationhood which its own currency represents?

Mr. Legg: I was just coming to that point. Eventually, Ireland detached its currency from sterling. It can be argued that Ireland's best economic interests were not served by tying itself to sterling, as the nature of the Irish economy, which was largely agriculturally based, did not equate to the nature of the United Kingdom economy.

It is possible from time to time for smaller economies to link their currencies to much larger economies. Hong Kong does it with the United States. We did it during the Bretton Woods period. It is possible to do it with very large economies for a certain time, but it is not viable to link economies of medium-sized states, because they will experience quite different shocks to their economy. We cannot make the decision to lock our currency to another medium-sized economic power, and—what is more—make a decision that is irrevocable. If we accept monetary union, we are making an irrevocable decision.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Is not the crucial difference between the so-called monetary union between Austria and Germany, or between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, not only that they were revocable but that they retained separate central banks, separate foreign currency reserves, separate gold reserves and total independence? The choice to link their currency was a decision for each of those sovereign states, whereas that arrangement bears no relation to what is set out in the Maastricht treaty, which is a legally binding irrevocable monetary union?

Mr. Legg: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. Those countries had the flexibility to change their currency if they so wished. They retained their own central banks, and the democracy and economic opportunity that went with that. Ireland, as my hon. Friend the Member for the Vale of Glamorgan said, made that change, but we are being called on to make an irrevocable decision on which we cannot go back.

One can think of more and more factors that one might take into account in judging whether convergence is taken into account. For example, one might look at the tax burden of each state, its overall balance of trade, the percentage of trade that it conducts across the world, its investment percentages across the world. It might just be conceivable that, at some point, convergence might take place, but politicians are notoriously lacking in the ability to pick that moment, as we have seen from our own recent economic history.

But even if we did pick the right moment, that convergence could not continue for ever and a day. That is the point. We would have given up our currency and our economic flexibility, with the objective of achieving something that I believe would be deeply damaging to the British people and our economy.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Is it not true that, in a way, we already have a common currency with the dollar? More people use it voluntarily than probably any other currency. More people use the pound sterling as a type of common currency than the deutschmark, so to link ourselves to the deutschmark, which is foreign in its nature to most people, is quite ridiculous.

Mr. Legg: I agree with my hon. Friend. One of the great problems we had when we were in the exchange rate mechanism was that our link with the deutschmark took us to $2 to the pound. For anybody in Britain trying to do business with the United States—many of our companies do—at such an exchange rate, that just was not on. The hon. Lady is right to say that the dollar is a very important currency. However many conditions we come up with for monetary union, at the end of the day we must accept that, under the Maastricht treaty, a political decision will be made on whether there is a single currency. It will not be done just on economic factors.

Many hon. Members may remember the Madrid conditions, which Professor Alan Walters came up with to please the Prime Minister of the day. He believed that they were impossible to achieve, so tough were the conditions. What happened? The Madrid conditions were never fulfilled, but we entered the ERM, with the problems that ensued.

I ask hon. Members not to put all their faith in economic conditions and convergence criteria, because at the end of the day they can go by the board.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that politicians all over Europe who are committed to the idea of a single currency are artificially manipulating economic indicators to ensure that the convergence criteria are met? Is it any satisfactory indication of anything?

Would it not be better for us to see whether convergence criteria that have been met could be sustained through a complete economic cycle, because those who build their house of straw will rapidly see it come unstuck when their economies at home hit a downturn? The fact that they can achieve that happy convergence at one point is no indication of anything that could be a foundation for a future currency.

Mr. Legg: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point. Some 12 months ago, I visited Germany. Having had discussions there about the convergence criteria and the level of debt, I learned that the level of debt that the German Government disclose to meet the 60 per cent. debt criteria does not include the East German debt that they inherited.

[Mr. Legg]

The hon. Gentleman is entirely right: politicians who have the political objective of achieving monetary union will dilute and tamper with the conditions to achieve their political objectives. We should not be surprised about that, because they have been very open with us.

Chancellor Kohl has been very open. He said that of course one gets political union with monetary union; it cannot operate in any other way. He must be right. If one thinks about what it means to have one interest rate and one currency, one sees that one must have fiscal transfer values to try to make the system work. The safety valve has been taken away, so one needs to transfer tax revenues to the regions that are not doing very well.

As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said tonight, that is precisely what happens in the United Kingdom with the single currency that we have here. That is precisely what would happen with a European single currency. Taxes would have to be raised and transferred to the regions that were doing badly because they had lost flexibility.

Mr. Marlow: Is not my hon. Friend setting out a rather exciting prospect: a bunch of countries in the European Union will fudge the convergence criteria and will join some single European currency? They will have got it wrong. There will be massive transfer payments and massive social payments, so that part of Europe will become increasingly uncompetitive, with increasingly higher interest rates and inflation, and we in the United Kingdom, with Thatcherite economic policies, driven by our desire to make our industry and trade prosper, will be the rich men of Europe.

Mr. Legg: My hon. Friend has outlined what some might consider a golden scenario. It is certainly a prospect to warm many of our hearts. It is so reminiscent of what we were told when we were in the exchange rate mechanism. We were told then that, if we left the ERM, interest rates would have to rise; tonight we have been told that, if we had a single currency, interest rates would be lower.

When we came out of the ERM, despite what we had been told by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we suddenly found that we could cut interest rates to the level that was required domestically. There is no guarantee that a single currency would produce lower interest rates or lower inflation. As politicians, we shoulder a grave responsibility in making the decisions that we are making now.

Mr. Whitney: My hon. Friend seems to see no difference between the single currency and stage 2 of the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Legg: I do see a difference: the single currency would be much worse. At least we could come out of the ERM. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby pointed out, George Soros could come and rescue us, and with one bound we were free. We can never come out of the single currency. The position will be irrevocable. Having given up our currency and transferred our reserves to the European central bank, we shall have banished the option of having a currency of our own and setting interest rates in accordance with domestic monetary conditions.

I think that most hon. Members understand the magnitude of the issues and policies that we are discussing. Surely it is time for the British Government to make their position clear. The decisions governing whether we enter a single European currency will have to be made—

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): In 1998.

Mr. Legg: The hon. Gentleman is right. The Prime Minister has already ruled it out for 1996 and 1997, however, and I believe that ruling it out for 1998 will be just one more small step.

The Government cannot put off this decision. They will have to explain whatever they decide to the British people in the next general election campaign; they cannot hope to fight an election in 1997 saying, "We do not know whether we shall go for a single currency in 1998." They must either rule it out or promise a referendum. I hope that, when he winds up, the Minister will begin to clarify the Government's position on a vital issue that is crucial to the British economy and the British people.

8.52 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I wish to return to the subject of the motion. I share many of the views of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) on the European Union. For many years, I believed that it was in the national interest to co-operate and, if necessary, integrate with our European partners—

Mr. Austin Mitchell: At any cost.

Mr. Radice: My hon. Friend has had his say, at considerable length. Perhaps he will allow me to make a three-minute speech.

The European Community has achieved a great deal for this continent. It has helped to keep peace in Europe, and it has helped to create unparalleled prosperity. *[Interruption.]* It certainly has, as anyone who had studied a little history and viewed the past from a slightly wider perspective than the past three or four years would know. It is essential to the future of the continent, which is why so many countries want to join the European Union: three of the four EFTA countries that held referendums voted to join. I agree with the Prime Minister that Britain ought to be at the heart of Europe.

That is not what we are discussing, however. We are discussing whether there should be a referendum. I strongly support the idea of involving the people more in major European decisions, because we are a Europe of the peoples rather than a Europe of the elite. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) that that means that the people should be consulted on such decisions; the question is how they should be consulted.

That consultation need not necessarily take place by means of a referendum. It could take place in a general election, if there were a major difference between the views of the two parties. The Conservative party is changing so rapidly that it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it will fight the next election on an anti-European ticket, although I hope very much that it will not. Those in the Conservative party who speak for

the European cause have a responsibility in that regard, and I am glad to say that they are just beginning to wake up to it.

Mr. Marlow: There are not many of them.

Mr. Radice: There are indeed. Perhaps they should speak a little louder; then we would not hear quite so much from the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow).

If there are no strong differences between the parties, however, there will be a case for a referendum. I do not agree with the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) that a principled objection can be advanced: it is possible to believe in parliamentary democracy while supporting the idea of a referendum on constitutional issues. In 1975, we had a referendum on whether we should leave the common market. We did not hear much about that from my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby, but that is probably because he did not like the decision; certainly he never accepted it.

I voted yes in that referendum, as did the majority of British people. Other countries have had more frequent referendums on European issues—especially France, Spain and Denmark—to decide not just questions of accession, but other questions. There is, however, a problem with ad hoc national referendums, which are often decided on national issues. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) pointed out, the French referendum was decided partly on the basis of whether people were for or against President Mitterrand. I know, because I was involved in that referendum—on the yes side, unlike others who have spoken.

The first Danish referendum was decided partly as a result of the unpopularity of the Conservative Government of the time. The second was won partly because there was a new Social Democrat Government who were able to present a new broom. The Swedish referendum could not have been carried by the Conservative Government, who were very unpopular at the time. That Government had the good sense to wait until they had been defeated at the polls, and it was a new Social Democrat Government—who were quite popular at that stage—who were able to carry the referendum.

I believe that we should hold European-wide referendums on major issues, and that they should take place on the same day. They would be decided on a national basis, but at least such a process would iron out some of the purely national issues and focus people on the European issues. I hope that the European nations will consider that at the 1996 intergovernmental conference.

I do not share the view of some of my hon. Friends that somehow we would lose in a referendum. Some of my hon. Friends gave away the fact that their support is cynical. They think that they can win it and that that is the only way in which they can stop Europe going forward. I do not believe that. The British people are sometime reluctant Europeans but they do not want to be left out of what is happening. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby may want to be left out but the British people do not. They showed that in 1975 and if there is a referendum they will show it again. I am certainly not against the principle of a referendum, but it would be a question of what would have to be decided at the time.

I am aware of Liberal Democrat policy and I do not blame the party for putting down the motion. It was perfectly fair for it to do so and we have had a good debate on the issue. However, it cannot be said that it is a serious attempt to defeat the Government because if it were there would have been wide consultation with the Labour party. The Liberals would have asked Labour to write the terms of a resolution. If they had really wanted to defeat the Government with the support of the Labour party, that is the way they should have gone about it.

They did not consult the other minority parties, either. I do not criticise them for that, but they should not pretend that the motion is a serious attempt to defeat the Government. It is a legitimate exposition of Liberal Democrat policy which contains some sense, and it has provided us with a good debate. I congratulate the Liberal party on that. If there is to be a coalition of ideas there will have to be give and take and there has not been quite enough of that in the debate.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Given the hon. Gentleman's forthcoming role in the European movement, on which I congratulate him, he will have some influence in that give and take. May I correct the hon. Gentleman as I did earlier? His account is factually incorrect, I am sure not wilfully, but he is wrong.

Mr. Radice: I think that there are different versions of what happened.

Mr. Spearing: Or what did not happen.

Mr. Radice: Yes, but there was no attempt to say to the Labour party, "You write the thing and support—"

Mr. Ashdown: That is give and take!

Mr. Radice: If the Liberal Democrats were interested in defeating the Government, that is what they would have done. The Liberals were interested in having a good debate and perhaps hoped to raise their profile, with which they have had some difficulty in recent months. That is perfectly legitimate and I do not complain about it, but let us not pretend that the motion is a serious attempt to defeat the Government.

Mr. Ashdown: My hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) told the hon. Gentleman that he was factually wrong. Clearly, he was not prepared to take that, so perhaps he will accept some of the details. He rightly said that this requires give and take. But his definition of that is that we give and they take.

I shall tell him exactly what happened. The words were drawn up and there was widespread consultation with other Opposition parties, including the Labour party. Labour Members were shown the words and offered the opportunity to change them or at least suggest how they might be changed. The offer was not taken up; there was no response from Labour. Far from the situation being as the hon. Gentleman describes, the truth is that all this is a charade and a farrago, because right from the start there was no intention of voting in favour of the motion.

Mr. Radice: It would be a pity if the debate were just a squabble between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. The Conservative party would like that very much. I shall not quote the *Evening Standard* or the memorandum by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) because that would not be sensible. The leader of the Liberal Democrats may have

[Mr. Radice]

read it and may know what is in the *Evening Standard*, but let us not have that kind of detailed claim and counter claim.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Radice: No. I said that my speech would be short and I am coming to the end of it.

I am in favour of a referendum, if necessary, on major European issues. I should prefer to have it on a European basis because that is a much more sensible way to go.
9.3 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): This has been an interesting, thought-provoking and revealing debate, because it has demonstrated that the undoubted divisions are not just in one party. When *Hansard* is analysed tomorrow it will become clear to everyone that the Labour party is divided, as are the Liberal Democrats, as we heard earlier.

The whole thrust of the debate is to discuss a future referendum. I want to examine the possibilities for that and to make some predictions—not just for two or three years hence, as many hon. Members have done, but for a little further into the nation's possible future.

Some hon. Members have already said that a referendum should be called on greater integration, but that begs the question of degree. Every statutory instrument, every Act whose genesis was in Brussels, is yet another step on the road to greater European integration. Since our earliest treaty with another power, such as that with Portugal in the 16th century, there have always been times when there has been a loss of some sovereignty, but that has been outweighed by the greater benefit. Therefore, a surrender of sovereignty is not always against the interests of the state. The advantages must always be weighed against the disadvantages; it must always be a question of degree.

Bilateral treaties can be initiated only by the British Executive, with the approval of Parliament, under the Ponsonby rule. That is not the case with legislation emanating from Brussels, especially that which is subject to a majority vote in the Council of Ministers—that is, not subject to unanimity. Nevertheless, I welcome some European legislation set out in the Maastricht treaty, especially that which gives power to the courts to ensure that rules rigorously applied in Britain are also applied in other European countries that have—how shall we put it?—a more flexible approach to the enforcement of national legislation.

However, let us be clear—not all integration is in this nation's interest. I shall expand on that later. First, I shall return to the subject of our debate, which is whether or not to hold a referendum. It was in 1890 that the Liberal Unionist constitutional lawyer Dicey wrote a pamphlet called "Ought the Referendum to be introduced into England?" At the time, he was concerned with home rule for Ireland. Some 105 years later, it is again the Liberal Democrats, and, it must be said, others, who pose the question whether we should use a referendum to solve a problem that divides Parliament, and not across party lines. Let us make no mistake, views on Europe are as diverse on the Opposition Benches, as we have heard this evening, as they are on the Government Benches.

I believe that referenda—I say "referenda" and not "referendums"—are a surrender of the responsibilities that we, as parliamentarians, have fought for over the years. To those who might say that a referendum is a useful tool as a means to an end, I would say that the outcome of referenda are not always predictable. For while it might be assumed that a referendum on Europe would reject greater integration, I believe that if, during a referendum campaign, enough industrialists and others were to predict mass unemployment—wrongly in my opinion—as a consequence of no greater integration, for fear of jobs and general well-being, a referendum might well come out in favour of greater European integration—hardly the result desired by many who are arguing today for a referendum.

The current vexed question is whether a single European currency or fixed exchange rate, for they are the same thing, is an integration too far and a surrender of our constitutional right to government. Is that, too, a question of degree? I think not. I believe that this is one of those rare occasions when there is a clear line to be drawn; when reality is not a shade of grey and it is only the politician who sees it simplistically in black or white.

Although my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was right to say that a single currency is not explicitly a surrender of sovereignty, any economic or historical model would say that implicitly it must be so. When Germany formed its customs union in the 19th century, it led to economic and political union. That worked for Germany in economic terms, although historians might argue that over 70 years it also led to three European wars—but that is not the point.

Political union worked in Germany because the Lander were culturally similar, sharing a common language system, a similar legal system and, on the whole, populations whose lifestyles and personal goals were similar. Garibaldi's unification of Italy's city states, however, has not been so successful. Although the language and legal systems are similar, Italy's population varies greatly between the north and south and that is not simply a function of economic activity. Italy's instability lies with its huge cultural differences.

If there were a referendum on a single currency, would we be voting for a European political union? The answer would definitely be yes. That is not demonstrated only by historical models, for without control of interest rates and other mechanisms, the state would have to surrender its sovereignty on all economic policy, if it were not to be subject to social instability arising from resultant unemployment and falls in living standards.

Mrs. Gorman: I notice that my hon. Friend has tipped a lot of pound coins on to the Bench. Of course, once upon a time, we used to have coins that were more valuable. What will happen to the pound in our pockets if we go into a single currency? Will it be anything like decimalisation, where the value of money halved and the price of everything doubled?

Mr. Fabricant: Many of the pounds in my pocket, or, in this instance, on the Bench, would be diverted to the "Club-Med" countries, especially countries such as Greece and Portugal, which would need sustaining if we were to have economic union.

Who can doubt that if sovereignty were not surrendered in favour of a single political entity, the most powerful economy in any monetary union would be the dog that wags the tail—the tail in this case being all the other

member states. To take that metaphor further, the dog wags the tail in the interests of the dog and not of the tail. The only possible course of action for the other member states would be to join a single political state with its dominant former partner to mitigate the effects of monetary union.

If a future referendum were to decide on monetary union, even assuming that the convergence criteria were met by all 15 member states, political stability would be short-lived without political union. Full economic union across states and across peoples as varied as the Greek hill farmer and the German factory worker would lead to huge divergent stresses and strains which would pull the union apart again. If that is the case now, how much more unstable would be a union of states including those from eastern Europe, whose economies are even more diverse? Are they to be excluded with other states from an inner-European hegemony? Believe me, it will not only be the common agricultural policy that would be unfundable and unworkable.

As we have heard, Eddie George, the Governor of the Bank of England, has graphically pointed out some of the uncontrollable strains and movements of peoples which would be a natural consequence of monetary union. Only a super-state could have any hope of controlling those. There could be no turning back. No sophisticated economy could recreate its own currency once it has been absorbed into a greater whole. Thus, if we were to have a referendum on the question of monetary union, it would be a logical consequence that we would also be voting on an inevitable political union and virtual super-state.

That raises a further question. If, in a world, perhaps in the near future, of huge trading blocs, it were deemed necessary for Britain to enter into a monetary union, I personally would rather Britain's union were with states with whom a commonality of cultural and political interest existed, for only then could such a union be stable and enduring. I do not see it as a prospect within the next 20, 40 or 60 years, if ever, but I speculate as to whether Australia's dissatisfaction with her Pacific rim neighbours, and the United States of America's discomfort with her neighbours to the south, might lead to the conclusion that, as the USA and the old Commonwealth share a common language, culture and legal system, mutual integration might be a logical progression.

This might be the only union as enduring as the 288-year-old Union of Great Britain, despite the fact that the Labour party seems determined to break that Union. What of the distances between these countries with mutual self-interest? Do they create impenetrable barriers? I think not. Modern technology and the nature and content of international trade make distance far less relevant, and this will be even more so in the future.

In summary, I am not enthusiastic about referenda per se. They are unpredictable and are a rejection of the powers of Parliament but, if we were to have a referendum on Europe, the questions must be clear. Do we want greater integration? Do we want monetary union, which will inevitably lead to political union and absolute loss of sovereignty? Do we want union which would be intrinsically unstable, with a mixture of peoples with different goals and different dreams?

When I was in business, immersed in international trade—much of it in Europe—I would have welcomed a fixed exchange rate, a single currency, but I would not have done so at the expense of higher taxation and potential political union introducing socio-business legislation through a socialist back door. By maintaining our opt-outs won for us at Maastricht, we would still, without monetary union, have access to the European markets so needed by our business men as well as those investing in Britain from outside Europe. Does the spectre of the future lighten a different vision?

I am not a Euro-sceptic but a Euro-pragmatist. Unlike some hon. Members, I have lived and worked in many countries in Europe and speak three European languages other than English. I welcome a free trade area in Europe among nation states and the power to enforce it through the courts. However, should we ever need to seek monetary union—I hope that we do not—should we not do so with different partners, partners who are from far beyond our European borders but who share the same dreams and aspirations and who could, in a democratic confederation—should this be necessary—realise the spirit of a new English-speaking nation whose limitless potential could finally be snatched from what is, in effect, a loveless and barren European marriage of convenience?

9.16 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I rise to speak primarily because I am enthusiastic about referendums as a device for securing a legitimate mandate from the electorate and because, more generally, as a candidate in five parliamentary elections I campaigned for parliamentary and constitutional reform. I am therefore pleased to have this opportunity to speak for the greater use of referendums in the United Kingdom, and not only for the narrow question of further integration in the European Union.

One issue that has not been raised in the debate is the undemocratic way in which we ratify treaties. It is time that we followed the example of other democracies where, when the Government sign treaties, those treaties are confirmed by an Act of Parliament at the very least. In this country, the royal prerogative is used, which is profoundly wrong.

The Maastricht legislation, which has preoccupied many of us since the general election, was not to ratify a treaty but to deal with the consequential legislative arrangements that flowed from our having signed the treaty. I want Parliament to confirm treaties by Acts. If major constitutional implications follow thereafter, they should be put to the people in referendums.

I speak as someone who has been described as a Euro-supporter. That is a crude and rather stupid term, like left wing and right wing. I have been a member of the Labour party for 29 years. For 28 years of those years, I have been described as a right winger. This year, I have noticed that I am described as a left winger. I have not shifted an inch—other people have passed me by. The terms left wing, right wing, Euro-sceptic or Euro-supporter are meaningless.

I do not believe that it would be feasible, practical or in the best interests of the United Kingdom to contemplate withdrawing from the EU, but it is probably time that Parliament checked public opinion. It certainly should do so after the IGC conference because, whether or not some of us are comfortable in the EU, there is clearly a need to reaffirm policy with the electorate. That can only be done by a referendum for the reasons that have been canvassed

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

this afternoon: that there are differences across the parties and that one must deal with so many other issues at general elections.

A referendum would be democratic and appropriate, and it would also mean that the ambivalence and hostility to the EU would have to be combated by the people who wish to promote Europe. There is no real debate about Europe, and a referendum would allow both sides to focus on the issues. That is not happening at present, and therefore I would welcome a referendum.

Speaking as a voter, I am uncertain about how I would vote in 1997 or 1998, but we should have the opportunity to vote. The issues should be thoroughly explored.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: No. I have listened to a lot of claptrap today, and I want to have my say. It is an important issue to me for the reasons I explained a few moments ago. I have fought five general elections—more than a lot of Members—and this is one of the things on which I campaigned on each occasion.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) reiterated an argument made by other hon. Members: that these are complex issues, the implication being that the ordinary elector could not understand or comprehend them. That is a deeply insulting argument, and it is also baseless. That argument was advanced by people who resisted the Reform Act 1832, because they believed that the middle classes could not possibly understand the complex issues involved in running the UK.

The same argument was advanced by those who resisted the franchise for those who were no doubt deemed "the great unwashed", or working-class people. It was thought that they could not possibly understand the complex issues. The argument was also used by those wishing to prevent women from having the right to vote. It is nonsense, and deeply insulting to the electorate, to suggest that they cannot comprehend such matters.

Members of the House voted for a referendum in the 1970s because it suited politicians on both sides, and primarily the Labour Government. I am opposed to having referendums à la carte to get over political differences, and that is why there should be a constitutional referendum Act which provides how and when major constitutional issues should be put to the people. Those include an elected second Chamber—which I support and which I hope my right hon. and hon. Friends will be able to introduce when they form the next Government—electoral reform and fixed-term Parliaments. Those issues need to be put to the electorate after the principal Act has been passed.

We are misreading the views of the electorate. A great deal of harm may result if, when we accede to treaties or accept constitutional changes, we dragoon people without the full-hearted consent of Parliament and of the people. It is undemocratic and foolhardy in the extreme, because the dam eventually breaks. I speak as somebody who can be probably described as more of a Euro-supporter than Euro-sceptic. It seems profoundly foolish to dragoon the British people into change when there is no mandate to do so. If there was a proper debate, the matter could be settled.

The argument has been advanced that people such as my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) never accepted the last referendum. That is not fair—subsequent treaties were acceded to, so the debate was, legitimately in their view, reopened. If there was a referendum and it was decided to accept constitutional change or a surrender of sovereignty, I suspect that the hon. Members for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) and for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and others would accept the voice of the people. Those hon. Members have said that they would do so. I too understand that spirit and accept it.

It is time that we in the House started to think of a referendum as being a virtue and being highly desirable in our developing democracy. I look to my hon. Friends who will form the next Government to be bold and to start saying that we will have constitutional innovations—not to get us out of political difficulties, but because it is right. If there is a Division, I shall be obliged, and will wish, to support the motion.

9.25 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): As so often, the Liberal Democrats' motion, on which we may vote this evening, looks both ways. Most, if not all, of the Liberals seem to believe in a united Europe, but most Liberals have enough nous to realise that they are out of step with the views of the British public who, while in favour of membership of the European Union, were against the surrender of sovereignty that resulted from the Maastricht treaty and are against any further surrender of sovereignty.

The Liberals are trying to have it both ways. They are being pro-European—indeed, ardent federalists—but are saying to the great British public that, if things go wrong a few years down the road, do not blame us as we were the party that called for a debate in Parliament advocating a referendum.

The motion looks as though it has been cobbled together. The debate has shown the variety of opinions across the House in all three major parties. The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred to the inadvisability of holding a referendum because it would establish a precedent and would encourage referendums on other topics, such as the death penalty or devolution in Scotland or Wales.

The fundamental distinction between a vote on the death penalty and a vote on an issue of constitutional importance is clear. Once we had acceded to the treaty of Rome or the Maastricht treaty, we had taken an irrevocable step, limiting Parliament's sovereignty and placing ourselves in a position from which we could not turn back. If Parliament were to reintroduce the death penalty for murder—it could, because the death penalty still exists in law for treason and, I believe, for arson in the Queen's dockyards—and a future Parliament disapproved, there would be nothing to stop that later Parliament repealing or amending the legislation. However, the issue that we are discussing today is quite different.

A referendum should not be used as a cop-out to salve Liberal Democrats' consciences on the destruction of the United Kingdom or as a means of making a spurious appeal for people to vote for them. A referendum should not be used simply to stitch together, artificially, differences in the Government as occurred in 1975. A

referendum should not be used as a device to exempt the present Parliament from the responsibility of having a debate on fundamental constitutional issues, with a free vote at the end. Parliament and the Conservative Government erred in not having a referendum before implementing the Maastricht treaty. Where there is a fundamental and irrevocable change to the constitution, the Government are not only justified in presenting the issue to the public but have a duty to do so.

That duty is even more strongly held if no clear choice is offered at a general election. When the Conservatives took Britain into the European Economic Community in 1973, they did so following a general election at which the Conservatives supported entry and the Labour party opposed it. The public had a choice, as Enoch Powell so graphically illustrated when he, as a staunch Conservative, suggested that people should vote Labour to prevent Britain's entry into the EEC.

At the most recent general election, the public had no such choice. The public knew that if they were Euro-sceptically minded they had to vote Conservative, because at least the Prime Minister had attempted to negotiate certain opt-outs at Maastricht and they preferred the thought of that to the thought of Maastricht with bells on, which we would undoubtedly have received if the Labour party had won that general election.

In short, it is vital that we should recognise that a referendum may be appropriate, indeed necessary, under certain circumstances, but not under the circumstances envisaged by the Liberal Democrats—*[Interruption.]*—as they say that we should have a referendum before any substantial alteration of the present constitutional settlement between the European Union and its member states. That means that if, by some miracle, the Government were able to negotiate some reversal of the ratchet effect of Maastricht, we would need a referendum to return us to the status quo prior to Maastricht. That would be ridiculous, because we were not given a referendum on ratifying the Maastricht treaty. Why should we need a referendum to throw it out of the window?

9.31 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): As they say, "follow that!" An extremely interesting debate took on slightly different proportions with the final two speeches from the Conservative Benches, which I will not attempt to follow. The hon. Member for the Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) was perhaps slightly too Machiavellian in the motives that he ascribed to us for initiating the debate, and the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) perhaps came out with the quote of the day, saying that what he disliked about referendums was the fact that they tended to be unpredictable.

Mr. Fabricant: I did not say that.

Mr. Kennedy: I shall have a look at the *Official Report*, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman used words very much to that effect.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on his excellent and lucid exposition of the crux of the case in favour of extending the referendum principle generally to constitutional issues. That was our main motivation in tabling the motion.

I shall not revisit any of the parliamentary or party political controversy—especially across the Opposition side of the House—that has helped frame the context of today's debate. Throughout the debate, the eagerness to engage both sides of the argument from the Back Benches has not exactly been matched by either of the two Front Benches. Indeed, I was left with the strong impression that the Minister and the Labour shadow spokesperson, the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin), would far rather have been anywhere than in the Chamber, having to discuss the European dilemmas and issues that they endeavoured to explore this afternoon.

It is extraordinary, in an Opposition day debate, to find the Government of the day unable or unwilling—or both—to table an amendment of their own, and to give any sign of their position in the Division Lobby. I wonder why that might be. It is equally extraordinary that there is no formal Labour amendment to the motion. It appears that, in a different sense, we have two opt-out parties in terms of the respective leaderships of the Conservative and Labour parties towards the debate and what has been suggested.

Leaving aside the principle of consulting people about constitutional matters, which goes beyond the issue of party politics and the lifetime of any Parliament, the reason for moving towards a referendum must be the rather depressing reality of British politics, certainly since the last general election and perhaps since the Maastricht negotiations which preceded that election. The Government have failed to provide leadership on the European issue because of internal divisions and a lack of purpose in confronting those divisions effectively and coherently. I shall return to that point in a moment.

As one Conservative Member said, on the European question—not least the matter of a single currency—it seems that Labour and the Conservatives essentially occupy much the same ground. They do not appear to rule out entirely the case for a referendum, but at the same time they are being delphic about the desirability of a single currency.

It is fair to let the Leader of the Opposition use his own words to characterise Labour's position on the issue. In *The Times* on Saturday he wrote:

"But I am clear about the direction in which I wish to lead the Labour Party. If convergence can be achieved, and if other countries go ahead with a single currency, it would be folly not to recognise the dangers of exclusion. In principle, if there is such real convergence, then clearly there could be benefits to our participation given the increasingly global nature of the economy in which we live. My guess—and it is only that—is that a single currency among any European countries is unlikely by 1997, possible by the end of the century and probable at some point in the not-too-distant future after that".

I hope that, in the not-too-distant future between now and the next election, we will have a crystal clear idea of exactly what the Labour party proposes. We will obviously have to look at the conditions and the convergence criteria; that is the sensible thing to do. If it comes to a referendum, it behoves all political parties to give a clear idea to the public about exactly which direction the debate will move in.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech and I agree with him about the Labour party's abdication of responsibility in not either sponsoring an amendment or joining the Opposition parties in the Lobby this evening. Is it not true that, when

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

we last discussed the Maastricht referendum issue in April 1993, which could have seen the Government defeated, the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen voted with the Government and half the Liberal party voted with the Government and half voted against the Government?

Mr. Kennedy: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman may have had to attend other engagements in Scotland earlier today and he missed the discussion of that point at the outset of the debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) placed on record—as I did when I spoke during that debate when I voted for a referendum on Maastricht—the fact that we treated that issue as a free vote. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that, if there had been a free vote on some of the issues affecting the progress of the Maastricht treaty and the referendum, we would have achieved Maastricht via a referendum.

The debate on the referendum issue has drawn some very revealing comments from senior Conservative Back Benchers. Time does not permit me to refer to them all. However, I pick up the remarks of the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton), who has apologised to the House for having to leave the debate early. He spoke of contributing to the debate in order to demonstrate his loyalty to the Government. I could not help but reflect that, in his final incarnation in government, he was Chief Whip to the previous leader of the Conservative party, and his loyalty on that occasion did not exactly guarantee her long-term success in that position. Perhaps the Government should not feel too sanguine about his expression of support this afternoon.

The right hon. Gentleman drew several different distinctions. There is a significant difference between a vote on capital punishment, euthanasia or abortion—which are conscience issues, where we must exercise individual conscience and discretion—and a constitutional issue. Even if a constitutional change cannot bind or entrench all future Parliaments, it clearly goes beyond party and influences future Parliaments in a way that decisions that can be revised do not.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) made the standard argument that a referendum is an alien concept, which it is not. There have been referendums on different issues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—and there may be another in Northern Ireland before long.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke of the importance of Members of Parliament exercising personal judgments rather than being beholden to a decision of the electorate. That would carry more force if we did not have the brutalised three-line Whip in the Government and official Opposition. When the right hon. Gentleman was pressed to say whether he would vote against a three-line Whip on the introduction of a single currency involving sterling, he did not answer. We were not to know his personal judgment, faced with that dilemma.

The most unacceptable and ludicrous criticism of a referendum was, "What would you people do if you lost—if you didn't get your way?" It was suggested that would make a mockery of Members of Parliament and of politics. Norway has not come to a standstill because the people of that country reached a decision not in keeping with a large section of the political establishment. One must accept the outcome. One must do as hon. Members on both sides of the House did in the 1970s—campaign gamely against Britain reconfirming her membership of Europe, and campaign year in, year out thereafter to change public opinion. That cannot be a serious criticism of the electoral and democratic process.

The Government are on a hook, but if there was a change of Government now, the new Administration would be impaled on exactly the same problems from its own Back Benches—as we heard and was confirmed this afternoon. The big issue is that the business of politics and the Westminster establishment is becoming more disconnected on this and too many issues from the people. On Europe, not least on Maastricht, we saw that difficulty reflected in other countries.

The political elites and chattering classes have moved too quickly ahead of their respective electorates and have forgotten the basic lesson for us all—we must carry people with us in sufficient numbers if we are to progress in a particular political direction. In a nutshell, that is the case for a referendum.

Mr. MacShane: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kennedy: No, I must conclude.

The problem is that we do not know the Government's direction. The Prime Minister said that the Maastricht criteria

"are a necessary but not a sufficient condition to justify a single currency"—

and that when those were met,

"we shall then consider whether it would be appropriate . . . to proceed".

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said:

"I don't want to see a single currency, period, for as far as I can possible foresee. I would hesitate for an eternity before I came out and said I would vote for a single currency."

The Foreign Secretary said:

"To say either yes or no now to the option which might occur in, say, 1999, would be quixotic and unnecessary. 'Never' is as foolish a word as 'now' in this context."

The Secretary of State for Employment, when Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said:

"A single currency would mean giving up the government of the UK. No British Government can give up the government of the UK. That's impossible."

The President of the Board of Trade said that, if Britain did not take part in work on a single currency,

"the French and Germans will design arrangements in their interests and not ours".

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"It is quite possible to have monetary union without political union. It is a mistake to believe that monetary union need be a huge step on a path to a Federal Europe."

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster provides the greatest quote of all:

"Our position on Europe is absolutely clear".

We must accept that, with the Conservatives, we are offered variety in the marketplace. There is no doubt about that. The bad news for the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who opened the debate—he may not have had the chance to see the 6 o'clock news—is that the clip that the BBC extracted from his speech showed perhaps the most revealing exchange of all. In a devastating intervention, the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) simply asked the

Minister if he agreed with the Prime Minister's statement during the Frost interview, which has become a constitutional event all on its own. The Minister was quoted as saying:

"I think that that is the case still".

A week is a long time in politics and it may not be too long before the Minister's position is being described as unassailable by the Euro-sceptics.

T. S. Eliot wrote:

"In a minute there is time for decisions and revisions which a minute can reverse."

The problem with this Administration is that there are too many minutes, too many decisions and too many reversions and revisions and we do not where the Government stand. I am afraid that Labour has been pretty delphic as well.

The quicker that we get this debate away from this place, where it is harnessed and shackled by divisions and internal politics across and within the parties, and get it outside to let the people decide on any constitutional changes, the better. All the pro-Europeans, as Conservative Members have rightly identified, who make up the majority in this House, would be free from the constraints of parliamentary nonsense and party Whips.

If we argued the case outside this Chamber, we would receive a positive response. It would be good for politics in this country and a lot better for Britain's future in Europe. I commend the motion to the House.

9.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): We have had an interesting debate in which no fewer than eight of my right hon. and hon. Friends have made informed, robust and principled speeches. Although the Liberal Democrats have seemingly paraded and dressed up their principles, it has not been a principled debate. It has been a tawdry and ham-fisted attempt to score short-term party-political advantage. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may guffaw but the truth of that was given by the leader of the Liberal Democrats yesterday in *The Observer*. His article was not headlined in any way to suggest that we should have a principled debate about giving people power—not at all.

The headline in yesterday's edition of *The Observer*, under the name of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), was

"Bring down the Tories tomorrow".

It said nothing about the principle of giving power to the people through a referendum. The right hon. Member said about the Government:

"Tomorrow, the opposition parties could join forces to defeat them, widen their splits over Europe, and hasten their demise."

Are the empty Opposition Benches a sign of what the Liberal Democrats think that they can do?

As the day unwound, we discovered more of the unprincipled nature of what all the ham-fisted charade was about.

"A vicious row has broken out within the Liberal Democrat leadership over a failed attempt to team up with Labour and defeat the Government tonight.

The party's bid to deliver a body-blow to John Major in a Commons vote on a referendum collapsed after Labour said it would not back the move."

We heard of some of the discussions which did not take place, or were alleged to have taken place, between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party. How the attempt to set up a Lib-Lab alliance fell through is unveiled in an extraordinary memo of complaint to the leader of the Liberal Democrats—

Mr. Mackinlay: What about the referendum?

Mr. Baldry: I shall come on to the referendum, but it is important for the hon. Gentleman to realise that Liberal Democrats, who seem to treat the matter as one of considerable amusement for the House, have used one of their supply days to propose a debate on a referendum. The House is entitled to consider their motivation for that.

Their motivation has absolutely nothing to do with referendums. Their motivation was simply short-term political advantage. They thought that they could cobble together a deal with the Labour party. It is a measure of the incompetence of both parties that they are totally incapable of cobbling together any deal whatever. The House and the country are entitled to know that the Liberal Democrats' debate has nothing to do with principles and that it is all about short-term, party-political gain.

Mr. Mackinlay: Can we talk about the referendum now?

Mr. Baldry: I promise that I will talk about the referendum when the hon. Gentleman lets me make progress on this point. It is clear that a memo was sent by the Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] It is interesting that Liberal Members do not deny that such a memo exists. In it, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) claimed that he had been made the scapegoat for this evening's fiasco.

Mr. Menzies Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I shall give way in a moment. It will be interesting to see whether even the Liberal Democrats can get all their Members into the Lobby this evening.

Mr. Campbell: Can the Minister tell me whether in that memo, a copy of which appears to have been stolen from the desk of my assistant, the word "scapegoat" appears anywhere?

Mr. Baldry: I am glad that the hon. and learned Gentleman does not dispute that the memo exists. It says:

"I am a little concerned that in the analysis of the events surrounding our Supply Day on Monday 13 February it seems to be accepted that I misunderstood my 'instructions' in relation to what I was to advise Robin Cook."

Let us therefore have none of this charade about today's debate being a discussion of a political matter of principle. It was about the Liberal Democrats thinking that they could embarrass the Government by cobbling together a deal with the Labour party. That they have lamentably failed to do.

Coming now to my promise to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) to deal with the referendum, that point turns on a very narrow compass. From our point of view it is quite straightforward; the Prime Minister put it in a straightforward way:

"I do not believe anything is going to happen in that conference that would remotely justify a referendum, I do not think it is going to deal with constitutional matters . . . if anything that involved

[Mr. Baldry]

significant constitutional change were raised in the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference we, the British, would not accept it, so the question of a referendum would not arise."

As we all know, the only possible reason for anyone offering a referendum on the 1996 IGC would be if the party in question were prepared to accept constitutional change in those negotiations. Such constitutional change might include ending the veto, extending qualified majority voting, giving massive new powers to the European Parliament or providing a firm commitment to a single currency. The Government's position could not be clearer. We do not think that significant constitutional matters will be discussed at the 1996 IGC. If they were discussed, we would not accept them, so the question of a referendum would not arise.

Today's debate, however, was never intended to be about a referendum. The Liberal Democrats simply thought that they might find something with which to entice the Labour party into the Lobby with them. In that, they lamentably failed.

Mr. Marlow: The IGC and the single currency have both been mentioned a great deal. The Minister who opened the debate said that the Prime Minister wanted a flexible Europe. Can my hon. Friend tell the House whether a flexible Europe is consistent with a single currency?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend put that question earlier in the debate. We have made our position on a single currency very clear. It is unlikely that anyone would want to go ahead with a single currency in 1996 or 1997. If anyone did so, the United Kingdom would not be with them.

In the longer term we have been concerned to point out that a single currency, launched in the wrong conditions, could tear the European Union apart—

Madam Speaker: Order. I should like to see the Minister's face rather more often.

Mr. Baldry: Sorry, Madam Speaker, I was trying to answer my hon. Friend's point.

Madam Speaker: Through the Chair, please.

Mr. Baldry: There has been a danger throughout the debate of trying to deal with hypotheses. Perhaps I may make it clear beyond peradventure to you, Madam Speaker, that, for the Government, this evening's motion turns on an extremely narrow compass. It is about a referendum. We do not see that circumstances are ever going to arise in which a referendum will be needed for the 1996 IGC because, as we have made clear, no substantial constitutional issues will arise. If they do, we shall vote against them.

For the reasons I have set out, we do not consider that it is worth voting on the motion. It has been brought forward for short-term, party political gain, and I advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to abstain.

9.55 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): It is unusual to have the opportunity to speak at this time when the House is debating a motion. I think that the opportunity should be taken for a number of brief reasons.

First, the emphasis tonight has been placed on people. That is absolutely right because Parliament—all of us—refer to the people for power, and that power is a trust. Tonight, in Dresden, they are talking about what happened in Coventry. Many people, both inside and outside the House, look to the treaties that we have been discussing—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps those sitting in front of me will listen to my remarks, because I am addressing them especially.

There are many who look to the treaties as a means of ensuring that Dresden and Coventry do not ever happen again, and that people in all the nations of Europe and all parts of Europe live together in a degree of harmony. That is what all of us and all our constituents want.

The problem is that many think that the treaties that are before us, and on which there could be a referendum, are not the way forward. The treaties confine us in our choices. The choice of the people in future will be denied when it comes to a balance of private and public enterprise, the borrowing requirement or what Chancellors of the Exchequer can do. Narrow, nasty nationalism, both here and in other parts of the European continent, is likely to be fanned and inflamed rather than prevented. I believe that profoundly because of the constitutional analysis of the treaties.

It is unfortunate that there has not been sufficient information about any of the treaties which Conservative Members and their friends have passed without reference to the people. The treaties are with us because of an election during which the issues were not put to the people. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and his successors had no general election mandate for the treaties. Any matters of this sort that we are called upon to deal with in future must be accompanied by absolutely full information.

The Government have not even rewritten and republished the treaties that we are talking about. The so-called Maastricht treaty was a treaty on union. The treaty that preceded it, the Single European Act, and the original treaty of Rome form a uniform and entire volume. The Government have not printed it. They are suppressing information at almost every stage. Everyone who is in favour of the treaties wants them not to be understood.

Once they are understood, the chances of a peaceful and prosperous Europe that we all want to see—I helped to rebuild Hamburg after the war and the terrible fires there—will be much less good. There must be co-operation and no coercion. There must be consent, not coercion by political and economic forces, which is implicit in the treaties. The treaties must be examined in far greater detail than we have been able to do this evening or on previous occasions when they have been debated.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 47, Noes 3.

Division No. 71] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Barnes, Harry	Cash, William
Beith, Rt Hon A J	Chidgey, David
Bendall, Vivian	Corbyn, Jeremy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Bennett, Andrew F	Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Harvey, Nick
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Simon Hughes

NOES

Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Rathbone, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Marlow and
Mr. Andrew Welsh

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes that the popular assent of the people of the United Kingdom should be sought through a referendum before any substantial alteration of the present constitutional settlement between the European Union and its member states.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Despite the abstention of Labour and Conservative Front-Bench speakers, which one assumes was based on collusion for their own purposes, the House has unambiguously voted by a clear majority in favour of the motion moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). Would it be in order during tomorrow's business to have a statement from a Minister telling us how the Government intend to give effect to the recorded wishes of the House?

Madam Speaker: If a Minister wishes to make a statement tomorrow, I shall, of course, permit such a statement.

Mr. Streeter: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As the Division was unwhipped, can we be sure that everyone has left the Aye Lobby? I am particularly concerned that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) might still be there, because they have not voted for their own motion. Could you look into that, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: I do not look into the way in which hon. Members vote, but when I was a Whip I was what was called a sweeper and I ensured that everybody was swept out of the Lobby before the Doors were closed.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Before this shambles is over, we should have it recorded that the person who moved the motion for the referendum, for which I voted, was not in the Lobby. When I went in I could not find the leader of the Liberal Democrat party at all.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order. The way in which hon. Members vote is not a matter for me.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Surely it is contempt of the House for the leader of the Liberal Democrats not to be here for the declaration of the outcome of the Division. I do not know whether he was in the Aye Lobby because I was not in that one. The right hon. Gentleman was not here when we had an important vote on the future of the common fisheries policy. He certainly did not vote on that occasion.

Madam Speaker: No point of order arises. The whereabouts of hon. Members is not a matter for me.

Mr. Salmond: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. There was a serious point of order containing an allegation of collusion between the Labour and Tory parties. Seemingly it falls short of collusion to deny the House the right to vote on a motion. Is that the sort of matter on which you have powers to investigate—deliberate collusion between Labour and Tory Front-Bench spokesmen to deny the House a vote on this matter?

Madam Speaker: Internal politics or politics between one party and another is not a matter for me. When a Division is called, Members should be here to vote as they wish. I am not interested at all in inter-party warfare, inter-party rivalry or inter-party loving because we are now close to St. Valentine's day.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. We have just had a vote on a referendum and the House has voted by a far larger majority for that referendum than it did for the Maastricht treaty. Would it be in order to have a referendum on the Maastricht treaty?

Madam Speaker: I do not deal with matters in retrospect.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance. I am desperately concerned about Scottish affairs. The Scottish National party appears to be voting in two ways—its leader votes one way and its Whip another. That gives me cause for concern about the future of Scotland and the possibility of referendums on Scottish matters.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that that is not a point of order, but a point of view. It should be expressed on another occasion, not through an abuse of the House on a point of order.

Mr. MacShane: On a point of order, Madam Speaker—the first point of order that I have raised since I have been a Member of the House. I am very much wearing my 'L' plates.

Madam Speaker: That is why I called the hon. Gentleman. I knew that it was his first point of order.

Mr. MacShane: Can you, Madam Speaker, give me some guidance on whether a vote that commands only 6 per cent. of the Members of the House has any validity

[Mr. MacShane]

and whether if, as I hope, one day there may have to be a referendum on Europe, you will encourage more than 6 per cent. of the population of this country to take part?

Madam Speaker: Referendums in this country have absolutely nothing to do with me. I am concerned only with ensuring that Divisions in this House are carried out properly and correctly, and this one was.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Would it be in order to have a teach-in so that the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) can understand the difference between being a teller and actually voting and, further, understand how being a teller can show the collusion between the Labour and Tory Front Benches, acting together to prevent a fair vote in the House?

Madam Speaker: I thought that I had dealt with that point, but if I did not do so adequately the hon. Gentleman has just done so.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. How many more points of order are we to have?

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As some hon. Members believe that it is highly significant that the House has just carried a vote by a majority of 44, which may require a statement from the Leader of the House, was not Friday's business also very significant in that the majority was four times larger for the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Should not that also require a statement to the House?

Madam Speaker: I do not think that that is a point of order for me. The House makes its own decisions on these matters.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) questioned whether tellers counted in the vote. Can you confirm that the requirement to have 40 hon. Members present and voting means 36 hon. Members plus the tellers and that, in fact, those who are tellers count as having voted?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As you raised the point about sweeping, may I point out that I was sweeping in the Aye Lobby and I can assure you that no one was left in the Lobby? Those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who were referred to earlier were, in fact, absent with the permission of our Chief Whip—but, as was quite clear, their presence was not necessary as we had a very large majority without them.

Madam Speaker: I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman follows my example of being a very good sweeper.

LIAISON

Ordered,

That Mr. Robert B. Jones be discharged from the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

Devon and Cornwall

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): Whatever the issues being debated earlier in the Chamber, I am delighted now to be raising the single most pressing issue facing Cornwall and Devon, which is how we can create jobs and build economic prosperity in one of the most deprived areas of the United Kingdom.

Many people, not least Members of Parliament, seem to be surprised to hear the far south-west described as one of the most deprived areas of the UK. It is a cliché to say that the area is more often thought of in terms of its reputation for beauty and long childhood holidays on our beaches and moors. However, local people cannot live on holidays alone, or even on the income from other people's holidays. The fact is that, on any measure, the area is exceptionally deprived.

In the past, claims about the relative deprivation of the region have been met with some disbelief. There has been a tendency to see that as insular moaning or just a few more wild claims by the Liberal Democrats—all the more so when we have argued that, in contrast to our high deprivation, we have suffered from low Government economic support.

However, any such sceptics—ministerial or otherwise—should have been firmly answered last year by the two Coopers and Lybrand reports commissioned by the Westcountry development corporation. Those reports put our case firmly on an independent, non-partisan basis. It is those reports and the case for a fair deal from the Government that I want to put to the Minister tonight, and on which we look for Government action.

The first report was published in June last year. It sought to compare both the needs and resources of Cornwall and Devon with those of the other regions of the United Kingdom. It spelled out starkly the reality of the deprivation to which I have referred, and the way in which the region's position had become steadily worse in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom since the early 1980s at least.

Let me take some of the report's key indicators one by one. The proportion of Cornwall and Devon with a high unemployment level is substantially higher than any other region in the UK. Outside the tourist season, my own county has several areas in the top 10 unemployment black spots in the UK. In December 1993, our unemployment levels were the third highest of any counties in the UK—higher than Teesside, Tyneside and all Welsh and Scottish counties.

Moreover, between 1990 and 1993, the proportion of long-term unemployed increased by 75 per cent. in the UK, but by 110 per cent. in Plymouth, by more than 150 per cent. in 16 out of the 24 travel-to-work areas in our region, and by 200 per cent. in five travel-to-work areas locally.

Even for people in work, the picture is not much better. Average full-time male earnings in Devon are 7 per cent. below the regional average. In Cornwall, they are 16 per cent. below, the second lowest in the UK. Moreover, between 1981 and 1991, the south-west increased its gross domestic product per head relative to the UK average, but the figures for Cornwall and Devon fell to just 83 per cent. of the average. The figure for Cornwall fell to just 72.9 per cent. of the average. People in our two counties, therefore, are not just poor; they are falling further and further behind the rest of the UK.

In most areas of low income and high unemployment, there is at least the relative compensation of low costs of living, especially housing costs. A number of factors combine in our area, however, to reverse that natural state of affairs. First, high population growth has occurred from two sources: retirement from the south-east, and families seeking the good life that they expect on the basis of remembered summer holidays during their childhood. With houses to sell in London and the south-east, they have had the money to bid up house prices locally to some of the highest levels outside the well-paid areas of the south-east.

Secondly, the Government's policy of privatising the public utilities has led to high charges for those services, caused by the relative expense of supplying a far-flung, sparsely populated area. Privatisation led to the abandonment of national charging structures. As a result, the cost of water in Cornwall and Devon is more than 50 per cent. above the national average. The cost of electricity is 7 per cent. more than the national average.

That means, as the Coopers and Lybrand report shows, that the average cost of living, including housing, for manual households in Devon and Cornwall has consistently been 7 to 10 per cent. above the national average, even after the effects of the recession. Those figures are comparable with those for Hampshire, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire, where wages are certainly not up to 16 per cent. below the national average, and where unemployment is not higher than in Teesside, Tyneside Wales or Scotland.

The final critical group of factors highlighted by the Coopers and Lybrand report are the so-called demographic ones. First, both Devon and Cornwall are areas of rapid population growth, for reasons that I referred to earlier. Cornwall's population growth has been in the top six in the UK. That ranks it with areas such as Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Berkshire, Dorset and Suffolk. The difference is that all those areas had high economic growth, and so the jobs to match. We did not.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Is there not a paradox? The hon. Gentleman rightly mentions the population increase, but why have those people come to Cornwall? I do not argue against the case he is making; I agree with it. However, is there not some merit in the argument that at least some of those people are coming to Cornwall, and boosting its population growth, to be unemployed for the reasons that he has stated—it is a pleasant place to live, and they enjoy all sorts of other benefits from coming to Cornwall.

Does he agree that the position is not as clear cut as his assessment might suggest, although I am not arguing against the case that he will make about a fairer share for Cornwall?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman must have seen the detailed statistics that I have seen. The overwhelming majority of people are from the two groups to which I referred—they have retired and are therefore not coming to Cornwall to work; or they tend to be families who are under the misapprehension that the area is relatively wealthy. That is what they remember from their childhood

[Mr. Taylor]

holidays. I am sure that, like me, the hon. Gentleman has at surgeries met people who have often moved to the area without a job, found it virtually impossible to obtain one and then come to us to help them get back to in the area from which they came. Secondly, the high proportion of elderly people impacts on expenditure for local health, social security, housing and personal social services.

If the Coopers and Lybrand report merely set out those problems, it would be useful but hardly dramatic, hardly news. Whenever Members of Parliament, business people or others have in the past pressed the case for Cornwall and Devon with Ministers, we have used similar arguments, but Ministers have always replied—I expect that the same will happen tonight—by stating the levels of Government assistance to the region. For example, Ministers point to the funding for the Plymouth development corporation, the increase in assisted areas and support for European funding eligibility for the region.

No one is suggesting that there is no support—we do not disagree with Ministers in that respect—but the question is, how does it compare to that given to others, and how does it compare to the scale of the problem? The Coopers and Lybrand report draws up a balance sheet to compare the needs of Cornwall and Devon with those of other regions of the United Kingdom and the comparative levels of assistance. It is in the latter respect that the difference is stark.

Figures for overall central Government expenditure per head for all English regions between 1987 and 1992 show that the south-west receives the third lowest amount. Only the east midlands and East Anglia get less, but they have fewer elderly and unemployed people, and stronger local economies. Overall, identified levels of Government spending in the region have averaged up to 10 per cent. lower than the average for all English regions. Indeed, Government expenditure per head of population in the south west was below the average of all English regions for every Department.

In comparison to Wales and Scotland, which face a similar range and intensity of economic problems, our revenue from central Government was exceptionally low. Scotland received £530 million, or more than £103 per head; Wales received £187 million, or more than £64 per head; but Devon and Cornwall received just £51 million, or just £31 per head. I remind the House, however, that, according to most data, we are worse off than Wales or Scotland.

The extent of the underfunding to our two counties relative to our needs is further illustrated by reference to some specific programmes. Despite the fact that Cornwall ranked third and Devon 21st out of the 64 counties in the unemployment league in 1993, DTI and Department of Employment regional spending was more than 25 per cent. less than the average English norm.

Regional development grants to Cornwall and Devon accounted for 2 per cent. of regional development corporation spending yet the two counties accounted for 3 per cent. of the United Kingdom's assisted area population. Even if Devon and Cornwall received all the south-west region's allocation of urban programme funding, we would still have received less than half the allocation that we would have received had it been handed out across the country on a per head basis, irrespective of need.

The conclusion of the report is clear. Not only do we suffer especially great economic problems in the region, but

"Devon and Cornwall in particular, receive significantly lower levels of Government spending than other parts of the UK".

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): At the beginning of his speech, my hon. Friend mentioned the importance of tourism to the two counties of Devon and Cornwall. Is he aware that more than six times as much per head of population is spent promoting tourism in Scotland than in our area? Can he cast any light on the comment by the Prime Minister when he visited our region, that people inherently know that the south-west is there when they are considering going on holiday, but that, for some reason, Scotland, Wales, the lake district and other areas need promotion?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right about the figures, but I am sorry that I cannot explain the Prime Minister's comments. I can only imagine that they were made in an effort to undermine the support of the remaining Conservative Members in the region. That was certainly the effect they had among those in the tourist industry.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Like the hon. Gentleman, I have read the Coopers and Lybrand report, and I have drawn similar conclusions from it. How does he think the imbalance should be redressed? Should the Government give less funding to Scotland and Wales? Is that what the Liberal Democrat party thinks? Is the hon. Gentleman asking the Government to make more money available for the west country in addition to what is spent in Scotland and Wales? I should be glad to know what the Liberal Democrat policy is.

Mr. Taylor: Since the hon. Gentleman agrees with the report, it would be interesting to know what he thinks. Presumably he thinks that funding should come from other areas, since he is not in favour of any increase in spending. My view, as a south-west Member of Parliament, is that I want to get a fair deal for the area so we are not disadvantaged.

Mr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Taylor: Let me finish answering the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter). I said that he asked his question on behalf of the hon. Member for St. Ives, and the hon. Gentleman must let me answer it.

The simple fact is that I want to see a level playing field, so that the area is not disadvantaged. If that means that other areas get cuts in their funding, so be it. However, The Liberal Democrats have put forward costed policy programmes which would see increased investment in getting people back to work. We would argue that ultimately taxes can be lower and everyone can be more prosperous if we get people back to work and paying taxes. That is the best way of cutting the budget deficit.

If the hon. Member for Sutton does not want see more Government investment—I suspect that that is the case—the conclusion must be that some money currently spent in other areas would have to come to our area.

Mr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Taylor: Perhaps the hon. Member for St. Ives will explain whether he is in favour of cutting funding for other areas, or whether he believes that the Government should be spending more than the present Budget.

Mr. Harris: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has touched on this point. Do the Scottish Members of his party agree that help that is given to Scotland and Wales—particularly Scotland—should be cut? Do all the Scottish Members say that Scotland should have less so that the south-west can have more? That is certainly my view.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to my answer. In our costed programmes—we are the only Opposition party which puts forward costed programmes—we have argued for increased investment, so it would not be necessary to make cuts. I believe that we should make cuts in other areas if that is the only way to even spending. I assume that the hon. Member for St. Ives takes the same view.

Mr. Harris: Certainly.

Mr. Taylor: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has asked the Secretary of State for Scotland about that. I would expect the Secretary of State for Scotland to defend his own area, just as I expect Scottish Liberal Democrat Members to defend their area. I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman thinks he has made at the end of that tortuous interchange.

The conclusion of the report was clear, and it was presented to the Prime Minister last July. He asked the regional director of the Government office in the south-west to produce further reports for him. That request led to the second Coopers and Lybrand report, this time prepared in conjunction with the Government office. I stress that it was prepared in conjunction with the Government regional office, just in case doubts remain in the Minister's mind about the probity of its findings.

Briefly, the report focused in more detail on the economic indicators. Most of them were familiar from the first report, but it added that Cornwall and Devon could face the seventh highest fall in agricultural employment of any of the 181 European regions; the increase in the region's work force between 1991 and 1997 is likely to outstrip employment growth by a factor of three, among the highest in the UK and Europe; and the region received the lowest level of foreign inward investment among all of the UK regions from 1982-1983 to 1993-1994. All the problems which I have identified in the present policies from the Government will worsen in the coming years.

Most crucial of all is the conclusion of the second report, drawn up in co-operation with the Government's own regional office. The report said:

"In terms of resource allocation the July 1994 report concluded that, because of the rapidly increasing levels of need in Devon and Cornwall over recent years, there appeared to be a strong case for the area to receive increased levels of Government assistance. We believe the issues documented in this report reinforce this case, which needs to be addressed at an early date if the area's regeneration is to take full advantage of the upturn in the economy more generally."

The message to the Minister tonight from the south-west is simple. The fact that Devon, and particularly Cornwall, have special economic problems is irrefutable. That case has been agreed by Conservative Members, although they attempted to make some party-political points while agreeing. Those problems are spelt out by the Government's figures.

We acknowledge the support that we receive in the region for tackling those problems, but, as the report makes clear, the support does not match that given to other regions with comparable problems. We get far less support than many regions that have far fewer problems—so much so, that one of the greatest concerns among the farmers who came here to meet us a week or so ago, among businesses, among the Devon and Cornwall training and enterprise council and among those in the Westcountry development corporation, is that we cannot even afford the matching funding demanded by the European aid that we are now entitled to after Europe recognised the problems that we face.

Let me be clear: we believe that we can be successful in Cornwall and Devon. As the report states, we have an exceptional environment, high levels of educational achievement, good labour availability—naturally—with high-quality skills. We have a tradition of local entrepreneurship and innovation, with the highest levels of self-employment in the country. We have a core of high-quality businesses in both manufacturing and services, and a public sector committed—under the Liberal Democrats—to regeneration and developing a significant track record of working in partnership with the private sector.

We are prepared to help ourselves—as we have shown—through a wide range of innovative local initiatives. I shall quote from the Westcountry development corporation again:

"If there was a level playing field for economic development, the combination of the opportunities and a region prepared to help itself could put Devon and Cornwall in the forefront of regional prosperity. But there is not a level playing field".

That is the point.

When Howard Davies, director general of the Confederation of British Industry, visited Plymouth in January, he said:

"I think the business community here feels that Government support—if we look at the profile of Government support for the region—is relatively low.

There is a strong argument for that to be higher and they would like that argument to be pressed more vocally by Members of Parliament."

Tonight, that argument is being pressed.

The south-west wants to hear just one thing tonight. Will the Government promise action to give us, not a special deal, but at long last, at least a fair deal?

10.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): I am grateful for the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government to the report on the economic needs of Devon and Cornwall. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, we welcome any analysis of this sort that helps us to gain a clearer perspective of the needs of a region. I assure the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) that the needs of his region are very much in the Government's mind.

[Mr. Jonathan Evans]

The Government regularly receive representations from Members in the south-west, and I note that many of them are present in the House tonight. My hon. Friends the Members for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks), for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) and for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) are present. I have also received representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe). It was a recognition of the Government's concern for the area that lay behind our decision to set up an office specifically for Devon and Cornwall in Plymouth last year as part of the Government office for the south-west.

The Coopers and Lybrand report suggests that various programmes across Government inadequately reflected the needs of the region. That is the thrust of the remarks of the hon. Member for Truro. That thesis is based on an analysis of various data and a number of comparisons with other areas. Let me make it absolutely clear that I do not suggest for one moment that there are not areas of need in parts of Devon and Cornwall, but I believe that we need also to ensure that we get all the facts straight, so I shall make a number of observations.

The report claims that the gross domestic product for Devon and Cornwall is one of the lowest in the country. However, more than one in five of the population of the region are over the age of 60—that is the second highest figure for any region in Europe and necessarily distorts any calculations on GDP. The unemployment data, which were mentioned by the hon. Gentleman and were presented in the report, are selective and rather dated. The figures given for travel-to-work areas are from 1993.

The report makes another significant omission. Between December 1992, when there was peak unemployment, and December 1994, Cornwall achieved a reduction in unemployment of 19.4 per cent. and Devon fared even better, with a reduction of 20.4 per cent.

I turn to the issue of inward investment. We want to encourage competitiveness and promote inward investment. By doing so, we aim to maximise the economic potential of the region and to increase prosperity. It is worth recording that 1993-94 was a record year for inward investment in Devon and Cornwall, with nine successful projects. The current year will exceed that, with no fewer than 17 successful projects, resulting in at least £46 million of investment and almost 1,400 jobs likely to be created or safeguarded.

I turn now to some of the things that the Government are currently doing to stimulate the economy of Devon and Cornwall. First, as the hon. Member for Truro rightly said, in relation to European funding, the Government, in partnership with local organisations, successfully negotiated substantial amounts of aid for the area from the European Union. More than £200 million of European funding will be available to Devon and Cornwall in the next six years. That is about £140 for every person in Devon and Cornwall. All of Cornwall, and much of Devon, is now eligible for objective 5b funding.

The objective 5b programme for rural areas will provide about another £170 million and, bearing in mind the remarks that the hon. Gentleman made about Wales, an area that I am not altogether unconnected with, it is worth saying that that figure is greater than all the spending in all of the areas subject to objective 5b status in the Principality.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): In the case of Wales, in which my hon. Friend's constituency lies, most of the funding is direct grant aid, but in the case of Devon and Cornwall, it is matching money. As we do not have large industry, it is naturally very difficult for the private sector to match the potential availability of funding to which my hon. Friend refers. So it is not valid to compare Wales with Devon and Cornwall.

Mr. Evans: I mentioned the matter specifically in the context of objective 5b spending, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is no comparison in context of the levels of support given to Wales and Scotland and to England.

I think that my hon. Friend well recognises that Government programmes are drawn up on the basis that there is, to start with, a split of funding between Wales, Scotland and England, and then within England, on the basis of agreed formulae. However, I mentioned the matter in relation to objective 5b status because it is a valid argument, although I am not suggesting—I think my hon. Friend understands that—that the south-west receives the same type of deal as Wales does. No one suggests that that is the case.

Mr. Harris: In fact there is nothing much between, if I may say so, the Members representing constituencies in Cornwall from either side of the House on that matter. Our grumble is that we are not obtaining in Cornwall the same type of deal that Wales, which my hon. Friend represents as a constituency Member of Parliament, obtains, and that we feel that the way in which those things are organised goes against the interests of Cornwall.

Will my hon. Friend discuss the question that I asked the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor)? Surely it would be wrong to increase the total of aid given. We want a level playing field so that we in Cornwall are treated in exactly the way that Members with constituencies in Wales are treated. Does my hon. Friend accept the argument that there must be a fair way of dealing between those of us in Cornwall and those in Wales specifically?

Mr. Evans: As I have made clear, the way in which public funding is arranged is that there are different allocations in relation to Wales, Scotland and England. In the case of England, as many of the larger programmes are formula-based, the view of the Government has been that, until such time as other information is available from my hon. Friends and from Members of Parliament from the region—

Mr. Matthew Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose—*

Mr. Evans: With respect, the view of the Government has been that funding has largely been based on equal criteria throughout England. Therefore, I think that it is important to consider the report in that context. My hon.

Friend mentioned the correlation with the situation in Wales, but I think that it is recognised that the situation is different.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I am conscious of the fact that there is not much time left, and I do not wish to embarrass the Minister by pushing the point about Wales.

As I made clear in my speech, there are comparisons with the rest of England which raise similar questions. The Government have received the report, but they have made no formal response to it. Do the Government plan to publish any kind of formal response? Will the Minister meet hon. Members from Cornwall and Devon to discuss the issue, because I think that there is cross-party concern about it, and therefore such a meeting would prove useful?

Mr. Evans: The time and the number of interventions that have occurred during both the hon. Gentleman's and my speech will prevent me from explaining the wide range of points to which I wanted to refer. It is absolutely clear—I have seen the correspondence between the Government office in the south-west and Mr. Boxall, who is the chief executive of the Westcountry development corporation—that there has been on-going dialogue for some time.

A letter written by the Government office on 7 December 1994 makes it clear that Mr. Leonard outlined the steps to be taken in another letter at that time. A letter of 19 December 1994 from the Westcountry development corporation to Mr. Leonard refers to the fact that the issue might be raised in an adjournment debate in the House once Mr. Leonard's report had been supplied to the Government.

So far, the Government have not received Mr. Leonard's report, although we have received the report from Coopers and Lybrand. The Government are very concerned to analyse and to consider the contents of the report, but this debate has taken place before the report has come from the Government office in the south-west.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Will he confirm that, when he has all the information in front of him, he will be prepared to meet hon. Members from both counties in order to examine the formula that we are concerned is simply not giving us a fair deal or providing an even playing field?

Mr. Evans: The correspondence that has taken place and the subsequent discussions with my hon. Friends to which I referred earlier indicate that there is on-going dialogue between the Government and hon. Members. The office of the Department of Trade and Industry is always open to hon. Members to discuss those matters.

However, I make it clear that at this point the Government have not received the report that is referred to in the correspondence. When it is received, the door of the DTI will be open to anyone who wishes to raise further points about it.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 14 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

DOUBLE TAXATION RELIEF

The VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Addresses praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Azerbaijan) Order 1994, the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Malta) Order 1994, the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Republic of Ireland) Order 1994 and the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Spain) Order 1994 be made in the form of the drafts laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

NHS Reorganisation

1. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a further statement on the current reorganisation of the NHS.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The national health service reforms provide a stable and enduring structure to the health service which will enable it to respond flexibly to the changing needs of patients. I am pleased that good progress is being made in Committee on the Health Authorities Bill. We are completing the unfinished business of the reforms, streamlining management and cutting bureaucracy.

The House will also know that I have issued today new guidance on NHS appointments. Those appointed to NHS organisations overwhelmingly give outstanding service. The guidance, based on current best practice, will ensure that appointments continue to be made on merit and that the process is open and fair and commands the confidence of the public and staff.

Mr. Mackinlay: How did the reorganised national health service respond to the flexible and changing needs of Mark Dwan? Will the Secretary of State tell us why she had to see the Lord Chancellor and what was discussed?

Mrs. Bottomley: There is great pressure on medium-secure beds. When the Labour party was in power, the Glancy report recommended medium-secure beds. By 1979, there were none. There are now 700, together with almost 1,000 other medium-secure beds. We are spending £47 million to produce an extra 600 next year. I shall be taking steps to make sure that the court authorities are aware of the way of making contact with those most directly responsible for the provision and arrangement of medium-secure beds.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: My right hon. colleague will be aware that one of the parts of the national health service being reorganised is the blood transfusion service. She may be aware that a petition on this matter was presented to her office this morning. Unfortunately, she was too busy to receive it. She may nevertheless be aware that we have a quite outstanding blood transfusion centre in Lancaster and it would be criminal folly to abolish it.

Mrs. Bottomley: I much regret that it was not possible to meet my hon. Friend, who is a great champion of the service. She will understand that, with the publication of new guidance on appointments to health authorities and trusts, it has been an extremely busy morning. There is, however, a distinction between improvement and management of the service and, of course, development of improved services for patients and making sure that blood donors have the best possible service. As she will know, the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), has been closely involved in these matters and he and I will look carefully at my hon. Friend's recommendations.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Secretary of State expand a little on the statement that was made earlier about the procedures being set out for the establishment of appointments to NHS organisations? Does she accept that some of us are disappointed that she has not accepted the advice of the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts that there should be an independent element in that procedure? From my reading of the statement, I believe that there is no such element. Why has she set her face against that?

Mrs. Bottomley: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will look at the guidance very carefully. Essentially, it puts into one manual best practice as it has been organised throughout the health service for some time.

We want to advertise widely for people to come forward to ensure that there is proper scrutiny of the names by non-executives who have a range of skills. We need people who understand how the health service works and who are involved in either a health authority or a trust to do that. They may bring outside expertise from the private or public sectors—for example, as a lecturer or a vicar—in vetting those names.

Regions may also wish to add the names of total outsiders. However, on balance, we believe that it is best for the names to be scrutinised by people who are involved in health service delivery. We want excellent people to help us to do the work. The hon. Gentleman will know that in his party Baroness Thomas and many others who are appointed on merit do excellent work within the health service.

Mr. Couchman: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Mrs. Cathy Hull, the wife of the deputy Labour leader of Rochester upon Medway city

council, on her recent appointment as a non-executive director and in wishing her a long and successful time in that position?

Mrs. Bottomley: I certainly will congratulate my hon. Friend's colleague. People from all political parties as well as those with no political affiliations serve on health authorities and trusts. We want people with ability and commitment who share a vision of having the best health service in the world. Overwhelmingly, those who serve on health authorities and trusts work to achieve that goal. However, we need greater openness and public understanding of the work involved to encourage more people to come forward.

Mr. Hinchliffe: In the mad scramble to establish a market in health, what consideration has been given to the implications for other services, such as child protection? Will the Secretary of State accept that it is astonishing that the recent consultation document on general practitioner fundholding made no reference to the importance of GP fundholders liaising with local social service departments and with area child protection committees? Does she accept that the increasing practice of GP fundholders purchasing crucial services, such as health visiting provision, from outside their areas is completely undermining—as she, with her background, should know better than anyone else—child protection collaboration at a local level and that it may cost lives?

Mrs. Bottomley: Of course the hon. Gentleman is right: collaboration between agencies is fundamental to service delivery in many areas, including child protection. However, I dispute the hon. Gentleman's knee-jerk attack on the market system. I can only quote Chris Ham who says:

> "The old system of planning by decibels, in which those running hospital services exerted most influence, has been replaced by an arrangement in which health authorities and GPs are in a much better position to shape the direction of the service development".

The hon. Gentleman may also consult either *The Lancet* or the recent edition of the *Fabian Review* which condemn the Labour party's lack of vision in this area.

General Practitioners, London

2. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the London area are estimated to be registered with (a) two general practitioners and (b) more than two general practitioners; at what cost to public funds; and if she will make a statement.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): The problem is being tackled at a local level by individual family health services authorities and the information is not available centrally. Dual registration affects the distribution of general practitioners' remuneration but not the overall cost.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that we meet in the high court of Parliament and that Parliament can handle questions to Ministers about beds, GPs and anything else? What is being done to improve the administration of the health service to ensure that people do not appear on more than one GP list? It is a waste of taxpayers' money which could be better spent elsewhere in the health service.

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is quite right: dual registration causes damage. It causes difficulties in assessing local health needs, and that is why we must work to solve the problem. It also means that some general practitioners receive funding, over and above that of their counterparts, which they do not deserve. However, I assure my hon. Friend that that does not increase the sum of global public expenditure. In my hon. Friend's own area of Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow, a list inflation team has been established to complete a number of important checks, which will, I hope, move towards the elimination of that problem.

Trent Regional Health Authority

3. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what savings she expects to result from the abolition of Trent regional health authority.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): By 1997-98, the total annual savings solely from the abolition of regional health authorities are expected to be in excess of £100 million.

Mr. Garnier: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the number of patients waiting for more than a year has fallen by 4,200 in the last quarter and that no patients in the region are waiting longer than 18 months? Will he assure me that any savings that he makes from the abolition of the region will be reinvested in increasing the standard and speed of patient care?

Mr. Sackville: Yes. I congratulate Trent region on its many achievements, which will be further augmented by its share of the £100 million a year that will be saved from the abolition of the regions. Why the Labour party should wish to oppose the abolition of the regions and take that money away from patient care, heaven alone knows.

Mr. Redmond: The Minister must be aware that, since the reorganisations introduced by the Government in 1979, administration has increased enormously. No one believes that the £100 million will be put into health care to reduce the waiting list. Why does not he get back to the good old days, when 3.5 per cent. of staff in areas such as Doncaster were administrative staff? That is the service that people want to have, not quangos on quangos.

Mr. Sackville: On the good old days, I can tell the hon. Gentleman only that we are treating many more patients than we did in those days; people are living longer; infant mortality is lower; and waiting times are smaller. Let him choose which he prefers.

Asthma

4. **Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she intends to include asthma as a condition for special attention in "The Health of the Nation".

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): "The Health of the Nation"

White Paper designates asthma as a strong contender for key area status. Further consideration would be necessary before national targets could be set.

Dr. Howells: What further information does the Minister need than the continuing rising incidence of asthma, and its links with atmospheric pollution from vehicles, factories, and so on? Why will he not take notice of the excellent example set by the Welsh Office, which has set achievable targets for the reduction of asthma, included as a key area in "The Health of the Nation"? Let us start to cure children and others who are suffering from that dreadful illness.

Mr. Bowis: We, too, take that matter very seriously. Of course, we are interested in what our Welsh colleagues are aiming at and are able to achieve. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have a major research programme into asthma. Causes are unknown; triggers are known. We want to see which triggers can be tackled, and whether we can find causes. The hon. Gentleman will know that, during 1994, we invested some £5 million in new research, and some 14 projects are under way. As and when they come to fruition, we will, perhaps, be in a better position to set realisable targets. In the meantime, of course, our GPs are working to great effect in helping sufferers from asthma to manage their illness.

Sir Peter Emery: Does my hon. Friend not realise that five people a day die from asthma and that is the one major disease to which reference should be made in "The Health of the Nation"? If it can be done in Wales, for goodness sake we should be able to do it in England.

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend puts a strong case. It is something which, as we have said, has been identified as a potential key area. But there are criteria for our health of the nation key targets: first, the fact that it is a major cause of preventable death and avoidable ill health that is certainly met; secondly, which effective interventions are possible—that is partially met; and thirdly, that it is possible to set targets.

What I am saying to my right hon. Friend is, not yet, but we are doing the research to see how it can best be moved forward. In the meantime, I reiterate that much of the work, as the National Asthma Campaign has said, is within schools, within GPs' practices, and the work there is excellent. Some 90 per cent. of GPs are signed up to the chronic disease management programme.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: "The Health of the Nation" talks about tackling the variations in health between groups in the population. Is it the Government's view that poverty is a health issue?

Mr. Bowis: If the hon. Gentleman has read the latest edition of *Doctor*, he will have noted that a number of doctors have identified different asthma triggers, ranging from housing to harvesting and from smoking to factory dust. All those elements can cause asthma, and in all those contexts prevention is possible. Individuals can change their life styles, doctors can help asthma sufferers to manage their condition and school nurses can play an enormous part in helping children to cope, and helping teachers to help children to cope.

Osteoporosis

5. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she proposes to take in response to the report of the advisory group on osteoporosis; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: My noble Friend Baroness Cumberlege announced on 31 January that we had accepted the advice contained in the report of the advisory group on osteoporosis.

Mr. Sims: Is my hon. Friend aware that the report's publication and the Government's acceptance of all its recommendations have been warmly welcomed? He will know that one woman in four is affected by the complaint. Is he aware that a survey carried out by the National Osteoporosis Society suggests that only one tenth of sufferers are receiving treatment?

As part of the process of professional and public education that the report recommends, will my hon. Friend ensure that its contents are drawn to the attention of health authorities—particularly the comment that it is desirable for all women at risk to have access to bone densitometry equipment?

Mr. Sackville: My noble Friend wrote to the chairmen of all health bodies at the time of the report's publication, bringing it to their attention and making the specific point about bone densitometry.

Accident and Emergency Departments

6. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors are taken into account in decisions about the relocation of accident and emergency departments.

Mr. Malone: Decisions on local accident and emergency services are made on the basis of the most appropriate service for local needs.

Mr. Page: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Although we should all like accident and emergency services at the bottom of our gardens, would it not be better for the health of the nation to have specialised centres run by teams with the facilities and expertise to provide such services, backed up by paramedic teams who can deliver people in a stabilised condition as soon as possible? Small localised services could deal with the walking wounded, as has been suggested in south-west Hertfordshire.

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is right in principle. There are a number of facilities that can meet such needs. The introduction of minor injuries clinics has provided a helpful source of immediate treatment; the experimental trauma centre in Stoke-on-Trent, which is being assessed, deals with major trauma; and accident and emergency services now have more paramedics who can stabilise people at the scene. All those developments in accident and emergency care should be evaluated, and should inform long-term decisions.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: The Minister should be aware that the relocation of the accident and emergency unit at Broadgreen hospital in my constituency has been speeded up because hospitals have been unable to recruit enough senior house officers. What does the Minister propose to do to assist hospitals in such circumstances? Changes in the training of doctors are

making available senior house officers scarcer, and the reduction in junior doctors' hours—welcome though it is—has been carried out in a way that has caused a crisis in accident and emergency units throughout the country.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Lady is right to point to stories that have appeared about shortages of junior doctors in accident and emergency units. There are several reasons for that. It partly reflects the normal change in the February turnaround of contracts. That is not unusual or unknown, and can be addressed in a number of ways. For example, management can adopt a more flexible approach to the way in which accident and emergency units are run. It is also important for specialist surgeons in hospital teams to contribute fully. The Government have made an effective contribution by increasing the number of accident and emergency specialists considerably since 1988: accident and emergency is now the largest growing hospital specialty in the country.

Mr. Congdon: I accept the need for and the benefits of large A and E departments, but does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that A and E departments, especially those in London, should stay open 24 hours a day and should not close their doors temporarily, thereby putting pressure on other A and E departments?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is right. It is important that the widest range of facilities is available, especially across London. I counsel him, however, to consider what is termed a closure. For example, I read in a report this morning that ambulances had temporarily not been going to Homerton hospital. However, I noticed that the A and E department there was still open to treat patients for something as serious as, for example, stabbing. I counsel him, therefore, to consider carefully the definitions in these matters.

Mr. Illsley: Should not the proximity of A and E departments to blood transfusion centres be one of the factors to be taken into account in the relocation of those departments? The Minister will be aware of the petition that was delivered to his Department this morning. It contained 500,000 signatures calling for the reversal of the policy to close five blood transfusion centres. Today, of all days, should not he join the Have a Heart campaign, reverse that policy and consider better and more constructive ways of improving the blood transfusion service?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman is rather ingenious at getting a bite at a different cherry under this question. Of course, all matters in relation to the provision of the blood transfusion service are extremely important. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), who has responsibility for these matters, takes great care to consider all the arguments.

Dr. Twinn: Is my hon. Friend aware that great concern exists in north London about the future of A and E provision, especially at North Middlesex and Chase Farm hospitals? Will he give those of us in north London an undertaking that no decision will be taken until neighbouring purchasers are made to co-operate over A and E provision, not just in north London but throughout Hertfordshire and Essex? Grave concern exists that we will find ourselves with no A and E provision because of competing authorities.

Mr. Malone: I am pleased to have the opportunity to reiterate to my hon. Friend the undertaking that my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), gave to the House. It states that, where there is a reconfiguration of A and E services, similar, if not better, facilities should be and must be in place.

Consultants' Waiting Lists

7. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from Dr. John Yates regarding his study of consultants' waiting lists; what action she has taken; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am aware of receiving no recent representations, although I am familiar with Dr. Yates's work of old. The action that we have taken is to establish national health service trusts, which are now in a far more effective position to ensure that all NHS consultants fulfil their obligations to the health service. As for waiting lists, I commend to the hon. Gentleman the new quarterly figures published today, which show waiting times continuing to come down and excellent progress towards our new patients charter target of a maximum 18-month wait.

Mr. Mullin: Is not the state of affairs disclosed by Dr. Yates's work scandalous? Why is the Secretary of State's Department so reluctant to face up to the issue of consultants who maintain dual waiting lists? Would not the best way to dispose of the corruption that surrounds dual waiting lists which are maintained by some consultants be to make them choose between working full time for the national health service and working full time privately?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman shows how divided his party is. His party leader says that he thinks that the new Labour party should be a model of collaboration between the public and private sectors, but the Labour party's vindictive loathing of the private sector is almost the only area of agreement in its non-existent health policy. Our commitment and our achievement have been to manage NHS consultants very much better, and to agree job plans, ensuring that the NHS comes first and that improvements are made in the service. The west midlands, where John Yates works, is now a model to be followed, promising a nine-month guarantee in relation to treating patients. Let us not have a vendetta against the private sector; let us manage NHS consultants to have the best possible NHS.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most effective way of ensuring that NHS consultants fulfil their obligations to the NHS is through strong local management? Is that not precisely what trusts are achieving? Does she further agree that local pay for consultants will offer an even stronger way of ensuring that the service is a good one?

Mrs. Bottomley: As ever, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. If John Yates did anything, he wrote a testimonial about why good NHS managers are

necessary in a modern health service. Instead of denigrating the private sector and NHS managers, the Labour party should consider in more practical terms how we can maximise the ability of all members of our team so that they provide the best possible service. The move towards local pay, heralded last week in the review body reports—which I am pleased that we were able to accept in full—will ensure even greater effectiveness in enabling people to maximise their contribution to the NHS.

Trust Hospitals

8. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total combined cost of establishing trust hospitals during the period 1991 to 1994.

Mr. Malone: This information is not held centrally. However, a total of £109,436,000 was made available by the Department of Health to regional health authorities towards the consultation costs, start-up costs and conveyancing costs incurred by units applying for trust status during the period 1991-94.

Ms Corston: It is interesting that the Minister has not taken this opportunity to confirm figures released by his Department in December which show that the cost of setting up the trusts in England alone was £103 million. That must be added to the £1 billion wasted over the past five years on providing extra administration and bureaucracy. Is it not true that all that money could have been spent on treating every one of the 1,071,000 people currently on waiting lists?

Mr. Malone: I must refute entirely what the hon. Lady says. This is a worthwhile investment in bringing about a substantial change in a structure which now delivers more health care than ever before. Reforming institutions so that they spend properly and sensibly is no different from building another unit to treat people. The truth is that trust hospitals have been a huge success. There are now 419 across the country and nearly every unit will be a trust after the fifth wave has gone through. Although the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) continues to refer to trusts as some kind of abomination, it is remarkable that there is no sign that the Labour party intends to do anything to reverse the process.

Dame Jill Knight: Is it not true that since hospitals became trusts far more people have been treated with more complicated operations and treatment so that any cost involved is money well spent? Is my hon. Friend aware of the concern being expressed by patients about the Labour party's threat to get rid of trusts, which would inevitably reduce the opportunities for treatment?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is right. It is intriguing that, although the right hon. Member for Derby, South refers to trusts as abominations, she does not intend to do anything about them. I heard the sedentary remark made by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) who, according to "Breakfast with Frost", clearly has more than one finger in the pie of Labour party policy. He said that there is a hidden agenda, so perhaps the right hon. Lady is about to find out. Trusts have outperformed all other hospitals in increasing the number of patients treated; as a result, we are now treating 122 patients for every 100 treated in 1990.

Mrs. Beckett: Is the Minister aware that this is only one example of the widespread concern about whether costs in the health service changes are accurately assessed and, much more to the point, about whether the money is being properly directed, whether we are talking about the establishment, merger or even closure of trusts? Is he aware, for example, of the great concern felt in London about the proposals to close Bart's hospital, the consultation period for which is shortly to come to an end? The Minister said a moment ago that the money spent was a worthwhile investment in substantial changes. Does he not recognise that most people see this as just another example of public money being used to turn a good public service into an expensive private business in which the people at the top rake it in, the people at the bottom are exploited and the taxpayer pays more and gets less?

Mr. Malone: The public who are now spending less time on waiting lists and passing through trust hospitals in greater volumes than ever before have reason to be grateful for these investments. I should also point out to the right hon. Lady that the scale of costs of starting up trusts is relatively small. For example, the cost of setting up the Homerton hospital trust was some £215,000 over quite a lengthy period and covering quite a number of functions which would probably have been undertaken over time by the previous hospital. It is a pretty small amount and an extremely good investment, and there is improved health care to show for it across the nation.

Addenbrookes and Fulbourn Hospitals

9. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy in respect of the location of (a) nurses' residences and (b) the mentally ill, with particular reference to (i) Addenbrookes hospital and (ii) Fulbourn hospital in Cambridgeshire.

Mr. Bowis: It is for the Addenbrookes national health service trust to decide how best to provide residential accommodation for its staff and for its patients.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is my hon. Friend aware that the proposed move of acute psychiatric cases from Fulbourn hospital to Addenbrookes is opposed on environmental and medical grounds by patients, by those who care for the patients and by nurses, and it is also opposed by the staff at Addenbrookes, who believe that it will cause serious disruption which will affect patients and the public? Will he therefore please urge serious reconsideration of the matter?

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the matter to our attention. I understand that, in fact, it is proposed to transfer three wards. It is, of course, for the trust to judge. I also understand that the community health council has agreed the move. However, my hon. Friend is quite right: it is important that patients, carers and staff—and, indeed, Members of Parliament—are consulted wherever possible and their views taken into account. I will certainly draw my hon. Friend's comments to the attention of the trust. At the same time, I hope that he will join me in applauding the trust for its work in

mental health in hospitals and in the community and, indeed, for the work that it is doing to improve security for its residential staff.

Patient Statistics

10. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated in national health service hospitals in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures for 1978.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There were 10.1 million episodes of care carried out in NHS hospitals in 1993-94. In 1978, the equivalent figure, calculated on a comparable basis, was 6.5 million. That is an increase of 55 per cent. I invite the House to congratulate NHS staff on that achievement.

Sir David Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures provide clear evidence of the improvement of the national health service under the present Government? Will she confirm that the North Staffordshire hospital trust has made a significant contribution to that improvement?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Every time patients are asked their views of the NHS, they report extremely favourably. Indeed, a substantial increase in those who reported favourably on the NHS was found when it was measured last. As my hon. Friend rightly says, his local trust has played a magnificent part. I was just looking at its figures. There has been a three and a half times increase, for example, in day surgery and a huge range of quality improvements. The trust provides an excellent service for local people in what I know is an area of considerable need.

Ms Eagle: As the Secretary of State has asked us all to pay tribute to the staff of hospitals, which we gladly do, will she explain why the Wirral hospital trust is currently attempting to introduce something called a generic support worker so that domestics will be expected to conduct administration and clerical work, help clinical procedures and clean the wards, all for £3.50 per hour?

Mrs. Bottomley: The challenge for the health service is to ensure that all those who work in it are able to look flexibly at their activities so as to ensure that we get the maximum possible quality and quantity of patient care. The hon. Lady will know that last week we were able to support in full the recommendations of the review body for a fair reward for NHS staff, who have seen their pay increase, I am pleased to say, more over the past six years than it has for people in the private sector.

Private Health Care

11. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy towards the private health care sector; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We welcome effective co-operation between the NHS and the independent health care sector wherever it benefits patients.

Mr. Whittingdale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he welcome the increasing extent to which trusts and health authorities are taking advantage of the facilities and expertise of the private health care sector to treat NHS patients, as is happening at the Oaks hospital in Colchester? Does he agree that that leads to a more efficient use of resources and benefits not only patients, but the NHS as a whole?

Mr. Sackville: Yes, wherever the private sector is able to offer expertise or better value for money, we must take advantage of it. To do otherwise would be to disadvantage NHS patients.

Mr. Rooker: Is the private sector in health care being limited to 1 per cent.?

Mr. Sackville: The private sector often gives very good value for money. Where that occurs, it would be quite immoral not to take advantage. If we followed the Labour party's advice and refused to do that for ideological reasons, only patients would suffer.

Mr. Bellingham: Will my hon. Friend the Minister find time today to consider the private Sandringham hospital which is located adjacent to the local NHS trust hospital in my constituency? Is my hon. Friend aware that the Sandringham hospital is paying a substantial rent to the NHS trust as well as sharing key medical facilities? Is that not an example of the need for a partnership between the public and private sectors? Will my hon. Friend educate his opposite number and explain that the partnership means saving money for the NHS, treating more patients and getting money at the sharp end?

Mr. Sackville: There are many examples of good co-operation and I am glad to add the Sandringham hospital to that list. We certainly encourage health authorities and trusts to find whatever ways they can to take full advantage of the expertise that the private sector has to offer.

Mental Health Nursing

12. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish a response to the review of mental health nursing.

Mr. Bowis: The chief nursing officer did so on behalf of the Government in March 1994.

Mrs. Jackson: In the Government's response, what have they published with regard to recommendations 8 and 20 which suggest that care plans should be developed with the mentally ill on the basis of their needs and wishes and not for the convenience of the service, and that therapeutic units in ordinary district hospitals are often not appropriate? Does the Minister recognise that the serious underfunding of community care for mentally ill people has meant totally inappropriate situations and continuing crises of confidence in the care of the mentally ill which are extremely serious for the future care of people in those district hospitals which are inappropriate?

Mr. Bowis: The Government's commitment to that report is highlighted by the response of the chief nursing officer, the most senior nurse in the country, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's foreword to that report and by the fact that the Department of Health has been running seminars and

conferences around the country, including one today in Birmingham involving users of the service. That seems to be the direction in which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) is trying to lead us because it is the users and their interests which are important. The report points to that and to nurses having a role in providing information and showing the options to people. With regard to therapeutic centres, that is something to which we have drawn the attention of providers. As for resources, £2 billion this year into mental health services cannot be bad.

Mr. Allason: Bearing in mind the review undertaken by Sir Louis Blom-Cooper into the Edith Morgan unit and mental health provision in Torbay in my constituency, does my hon. Friend agree that there is a gap in the current law in respect of people who are a danger not just to themselves but to others and, indeed, particularly to people who provide mental health care, and that it is high time for a review of the law to ensure that there is suitable accommodation precisely for those dangerous individuals?

Mr. Bowis: Yes. Sir Louis identified two gaps: first, understanding of the existing law so that the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983 are used to the full and, secondly, a particular gap in respect of revolving-door cases of the severely mentally ill who might be at risk in the community. That is why we shall shortly be introducing a new mental health Bill which will include a measure on supervised discharge orders. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) will be the first to welcome that and the first into the Lobby with us.

NHS Budget

13. **Mr. Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors she takes into account when allocating resources within the NHS budget; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: NHS spending in England in 1995-96 will rise to £32 billion, a further increase of £1.3 billion. The underlying principles in deciding how that budget is spent are that access to a comprehensive health service should be available to all on the basis of clinical judgment and that money is allocated according to health need.

Mr. Stevenson: Does the Secretary of State not realise the total inadequacy of that answer when we consider the millions of people who are being denied quality of life and have reduced life expectancy because of poverty? Is she aware that Government-imposed poverty is reducing the life expectancy of millions of people? Is that not a direct result of NHS market forces which are rationing health care on the basis of poverty?

Mrs. Bottomley: That question is quite ludicrous, particularly coming from the hon. Gentleman with the record in his constituency. We are committed to the improvement of people's well-being and the reduction of unemployment. Average incomes have increased by more than a third. In the hon. Gentleman's constituency, the money that goes to the health service has increased by more than 30 per cent. in the past five years, partly because resources are targeted at areas of greatest need. Life expectancy is increasing and infant mortality figures are improving. The results of the health reforms are available for all to see.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Michie: Last Tuesday, the Prime Minister said that a single currency was a constitutional issue. Last Thursday, the Chancellor said that it was not. Will the right hon. Gentleman now tell us who is right?

The Prime Minister: I have told the hon. Lady, I think, directly, and many people in the House precisely what the position is as far as a single currency is concerned, and I have also told people exactly how we propose to approach it. There will be no single currency involving the United Kingdom in 1996 or 1997. When and if it arises at a later stage, whether 1999 or thereafter, we will examine both the economic implications and the other implications, and we will then make a judgment on the national interest.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are determined to protect the country from terrorism, drug smugglers and a tidal wave of economic refugees into this country?

The Prime Minister: I should say to my hon. Friend that in recent years we have seen a very welcome improvement in race relations in this country and I do not wish to see that put at risk in any way. Raising fears about immigration tends to put that at risk. For that reason, I am entirely determined to maintain our fair but firm immigration policies, and that means that we shall retain our border controls.

Mr. Blair: Following the Prime Minister's welcome commitment last Thursday to reducing inequality, may we now put it to the test? As the national electricity grid is an absolute monopoly subject to no competition, will the right hon. Gentleman act against the excesses of the few regional electricity chiefs who stand to make £50 million out of share options on the back of it?

The Prime Minister: I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I find much of his opposition to share options rather synthetic since a good deal of his leadership campaign was financed out of the proceeds of share options.

Mr. Blair: So the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to do nothing on that. Let me now put this to him: as there still remain about 1 million long-term unemployed and the Government are proposing a £50 million cut in help to the unemployed, will he therefore act in respect of that?

The Prime Minister: I notice that the right hon. Gentleman did not respond to the earlier point. As for

his general concerns about poverty, perhaps I can help him by filling in some of the facts that he overlooks. As he will know, and as there are ample statistics to show, the vast majority of people are better off. Average income has risen by more than one third since 1979, the average income of all economic groups and family types has risen, vulnerable groups have been protected and average incomes are up by more than 10 per cent. for poorer pensioners, and up for the unemployed as well as for those in full-time work. Those are the results of the Government's actions, and they exceed by far the results achieved by any previous Government.

Mr. Blair: So the Prime Minister is prepared to do nothing about that either. Whatever he says about reducing inequality, he will do nothing about greed at the top and nothing about protecting the unemployed at the bottom. Are the British people not right to conclude, therefore, that his commitment to reducing inequality will be seen in time as just one more easily made, easily broken Tory promise?

The Prime Minister: I look forward to the day when the right hon. Gentleman listens to the answer before continuing with his question. As "Social Trends" is a publication often cited by Opposition Members, perhaps they will take notice of the information available in the latest edition, which states that the income of recently retired pensioners has increased by just over a half in real terms since 1981, and the real income after tax of a lone parent on the lowest decile of female earnings and with two children rose by 50 per cent. between 1981 and 1993. Why do we never hear about the reality of what has happened rather than the accusations without base which come from the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Marlow: If European institutions produce measures to dismantle our external immigration controls, and those measures are subsequently supported by the European Court, how will my right hon. Friend maintain our external controls?

The Prime Minister: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) a moment or so ago, we believe in our right to maintain controls. My predecessor set out our determination and received a solemn declaration to that effect some time ago. Let me make it clear that we shall argue strongly for the maintenance of that position and shall take whatever steps are necessary to that end. I will tell my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) about that declaration: it was solemnly entered into by all the Heads of Government of the other European countries. They pledged their word, and I intend that they will keep it.

Q2. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cousins: Is the Prime Minister aware that, following the Government's deal with Trafalgar House to kill off Northern Electric this morning, the resulting free-for-all in electricity companies has caused electricity shares to rise by 10 per cent. in a Valentine's day orgy on the stock exchange, while there has been a Valentine's day massacre of job security in the north? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the Confederation of British Industry that growing unfairness in society affects not only jobs but competition and business?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will have observed over the last couple of years, competition in business has been creating jobs, not losing them, which is why unemployment has dropped by more than half a million.

Mr. Foulkes: Rubbish.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) has apparently not noticed the drop of half a million in unemployment, so I will tell him that it has dropped right across Scotland, which he cares about, as well as in England, in Wales and in Northern Ireland. If the hon. Gentleman has not understood even that, I can understand why he is on the Opposition Benches—because he understands nothing.

Q3. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Lady Olga Maitland: Has my right hon. Friend seen the report that tourism in Northern Ireland has doubled since the ceasefire was announced? Does he agree that that reflects in an important way the outcome of the peace process?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the remarkable increases in tourism. There have also been remarkable changes in the life styles of the people in Northern Ireland and in the success of large and small businesses in Northern Ireland. I believe that those are results of the ceasefire, which I hope we shall be able to turn into a permanent peace.

Q4. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cunningham: Does the Prime Minister recall that last Thursday in the House he gave an undertaking to commit the Government to fighting injustice and inequality? Will he now, as a first step, take the opportunity to reintroduce wages councils and, as a second step, abolish the jobseeker's allowance?

The Prime Minister: I will not give the hon. Gentleman that undertaking, because I do not believe that wages councils acted in the interests of people who were low paid. I believe that they kept a lot of people out of work who might otherwise have been in work. I accept that the Government have a responsibility to help the poor, and we have sought to do that. That is why extra help of more than £1 billion since 1988,

over and above inflation, has been provided to help low-income families. That is the point that I invite the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends to concentrate upon.

Q5. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arnold: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the decision of the parents of pupils at 88 schools in Kent who voted overwhelmingly for the schools to become grant maintained? Will he congratulate those Kentish parents on their choice? Does he welcome the fact that they had the choice in the first place—a choice exercised by the Leader of the Opposition and a number of Labour Back Benchers—or does he consider that choice to be wicked?

The Prime Minister: I believe that every parent should have the right to choose what is best for his or her children, and I have no criticism of any parent who does so. I simply ask that all parents should have the same choice.

Q6. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Watson: What does the Prime Minister suggest that I could do to help my constituent, Jane Pepper, who gave up a secure job in the civil service last year to attend an access course for university? She secured three offers of places, but is now having to give them up because she loses £5,000 as a result of the Government's penny pinching in cutting the mature students' allowance. Leaving aside the waffle that the Prime Minister usually gives us, what advice can he give to Jane Pepper and the thousands of other people who missed out on higher education the first time around and are now having the door slammed in their faces again?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows that the number of people going on to further and higher education has increased dramatically. When the hon. Gentleman's party left office, one in eight of our children went to university. The figure is now one in three, and it is increasing.

Q7. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the rather disappointing performance of the English cricketers in Australia illustrates the need for more competitive sport in our schools?

The Prime Minister: I should certainly like to see more competitive sport in our schools, and we intend to ensure that there is more. Beyond that, we must ensure that there is a much better sports environment through the clubs, so that there is a proper throughput from school to club level and to more senior levels in sport. I intend to do what I can to bring that about.

Q8. **Ms Jowell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Jowell: Is the Prime Minister aware that last week a senior manager at Guy's hospital in London had to telephone 24 hospitals to arrange cover for patients needing acute and intensive care beds? Does he accept that patients' lives are at risk because of the shortage of beds in London? Will he instruct the Secretary of State for Health that no further bed closures should be allowed?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady had wished me to comment on that, no doubt she would have given me earlier notice of the question. Often enough, there have been cases in which a direct answer could have been given if information had been provided, and often enough I have examined matters subsequently and found them to be a touch different from what had been suggested on the Floor of the House. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will have heard what the hon. Lady had to say.

Mr. Michael Brown: Is not the situation with regard to the single currency quite straightforward—that if my right hon. Friend remains Prime Minister we will not have a single currency, but if the Leader of the Opposition becomes Prime Minister we will?

The Prime Minister: As I have indicated to my hon. Friend on previous occasions, I will make a judgment on what I believe the national interest demands. If it demands no, I will say no.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received a request from the President of the Board of Trade to make a statement to the House about policy on the future ownership and control of the regional electricity companies? Bearing in mind the fact that he accepted in the House that some important questions remain to be answered in that area of policy, and also the public interest, as well as the interests of consumers and employees in regional electricity companies, should not the President of the Board of Trade make such an important statement of policy in the House, rather than simply issuing a press release from his Department?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed so far today that any Minister wants to make a statement to the House, on that or any other matter.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any request from the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) to make a personal statement about the shambles in the House of Commons last night, on the basis that a leaked exchange of notes between Liberal Members of Parliament is not sufficient explanation for what occurred?

Madam Speaker: I have not had any note from the hon. and learned Member, but I was in the Chair last night, and I very much resent the suggestion that there was a shambles in the House. There is never a shambles when I am in the Chair, and the hon. Gentleman should be very careful.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During the Christmas recess, the Prime Minister made an unwarranted and unexpected attack on Wales and on my own party. During each Prime Minister's Question Time since then, I have tried to catch your eye so that I could put our viewpoint on that matter to the Prime Minister and elicit clarification from him. If it is impossible for members of my party to question the Prime Minister on the Floor of this House for two months, how on earth will democracy work as far as Wales is concerned? Is not that another argument for us to have our own Parliament, as this one cannot deliver us democracy?

Madam Speaker: I am not certain whether any members of the hon. Gentleman's party have tabled questions to the Prime Minister, but I will check on that. If the hon. Gentleman not only looks at the Order Paper but reads it, he will realise that the opportunities to call any of them—or, indeed, any Opposition Member—during the past few weeks have been very limited, simply because of the way in which the Order Paper is laid out.

In addition to those hon. Members who have a question down, I seek to call those who have not yet asked the Prime Minister a question during this Session. Of course, I have the hon. Gentleman in mind, and will do my best to ensure that he is able to put his question to the Prime Minister as soon as possible. He will understand the limitations on the Chair during Prime Minister's Question Time.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I learn from this morning's *The Independent* that the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) made a particular decision about the entry of the Al-Fayed brothers, and was subsequently asked to reconsider it by the Home Secretary. Is that a matter for the Committee of Privileges?

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman believes that it might be, he should send a written submission to me, and I will look very carefully at the way that it was done.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Are you aware that, as we meet at this time, Mr. Gianfranco Fini, leader of the Italian fascists, is being greeted in the House by Conservative Members—the Mr. Fini about whom early-day motion 429 has been tabled, signed by 112 hon. Members, condemning his fascism, his anti-semitism and his connection with Mussolini? Is it in order, in the anniversary year of the defeat of fascism, for hon. Members to invite Mr. Mussolini's political descendant to visit the House?

Madam Speaker: It is up to individual Members to issue invitations to outsiders to address private meetings in the House. Some people, of course, may find such invitations unpalatable and even offensive, but it would be invidious for me, as Speaker, to be set up as an arbiter of who can and who cannot be invited into the House. It is for Members individually to take the responsibility upon themselves, and to think very carefully before they issue their invitations.

Landlord and Tenant (Covenants)

3.35 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for persons bound by covenants of a tenancy to be released from such covenants on the assignment of the tenancy, and to make other provision with respect to rights and liabilities arising under such covenants; to restrict in certain circumstances the operation of rights of re-entry, forfeiture and disclaimer; and for connected purposes.

I am pleased to propose a Bill about contractual liability on a day such as today, St. Valentine's day, when, traditionally, many couples take their first step towards a marriage contract. I hope that such couples have a long and happy life together, but if, by mischance, they should find that they are not suited, they can break off their engagement without fear of being confronted by a court action for a breach of promise. That law was abolished 25 years ago. It had long outlived its purpose and imposed an unjust burden, and I applaud its passing.

Reflecting on that welcome reform, I propose a Bill today that is long overdue in righting an acknowledged injustice peculiar to this country, whereby landlords can pursue tenants many, many years after they have ceased trading for subsequent arrears of rent after the lease has been assigned, known by lawyers as "privity of contract".

The smooth working of the commercial property market requires good relations between landlords, who provide their capital, and tenants, who trade on their skills. I am sure that most landlords dislike enforcing that unjust law, which has caused distress and genuine hardship to many thousands of former tenants caught in its obscure and iniquitous trap.

Long after retirement, a shopkeeper—or even, after his death, his family—can be confronted with exorbitant demands for arrears of rent owing to the failure of a subsequent tenant. The original tenant can be pursued 20 or more years after assigning a lease, perhaps three or four tenants later. The landlord is under no obligation to mitigate the losses, so confronting former tenants with potential financial ruin.

I have had an especially distressing constituency case of that type, affecting a widow who, long after the lease was assigned, was confronted with punitive demands, not only for long arrears of rent, but for service charges and dilapidations. I am sure that many other right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have had similar constituency cases, affecting both large and small businesses.

Recently, a writ for £150,000 was served on the former tenant of a shop in the Arndale centre in Manchester. The landlord did not even have the courtesy to write to the former tenant before slapping down a court writ for 18 months of rent arrears, long after the original lease had been assigned.

In Nottingham recently, a landlord deliberately took no action to re-let two adjacent vacant properties in a prime site. The two former tenants were forced to the point of personal bankruptcy before the landlord agreed to re-let his properties. One of the former tenants was forced to sell his home. Those shops could easily have been re-let by the landlord without loss, had he acted reasonably.

I am aware of a landlord in London who conspired with a weak tenant who was on the point of bankruptcy to sign a renewed lease on a doubled rent. As soon as the tenant became bankrupt, the landlord forced the former tenant to pay the double rent. That scam is made legal only through the iniquity of the privity of contract law.

In 1988, the Law Commission reported on privity of contract, and concluded that it was intrinsically unfair that anyone should bear burdens under a contract from which they derived no benefit and over which they had no control. Consequently, the commission recommended a wholesale reform of the current law. Five years later, in March 1993, my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor announced that there was a strong case for reform of privity for new leases, and that a new nine months' notice of liability provision would be introduced so that landlords would be under a statutory duty to serve notice on any former tenant from whom they wished to claim.

My Bill introduces those necessary reforms. It abolishes privity of contract for new leases after the first assignment of the lease. Therefore, the original tenant would be liable only until after the first assignee had reassigned the lease. The Bill also introduces the nine months' notice provision, which requires nine months' notice of the date on which a debt has become due, and applies to both existing and future leases. That keeps former tenants informed about their obligation and helps protect individuals or companies against unforeseen and unaffordable costs.

Some concern had been raised by the British Property Federation that, as currently drafted, my Bill might put investment at risk and undermine confidence in the property market. To avoid that, the Bill may need to be amended so that landlords can agree with potential tenants the circumstances under which an assignment of that lease will be permitted.

I accept that criticism, and would not resist an appropriate amendment to the Bill, should it reach Committee stage. I understand that an agreement has been reached between the British Property Federation, acting for landlords, and the British Retail Consortium, acting for tenants, on an amendment to section 19(1) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1927, which would ameliorate that concern.

I further understand that there is agreement on additional benefits to tenants in new clauses to stop bad practice in existing leases. Such amendments would not only remove landlords' fears but would significantly improve the position of tenants beyond that contemplated in the Bill.

My Bill has support from all sides of the property industry, including not only the British Property Federation and the British Retail Consortium but the British Chambers of Commerce; the Forum of Private Business; the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; the Property Managers Association; and the British Council of Shopping Centres. It also has cross-party support within the House.

Britain is known as a nation of shopkeepers, so it seems appropriate that, on this day, Britain's quarter of a million shopkeepers should present you, Madam Speaker, with a Valentine wish that my Bill be given an unopposed First Reading by the House.

Question put and agreed to.

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Peter Thurnham, Dame Peggy Fenner, Mr. John McFall, Mr. John Fraser, Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Sir Gerard Vaughan, Mr. A.J. Beith, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Paul Boateng, Mr. Patrick Nicholls, Mr. Richard Page, and Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

LANDLORD AND TENANT (COVENANTS)

Mr. Peter Thurnham accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for persons bound by covenants of a tenancy to be released from such covenants on the assignment of the tenancy, and to make other provision with respect to rights and liabilities arising under such covenants; to restrict in certain circumstances the operation of rights of re-entry, forfeiture and disclaimer; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 April, and to be printed. [Bill 50.]

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Poverty and Unemployment

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. I must also advise hon. Members that, between the hours of 7 and 9 pm this evening, speeches must be limited to 10 minutes.

3.44 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the damage done to the country's social fabric and economy by the rapid growth of poverty in United Kingdom society; deplores Government policies which have failed the long-term unemployed, seen the number of families living on less than half national average income treble and deprived many of an opportunity to contribute to and share in national prosperity; and calls for immediate concerted action to tackle the causes of poverty and unemployment including a major welfare-to-work programme, a national childcare strategy and action to improve education and skills.

Last Thursday, as many hon. Members will remember, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister whether it was the aim of the Government to redress inequality. The answer was a simple and unadorned yes. That agreement, that common ground should be our starting point this afternoon.

The Prime Minister went on, rather more controversially, to say that, in his view, the right way to combat poverty was

"by ensuring that chances and opportunities are greater so inequality falls; that is the right way and that is what the Government are doing."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 453.]

The House will not be surprised to hear that I quarrel with that judgment. Put plainly, I do not believe that there is evidence, and certainly no convincing argument, that present policies are controlling or even limiting the growth of inequality. More seriously, and more disappointingly, there is little or no evidence that the Government are trying to do so.

There will be much talk during the debate—and rightly so—about the Rowntree report that was produced last week. Indeed, that was the cause and the basis of the exchange between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. It is right that a good deal of attention should be paid to the report because its publication is a public service. It puts the harsh profile of growing problems of poverty in sharp relief.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Could the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Rowntree foundation report was drafted by John Hills, a Labour activist who worked on the Fabian Society tax review before the last election?

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Lady should remember that, whoever wrote the draft, the report was unanimously approved by, for example, Mr. Howard Davies of the CBI, by a very prominent Conservative who is a member of the Baring banking family, and by the deputy chairman of British Telecom. To suggest that it is a put-up job or a Labour conspiracy reflects no credit on the hon. Lady's

intelligence, and I suspect that it reflects even less credit on the central office briefing that she was probably clutching.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No. Let me make it clear that I shall take some points of information as the debate proceeds, but that I am anxious to make progress and to establish my first point. The report gives perspective and clarity, and the picture that emerges from its findings is of a disunited kingdom. Every right hon. and hon. Member should take that seriously.

I understand that, in the past few minutes, the Prime Minister has been dealing with these problems with the attitude of a latter-day Pangloss. Of course he is right that there are families and pensioners who are doing well. That is almost by definition a picture of the divided community. There are people on the right side of the divide in the arithmetic who are flourishing, and nobody complains about that.

The trouble is that, while pensioner incomes on average are rising, 1.6 million are existing on income support. While many families are comfortably off, others—one of the most vulnerable groups in society: perhaps with several children and a low wage—are living just above the income support level and in real difficulty.

What clearly emerges from the report is that income inequality is greater now than at any time since the second world war, and that, since the Government came to power, the lowest income groups—perhaps as many as 15 million people—have been deprived of any share in increasing national wealth. Rowntree found that, even after excluding the self-employed—and that is of some significance—incomes of the bottom 10 per cent. of the population, after housing costs, were 9 per cent. lower than they were in 1979. Since 1977, the proportion of the population living on less than half the national average income has trebled.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Because benefits increased.

Mr. Dewar: I will come to that point. I can always rely on the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) to feed me a line; he is one of the best stooges in the House from the Labour party's point of view. I think that he can comprehend the fact that in Tory Britain more than 10 million people are now dependant upon income support, which is more than double the number when the hon. Gentleman's friends came to power.

A family on income support comprising a husband, a wife and two children is living on about one third of the national average wage. That leaves very little room for comfort. I do not argue that the meek should inherit the earth, but I do not believe that they should be cut off without a penny.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman advances the analysis in the Rowntree report which proposes increased taxes, an increased number of civil servants and a guaranteed minimum wage or, alternatively, extra burdens for business. Is he prepared to pledge those proposals on behalf of his party?

Mr. Dewar: That is not what we propose—nor, to be fair, is it a proper representation of the points in the Rowntree report. I will turn to solutions later in my remarks.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) obviously dislikes the Rowntree report. I can understand that; it is inconvenient and no doubt embarrassing. However, the charges in the report are wholly corroborated by other evidence. As the hon. Gentleman takes these matters seriously, I know that he will recall the report of the Institute for Fiscal Studies entitled "For Richer and For Poorer", which deals with income distribution between 1961 and 1991. It hammers the same case, and it comes to the same conclusions.

For a local case study with which the hon. Member is probably not familiar, he should go to Her Majesty's Stationery Office and ask for a copy of "Poor and Paying for it: the price of living on a low income", which is an exhaustive examination of the privileges—or really the penalties—of living in poverty in Scotland. It was produced by the Scottish Consumer Council, all of whose members I think have been appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland and are therefore not likely to be interested in deliberately doing him in for political reasons. I think that the case is almost overwhelming.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): I fear that the hon. Gentleman is putting forward a bogus argument based on a report which is substantially founded on dubious facts. Does he accept that the Social Services Select Committee has reported that those on income support are 15 per cent. better off now than they were in 1979? Does he further accept that all social services payments and payments for health, education and other public spending originate from enterprise and initiative, and that his party's policies will spoil our country's ability to meet the payments that our people want and need?

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman has taken his time to make a rather familiar point. I am anxious to help him. I recognise that he believes that the Rowntree report is prejudiced and fraudulent—he has said that in pretty clear terms. I will be interested to hear whether the Secretary of State for Social Security accepts that the basis of that body's work is flawed in that way.

I invite the hon. Gentleman to consult another authority. If he looks in *Hansard* of 2 February 1995, he will see a written answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). He asks for the percentage change in real incomes of the top 20 per cent. of families with children and the bottom 20 per cent. between 1979 and 1991-92, the latest date for which figures are available.

After housing costs, according to the Department of Social Security and the Minister who speaks for it, the bottom 20 per cent. have seen their incomes fall by 12 per cent. in real terms; while the incomes of the top 20 per cent. have increased by 49 per cent. A division is clearly opening up, as those two groups were already advantaged on the one hand and disadvantaged on the other.

[Mr. Dewar]

It may be interesting to argue what we should do about that, or even to what extent Government can control those matters, but to say that it is not happening is to fly in the face of common sense and evidence, at every level and from every source. It makes the hon. Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) look a little silly.

A defence has been mounted, and I will turn to that point.

The Prime Minister, for example—after all, he is only echoing the views of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton, and could he do better—said that the Government are a victim of their own generosity. Because they raise benefits, they create poverty and move the poverty line. But, unfortunately, if one looks at what happened—because in recent years the Government have tied the level of benefits to the retail prices index—one will see that a gap has opened up between them and earnings, which have tended to increase more quickly, and that is one of the reasons for that phenomenon.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No, I am sorry, but I must go on.

It has been urged on other occasions that we should not take into account the figures for the bottom 10 per cent., because they are inaccurate. I remember an interesting debate sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) in which the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), an Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, presented with the irrefutable evidence about the deterioration in the prospects of the bottom 10 per cent., said, "Well, you can't really believe these figures, because they are full of the self-employed—100,000 farmers, 40,000 taxi drivers, 12,500 qualified accountants, who are returning nil or negative incomes as a clever piece of tax management." If that is happening, it is a very eloquent comment on our tax system.

In any event, the Rowntree figures, and the Government's figures in the parliamentary answer, do not talk about the very bottom 10 per cent., but about 20 per cent. at the bottom and 20 per cent. at the top—40 per cent. of the population. I submit—I do not think that any statistician would argue with me—that they give a fair account of what is happening in Britain today.

I remind the House of the figures I gave a moment ago from the Rowntree report. It excluded the self-employed—that doubtful category that might give rise to misunderstanding—and still found that the bottom 10 per cent. is down 9 per cent. after housing costs since 1979.

Mr. Clappison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No, I am sorry. I am going to hurry on. I recognise that there are limitations on the time that I can take.

I believe that it is beyond argument that the gap is widening. The Government, of course, say that they are still trying to do something about it. After all, they have a proven track record of failure in many fields, and they may indeed be doing their best. One of the most damaging aspects is the impact of Government policy itself. To quote the Rowntree report:

"Discretionary tax changes shifted the burden of taxation from higher to lower and middle income groups."

That can be illustrated in a welter of facts and figures with which many hon. Members are familiar.

Too many people in the Cabinet, perhaps even the Secretary of State for Social Security, are still thirled to the Thatcher legacy, and still believe in the trickle-down theory: help the poor by making the rich richer. I have heard that, and no doubt will hear it again in the course of the debate.

I do not believe that that is any longer an area of legitimate dispute. It has been destroyed by the experience of the past 15 years, by observable fact, by the situation that we see around us in our constituencies. The bottom is getting detached. We now see cynicism and alienation to a dangerous extent in our communities.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clappison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: What a choice!

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way.

The hon. Gentleman criticised the Government a moment ago for not linking benefits to earnings rather than prices; he then passed on very quickly. Will he give a commitment that the Labour party would link benefits to earnings rather than prices—yes or no?

Mr. Dewar: I have explained our position—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not listen to me. I shall say it again for his benefit: we have always protested against the unbreakable glass ceiling that has been imposed by the Government. We have also made it clear that we do not think that it is right that, over a lengthy period, those on benefits should be excluded from rising national wealth. As a prudent Opposition, who make promises only when we know that we can deliver, we have made it absolutely clear that we will halt that decline and try to reverse it when circumstances allow. *[Interruption.]* As I am always urged to be responsible and prudent, I find the kind of jackass noises coming from Conservative Members brave but ill advised.

Let me make it clear to the House. The concern that I have expressed is widely shared. I am sure that hon. Members—I suspect that they have read *The Sunday Telegraph*—will have seen the report this weekend, which, if correct, suggests that the senior civil service shares our concern about the growth in poverty and division in our communities. It is reported that Sir Robin Butler brought together permanent secretaries from eight departments to discuss the problems that arise when policies designed to increase choice destroy it for those who are already disadvantaged. They cited bus deregulation, the mobility problems when services are run down in peripheral schemes and a housing policy that forces people into benefit dependency; they also considered the problems of single parents. In those instances, they felt that what the Government were doing was incompatible with the interests of the poorer sections of the community.

I have not seen the document, but it appears at least to constitute a direct challenge to the Prime Minister's claim that opportunity is opening up for those who are currently in travail. If it does not constitute such a challenge, I suggest to the Secretary of State that the best way in

which to remove that presumption is to publish the note that we are told is circulating in Whitehall, so that we can all judge.

The Butler discussions, as reported, point to another key fact that we must keep in mind. This is not simply an argument about cash; deprivation has a much wider remit than that. It affects education: the ambitions of many children with real ability are being stifled and ended. It affects employment, and the prospects of low-paid people to whom choice is not open.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No.

Unemployed people are subject to the deadening round of benefit dependency, relieved only by problems related to the "actively seeking work" test.

If hon. Members examine any one of those areas of social policy, they will realise that the chances in life of many people—probably many people in Conservative constituencies, but certainly many in my constituency—are being destroyed. For many—some may think this a rather over-dramatic statement, but I consider it entirely justified—life itself is literally being cut short.

I do not know how many hon. Members watched last night's BBC "Panorama" programme. It concentrated on a peripheral housing scheme in west Glasgow—the Drumchapel scheme. I happen to know that area very well, because I represent it; so I watched the programme with considerable interest and concern. I accept that concentration on a single aspect of an area does not always give a complete picture. Drumchapel is a community with problems, but it has strengths as well: its strengths lie in its people—people who too often, and in so many ways, are obstructed rather than assisted by the system.

The facts are familiar. Most Members of Parliament recognise the link between deprivation and health. Perhaps those facts have become too familiar, and have lost the ability to shock; it should not be so.

As I have said, the television programme dealt with a housing scheme in a deprived area of my constituency. Literally a hundred yards away is Bearsden, a leafy suburb whose economic circumstances are very different. Between 1981 and 1991, male mortality between the ages of 15 and 46 rose by 9 per cent. in Drumchapel; in Bearsden, it fell by 14 per cent. It was a case not of both rates improving, or of one improving faster than the other: the mortality rate in Bearsden improved, while it deteriorated in Drumchapel.

Young men in Drumchapel are twice as likely to die as those living in an affluent and leafy suburb. They are 75 per cent. more at risk during major surgery. This may not be a pleasant subject, but it is a fact that, for a person living in a poor area such as Drumchapel who requires a bowel operation, the chances of developing complications and dying are 50 per cent. higher than those of a person living in the neighbouring affluent area.

The position is not academic. In an area such as Drumchapel, a man's life expectancy can be as much as 10 years shorter than in the neighbouring area, while a woman's can be seven years shorter. I make no apology for saying that these are people whom I know and with whom I deal; constituents of yours, whom you too will know, Madam Speaker; and people with whom many of my hon. Friends work.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester) *rose—*

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley) *rose—*

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton) *rose—*

Mr. Duncan *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I will take just one intervention.

Mr. Brandreth: The hon. Gentleman has spent 22 minutes telling us that he deplores poverty. I deplore it, too: I think that we agree on that. We also agree, I hope, that we want increased growth and a better standard of living for all our citizens. The motion speaks of a "programme", a "childcare strategy" and

"action to improve education and skills".

Can the hon. Gentleman flesh that out? Can he tell us when he will introduce the programme, what it would cost and how he believes that it will improve the state that he currently deplores?

Mr. Dewar: I am genuinely glad that the hon. Gentleman rose, because the fact that he accepts the tenor and accuracy of my remarks—"We all agree," he said—is a refreshing contrast to almost every point of information that has been made in the debate. On occasions, he must feel a rather lonely man on the Conservative Benches. I will come to his question in a minute. I can answer the first part very simply. We will do it when we are in government, which probably is not going to be so very far away.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: Let me just complete my medical point. It will be quite short, and it involves issues in which I feel very involved. I have talked to many of the people involved, and medical opinion is united on the link with deprivation. It was first established by the Black report, and since then it has been established many times by research in many parts of the country.

I am talking not just about Drumchapel. In Glasgow, I find it deeply depressing that successive holders of the senior post in public health believe not only that a direct link exists between deprivation and poverty, but that that gap will continue to widen if present trends continue. That is not something that any hon. Member can be satisfied about.

The Minister for Health was no doubt doing his best on television last night. I make no criticism of him personally; I know that he is closely connected with the city of Glasgow, and that he knows a great deal about medicine in Glasgow. I may, of course, misquote him in detail, but I think that I have caught the spirit of his comments.

The Minister was asked whether deprivation was a major part of the health problem that was being recorded. He answered that it was a matter of subjective judgment, but a diversion from the real debate about specific health problems and about how to treat them. I shall not overdo this, but, in my considered opinion, that does not show the necessary sense of urgency, or the overall view that gives hope that this distressing problem will be properly tackled.

[Mr. Dewar]

In considering high cancer rates in areas of depression, the Minister for Health said, again revealingly, that anyone can give up smoking. In Drumchapel, one is three times more likely to die of lung cancer than someone who lives in Bearsden. I went to university because of opportunity, expectation and family and peer group support. Would I have made it if I had had to struggle in the sort of circumstances in which we let many of my constituents live?

As I sit in my surgery, I often feel that I have never been in the position where a small unexpected bill amounts to a financial crisis for my constituents because they have no edge or margin in which to live and to work. I would not be happy defending the record of recent years, or a system that is built on the basis that the outstandingly able will be able to beat that system, but that many others will inevitably and unfairly be left as casualties.

Let me now come to the question raised by the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) about what is to be done. I want to make it clear that I recognise that it would be dishonest and counter-productive to promise an instant transformation under any Government. Obviously, the situation has been running unchecked for some considerable time, but it must now be met with commitment and determination over a period to redress the balance.

Mr. Streeter: If the hon. Gentleman is genuine in his concern for the people whom he describes, and I accept that he is, why will he not commit a future Labour Government to spend more money on such people?

Mr. Dewar: I shall come to our programme in a moment. Of course, as I made clear, I want to redress the balance, but—as I am sure the hon. Gentleman would be the first to agree—we must get the system and the priorities right. It is not simply a matter of taking a system that is operating inefficiently and badly, and pouring more money into it.

If that were true, the Secretary of State for Social Security would have presided over one of the most effective attacks on inequality and poverty, as his budget has spiralled to £90 billion. Sadly, the money has been wasted, putting the taxpayer in the firing line, because recession and poverty must be funded by the taxpayer. It is working, tax-paying middle Britain that has been put into the firing line by these mistaken policies. One of the first things we must do is ensure that the money is used effectively, and that our priorities are right.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I quite understand why the hon. Gentleman would do anything rather than put numbers on his policies and make specific spending commitments. He said that it was important to get the system and the priorities right, but will he tell us what principles will animate new Labour in its policy making?

We are given to understand that, in the new dawn, we shall not have our lives run for us by Fabian managerialists, or ruled by big corporate interests. Instead, under new Labour, the people will have choice and Labour will embrace markets. However, as the hon. Gentleman has, I think, been saying, markets do not necessarily induce fairness, so what principles will Labour apply to regulate and civilise the markets? [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] What principles will it operate to determine the degree of regulation, planning, investment, intervention and redistributive taxation in order to achieve the greater fairness and equality that the hon. Gentleman seeks?

Mr. Dewar: I think that the merriment that greeted the hon. Gentleman's interjection—which was, as ever, well reasoned—tells its own tale.

Of course, we have to inject fairness into the tax system. [HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] I did not want to go into that, because it is a narrow battle, but are Conservatives proud of the fact that, this afternoon, Sir Desmond Pitcher of North West Water is defending the share options and salary increases of the privatised utilities? Is that the symbol of Conservative Britain? As I understand it, share options in the pipeline at North West Water, which are worth very nearly £5 million, are to be shared among six board directors. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have heard enough barracking from sedentary positions. We should be able to hear the debate.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): It is the hon. Member for South Dorset, (Mr. Bruce).

Madam Speaker: I know who it is.

Mr. Dewar: Perhaps we should take that as a symbol of the priorities. Of course there has to be a fair tax system. We have to get away from a situation in which people can make offensively large sums of money and capital gains, not by virtue of being themselves but simply because a situation has been created by the Government which looks unpleasantly like a private monopoly. What is happening upstairs is perhaps a symbol of that.

Of course, the best way to help people is to get them back to work if we can, and I want to say a word or two about that. I have made it clear that I am not asking for massive new spending commitments at this stage. I want to do what Sir Robin Butler attempted to do, as we understand it, with his working party, which was to ensure that Government policies are examined, no doubt from many points of view. However, one point of view that should be given particular priority is the impact of those policies on the life chances and position in society of the disadvantaged and underprivileged. The working party highlighted many examples where that has not happened.

We need an effective policy to take people off welfare and into work. Of course, there was some gesture politics, especially during the Budget. For example, insurance holidays were announced for employers who took people off the long-term unemployment register. We calculated that it was worth £6 a week, and I take no particular pleasure in predicting that it will have no impact whatsoever. In addition, there is the back-to-work bonus, which means no help now, jam tomorrow or perhaps jam never. If one is lucky and advantaged enough to find a job, one gets a divvy on top. That is not the answer to the problem.

I understand that, today, in the Committee debating the Jobseekers Bill, an announcement is being made on the 21-hour rule. I believe that the 21-hour rule should be re-examined. There is a case for a more flexible approach, because it is a pretty mad world in which someone who wants to enhance his skills by following a course of more

than 21 hours a week is not entitled to any support in the form of benefits and therefore cannot do the course. He ends up drawing the benefit anyway, but does without the skill enhancement.

Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell me whether, as I understand, the 21-hour rule is to be cut to 16 hours, which makes the whole system even more inflexible and makes it harder for people to move into education or skill training while retaining at least a marginal life support within the benefit system. I want to see—

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough) *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I am trying to answer some of the questions that have been asked. If the hon. Gentleman contains himself, I would like to draw to a conclusion quite soon, because I am conscious of the new rulings.

Obviously, we ought to be looking at child care. We ought to be putting the emphasis on training, not cutting the budget. We ought, obviously, to be considering not the kind of national insurance holiday that the Chancellor proposed, but a tax concession or allowance for employers who take people off the register of those unemployed for two years, which would give real impetus to getting people back to work.

Those are important factors, which would, over a period, begin to make a difference and begin to work. We need, as I say, to make better use of the resources that have been allocated. We must recognise that deprivation, as I tried to say during earlier exchanges, is expensive for us all. Inequality unchecked puts stability and social cohesion at risk, at hazard.

The Government are confused and divided on such matters. Evidence of that can be heard in the various conflicting briefings which no doubt lie at the root of the points of information that have been made during my speech. The Conservatives have a divided party and a divided Cabinet, presiding over a divided country.

On the other side of the argument, some, as we have heard, simply deny the facts about events happening around us. Some argue that the market should have its head, that Adam Smith's invisible hand still rules, and that inequality is built into a system that rewards initiative and ability. Predictably, the hon. Member for Surrey, East, who made that point, has gone. No doubt he did not want to stay for any sustained argument.

Such people argue that inequality is built into a system that rewards initiative and ability, and that it is a price worth paying. I do not think that it is a price worth paying. It is especially morally offensive to ask other people to pay that price when we are not prepared to pay anything ourselves.

The Prime Minister was right last Thursday when he said that it was the duty of Government to try to reduce inequality. He is disastrously wrong when he argues that his Government have got it right and that they are creating opportunity and hope in the areas which are hard hit.

I have a long memory. I remember that on 23 November 1990, the Prime Minister proclaimed his belief that

"in the next 10 years we will have to make changes that will genuinely produce across the whole country a genuinely classless society in which people can rise to whatever level that their own abilities and their own good fortune may take them, from wherever they started."

If we look at the statistics, at the picture that emerges, at the individual experience of Members of Parliament who worry and cope as best they can with the damage on the ground, and at the shape of Britain of the future if those trends run unchecked, we see what a failure that aspiration has been.

The Prime Minister is almost half way through that 10-year period and he is—sadly—marching backwards. It is time to think again. It is time to make a new start.

4.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the fact that the vast majority of people are significantly better off today than in 1979, and notes, in particular, that the average pensioner is now more than 50 per cent. better off; approves the Government's policy of ensuring that social security spending does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay while focussing resources on those who need it most; applauds the fact that the Government has channelled an extra £1 billion a year to low income families, and an even greater sum to poorer pensioners, since 1988; welcomes the high priority accorded by the Government to education and training; recognises that employment is the best route to higher incomes, and commends the package of work incentives, including the child care disregard and the Back to Work Bonus, which the Government has introduced; applauds the Government's achievement in reducing unemployment by over half a million since 1992 and notes the fact that a national minimum wage would increase unemployment; and deplores the Opposition's failure to reveal the level of their national minimum wage, how they would deal with differentials, their social security policies and their costs."

I welcome the debate for two reasons. The first is that it enables me to pursue in the House the serious issues that I raised in my Ulster Conservative Political Centre lecture, which the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security was kind enough to describe as the most important speech made by any Cabinet Minister for a long time.

The second is that it gives me a chance to rebut the attempts of the Opposition to revive the politics of envy on the back of the recent Rowntree report.

By contrast, we Conservatives believe in helping the least well-off, which is why we have devoted huge resources to doing so. We believe, where possible, in helping people out of dependency by giving them opportunity, choice and incentives. Our policies are succeeding better than those pursued by any of our European Community partners, as we reduce our unemployment further and faster, we raise our once dismal education standards and we enable people to accumulate savings to ensure a more prosperous retirement.

The Opposition believe in levelling down, promoting envy and encouraging dependency on the state. If they were genuinely concerned about the least well-off, they too would propose today a concrete, costed and coherent policy. Instead, they brandish statistics and glory in the gini coefficients on which the Rowntree report is based.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Was my right hon. Friend a little surprised to be called to the Dispatch Box by the Labour party to speak in a social security debate supposedly on poverty, when the motion deals simply with employment, education and how to get people out of

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

poverty? Is it not typical of the Labour party that it believes that the way out of poverty has something to do with the Department of Social Security?

Mr. Lilley: Absolutely. The most amazing thing is that Labour called the debate in Labour party time, but it has not told us what its policies are. I will come to that point in a moment.

It is quite clear that, to the Opposition, the poor are not people to be helped, but simply statistics with which to beat the Government and attack the free enterprise system. It is not surprising that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) should seize on the Rowntree report. As *The Economist*, which these days is no right-wing journal, said:

"Unfortunately the politics of envy, though never clearly stated, lies behind (and weakens) much of the analysis in the Rowntree Report like a similar report by the Labour sponsored Commission on Social Justice . . . it is unconvincing as a whole."

As it is Valentine's day, I will give the hon. Member for Garscadden a friendly warning. Before he and his party swallow everything in the Rowntree report hook, line and sinker, they should be careful. They must remember who wrote it—the distinguished left-wing academic, John Hills, the same John Hills who, according to *The Guardian*, was the principal author and inspirer of Labour's tax bombshell, which we found so helpful at the last election. It was the same John Hills who, last year, published a benefits bombshell when he suggested that there would be nothing wrong with increasing spending on social security by a further 5 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Mr. Dewar: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman should heed my warning.

In the document to which I have referred, Mr. Hills effectively proposes a tax, benefit and incomes policy bombshell all in one. He has learnt not to put a price tag on it, but we of course may do so. The hon. Member for Garscadden should beware of that before it blows up Labour's electoral hopes.

Mr. Dewar: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that we make our own policies and do not lift them from anyone's reports. Before we continue that argument, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will establish one important thing: he does not like John Hills or where he comes from, but does he accept the accuracy of the analysis in terms of the statistics and the picture they paint? That is clearly not acceptable to many of the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues, but the Secretary of State's opinion is important. Is he rubbishing the author or the analysis in the report?

Mr. Lilley: I am not rubbishing either. I do not dislike Mr. Hills; indeed, I invited him to the Nottingham seminar which was attended by the hon. Member for Garscadden. I am simply pointing out that Mr. Hills has his political agenda, to which he is perfectly entitled but which has misled the Labour party in the past—*[Interruption.]* I will come to the figures in a moment. The important point is how one interprets the figures. The Opposition use statistics like a drunk uses a lamp post—more for support than for illumination. We believe that statistics should be used to establish what we get from them.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I hope to make a speech later and give the facts about the people I see people living in poverty. Is the Secretary of State aware that I received a telephone call today from a local newspaper to tell me about the town of Linwood? I hope that hon. Members remember Linwood, where 5,000 people lost their jobs 10 years ago. The Government are now telling our people that they are living in poverty. In numerous areas people are living in poverty. That is a fact under this Government. After 10 years, the Government have done nothing and the people of Linwood are living in poverty.

Mr. Lilley: I am not sure whether it is possible to sustain that argument. We have done a great deal for the people of Linwood and for people elsewhere.

The overall picture is easily obscured by concentrating on measures of inequality.

Mr. Heald: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for the Opposition to use the analysis of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, accepting it all as received fact without following it through to its conclusion—that there should be much more public spending—is gutless and cowardly?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is extraordinary that the Opposition cannot see the inconsistency of endorsing a document and then failing to accept responsibility for the policies that it contains and to which they say it inevitably leads.

Mr. Dewar: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is a distinction between endorsing the analysis and necessarily accepting all the conclusions, although many of them are sound? Surely that is a simple concept for the right hon. Gentleman to grasp. I should have thought that the thrust of the Rowntree report was that resources are being squandered and spent on the wrong aims and objectives. That is the real message of the report.

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the policies proposed in the document are not merited by the analysis in the document, it would be only reasonable to tell the House why.

The Opposition are so concerned with relative incomes and extremes of wealth that they ignore what is happening to the vast majority. The simple fact is that, since 1979, the vast majority of people in this country have become significantly better off. Average incomes have increased by more than a third.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: I will make a little progress, if I may. So far, I have given way far more than the hon. Member for Garscadden did throughout his speech.

The report prepared for the Rowntree inquiry by the Institute of Fiscal Studies shows just how dramatic the growth of incomes in recent years has been. In the 10 years from 1961 to 1971, average non-pensioner household incomes increased by just 18 per cent. In the next decade to 1981, they increased by a further 13 per cent., but in the 10 years from 1981 to 1991 they soared by 39 per cent.—more than in the previous 20 years put together.

During a time of such a dramatic rise in overall incomes, it should come as no surprise that the income of different groups grew differently, and we have never tried to pretend otherwise. Moreover, far from falling behind other countries, the living standards of ordinary British people have been catching up. The latest OECD figures reported in this month's *Employment Gazette* are well worth reading. It states:

"Taking into account the cost of living, estimated average take-home pay for an unmarried UK production worker as defined by the OECD is . . . higher than in all other EU countries, except Luxembourg.

Estimated take-home pay for a married couple [with two children] on an average production worker's earnings is higher in the UK than in all other EC countries except Luxembourg, Belgium and the former West Germany"

which were 1 per cent. ahead. The report continues:

"The relatively high level of UK take-home pay reflects in part the low cost of living in the UK compared with other North European countries and the relatively low level of taxes on employment."

To most people, that rise in the living standards of ordinary people in Britain is pretty obvious and self-evident, but, to Labour and Mr. Hills, ordinary people must have become poorer because their incomes have not risen as fast as those of the likes of Mr. Cedric Brown.

Ms Corston: Will the Secretary of State confirm that virtually every one of the figures on which the Rowntree report is based, reflecting the growth in inequality, was released and, indeed, confirmed by his Department to me on 31 August last year, and published in *Hansard* on 26 October 1994?

Mr. Lilley: The figure on which the hon. Lady puts most weight is bracketed, which signifies that it is particularly unreliable. There are small samples and difficult issues, but I will refer to the figures and try to put them in perspective.

Let me rebut just a few points that were made by the hon. Member for Garscadden and his colleagues on the back of the Rowntree report. It is simply not sensible to claim that because the rich are getting richer the poor must be getting poorer. It is arithmetically true, of course, that, if the incomes of some better-off groups outstrip the average, there will be more people below the average, but to define poverty purely as a fraction of average income is to distort the very meaning of the word. To define it in terms of the income support level is even more perverse, because it would mean that whenever the income support safety net were raised the number of people classified as poor would increase. The Social Security Select Committee concluded that the increase in the level of income support relative to the old supplementary benefit level accounted for most of the reported rise in the number of potential claimants.

The claim that the poor have been getting poorer in absolute terms does not hold much water either. The report of the Labour-chaired Select Committee shows that the income support safety net is about 15 per cent. higher than the supplementary benefit level that we inherited in 1979. We know that benefits for an unemployed couple with two young children are 24 per cent. higher in real terms now than they were in 1979, and that pensioners as a group have higher incomes now than in 1979; in fact their incomes have increased by 50 per cent.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman might care to listen to what I am about to say; he may find it especially persuasive, because I shall quote the hon. Member for Garscadden, who recently said:

"There is . . . evidence, which I welcome, that retired people are on average now enjoying many more resources and a higher quality of life. That is largely because of the maturing of state earnings-related pension schemes and occupational schemes and . . ., approved personal pensions."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 606.]

On top of that, the Government have focused an extra £1.2 billion a year to boost the incomes of poorer pensioners.

From April, all pensioner couples without other means will be entitled to more than £100 per week.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who no doubt wishes to welcome that fact.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way with his usual courtesy. Will he confirm that the test case involving his Department's non-payment of invalidity benefit to women aged between 60 and 65 is to be heard by the European Court of Justice on 16 April? If it goes against the Government, as I sincerely hope it will, will the women who have been denied payments for more than three years receive arrears of payment beyond April 1992?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman always asks intelligent detailed questions, usually about matters relating to the European Court. Despite my obsession with such matters I am not always as familiar with the cases as he is, but I shall certainly investigate the question and write to him after the debate.

As well as the extra resources that we have focused on benefits for least well-off pensioners, we have focused an extra £1 billion on poorer families. It is hard to pretend that the most significant groups that we normally think of as the poor have got worse off, when their benefits have been increased.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I must make some progress.

The Opposition largely base their claim on figures for the bottom tenth of incomes after housing costs, as set out in the document, "Households Below Average Income", which we published at the behest of the Select Committee.

It is harder still to say that such people's living standards have declined since 1979 when the proportion of people in the bottom tenth having, for example, a fridge-freezer has risen from 32 per cent. in 1979 to 81 per cent. in 1991-92. Furthermore, the proportion with a telephone has risen from 47 per cent. in 1979 to 73 per cent. in 1991-92; the proportion with a washing machine has risen from 69 per cent. in 1979 to 86 per cent. in 1991-92; the proportion with a video has risen from a negligible figure in 1979 to 65 per cent. in 1991-92; and the proportion with a car has risen from 40 per cent. in 1979 to 53 per cent. in 1991-92.

[Mr. Lilley]

Indeed, to most people the idea that more than half the people alleged to be sinking into ever-deepening poverty have none the less managed to acquire a car at least gives pause for thought—

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley:—perhaps even to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman).

Ms Harman: Does the Secretary of State still believe what he said in his speech in Northern Ireland:

"over the past couple of decades, although average earnings have grown strongly, the differentials have widened, and it is this widening of earnings differentials which lies behind many of our social problems—the break up of families, lone parenthood, welfare dependency, delinquency and crime"?

Opposition Members are having difficulty in reconciling what the right hon. Gentleman said in that speech with what he is saying to the House in front of his Back Benchers today.

Mr. Lilley: Not at all. I was going to quote almost those very words when I encountered the distinct problem of the widening dispersion of earning power across the western world, which is a matter to which I tried to draw the House's attention. *[Interruption.]* We are a part of the western world, although the hon. Member for Peckham may not realise it. She has spent probably half her career trying to make us a part of the other world.

The fact is that the figures drawn from "Households Below Average Income" do not measure what has happened to a given group of low-income people over time. In fact, they reflect a category that is constantly changing in composition. Unemployed people accounted for only 15 per cent. of the bottom tenth of incomes in 1979, but the figure had increased to almost a third in 1991-92 at the trough of the recession. Since then, unemployment has fallen by more than 500,000 and will come down further.

Self-employment, on the other hand, increased massively during the 1980s. That is a welcome sign of enterprise and regeneration, but self-employed people have fluctuating incomes, particularly in the early stages of business formation. What is more, they can control the reporting of their incomes. They are over-represented in the bottom tenth. Indeed, if the sample is representative of the country, in 1991-92—as the hon. Member for Garscadden has reminded us—the bottom 10 per cent. of incomes included 90,000 farmers, 145,000 builders, about 40,000 taxi drivers and 10,000 accountants.

Some of those people may be struggling to keep afloat. That is why self-employed people are entitled to claim family credit and some 85,000 of them are so helped. The heavy presence of self-employed people in the bottom decile is a poor guide to the living standards of this group. That doubt is reinforced by the fact that 750,000 people report zero or negative incomes. The Rowntree report recognised that point, although it was tucked away in an appendix to the second volume.

The report stated:

"households reporting zero or negative incomes in 1990-91 also reported expenditure above the average for all households . . . the suspicion is that some may habitually misreport income to the authorities, disguising comfortable life styles. If so the HBAI picture will suggest too much inequality."

The Opposition may not accept my assertion that the figures do not justify the conclusions that they base on them. They may not even accept Mr. Hills' qualification, but they will surely accept the views of a member of the Commission on Social Justice, Steve Webb, who works for the Institute of Fiscal Studies. He gave a seminar on this very issue, and specifically addressed my analyses of the figures. His conclusion was quite unequivocal, and it was summed up in the title of his lecture:

"Why Peter Lilley was right about the poverty figures."

The Opposition will have a little difficulty disagreeing with a member of their own commission on that point.

When one looks more closely at the figures, one finds that there is considerable change and movement. Again, I am grateful to the Rowntree report for pointing out that some 29 per cent. of people in the bottom tenth of incomes in 1990 had moved two or more deciles two years later. If one looks at people's incomes over their lifetime rather than just at a point in time, one finds that the level of inequality between people falls dramatically by more than a half.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Secretary of State has referred several times to unemployment causing poverty, but he has not placed much emphasis on the low-activity rates in many areas. Is he aware that the Rowntree report drew heavily on a study, "The Geography of Poverty and Wealth", by Anne Green, which was published last summer? That study showed that 10 of the 12 worst areas in Britain in terms of the activity figures were in the industrial valleys of Glamorgan and Gwent. That was causing an enormously low level of income—so much so that in Mid Glamorgan gross domestic product per head of population is lower than the Irish Republic average.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is right. There are difficult areas, and that is one of the issues that we are trying to tackle on a cross-departmental basis. Permanent secretaries, with my endorsement and support, are ensuring that our policies are co-ordinated and that they reinforce each other, whether on the single regeneration budget, the expenditure of my Department, or that of the Department for Education. We have to do all in our power to help people in those areas and I accept the hon. Gentleman's argument.

I must dispose of some other misconceptions before we consider the causes and cures for the more fundamental problem that I dealt with in my Ulster lecture. The report highlights the fall in the wages of the lowest-paid group and states:

"After 1978 hourly wages of the lowest paid men hardly changed in real terms and by 1992 they were lower than in 1975."

That bold statement gives the impression that the least well-paid have not benefited under a Conservative Government.

I pondered the strange references and the switch from 1978 to 1975 and studied the chart in the report showing the path of wages in that period. It reveals that the only significant and substantial fall in wages—a sharp one—occurred between 1975 and 1978, under a Labour Government, and that wages have since recovered somewhat.

Inequalities of income are not more marked in Britain than overseas. Again, the summary of the Rowntree report states:

"the pace at which inequality increased in the UK was faster than in any other,"—

country—

"with the exception of New Zealand."

As is clear, that claim is based on comparisons of countries using different years.

A more relevant indicator might be the level of inequality and not the amount or the speed with which it changed. Volume 2 of the report makes it clear that the United Kingdom is in the middle of a league table of other developed countries for income inequality. The increase in measured inequality that occurred in this country only partly reflects the unwinding of the effects of the incomes policy since the mid-1970s.

A fourth claim must be rebutted—the presumption of much of the discussion that the widening of incomes recorded in the Rowntree report was due to the fact that tax changes allegedly made the tax system less progressive. The report is unequivocal about that and states:

"The tax system had much the same impact in reducing inequality in 1993 as in 1977."

Having dealt with some of the fallacies that have been worked up on the basis of this report, let us consider what is happening. A phenomenon of enormous significance underlies some of the Rowntree committee's concerns. As I said in my Ulster speech, the growing dispersion of earning power is probably the most significant social change affecting the United Kingdom and most other western countries. The earning power of brawn has not kept pace with that of brain.

Some countries, especially the United States, New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom, have responded to that phenomenon, which affects all advanced countries, by allowing earnings to reflect the changing productivity of different skill groups. As a result, each of those countries has generally experienced a greater dispersion of earnings, but more job creation and a smaller rise in unemployment.

By contrast, other countries—notably on the continent—have endeavoured to prevent wages from reflecting the changing earnings potential of less skilled people as we increasingly compete with the far east and experience the impact of new technology. In those countries, growth in inequality is slower, at the expense of higher unemployment and fewer jobs. For example, the proportion of those of working age in work in the United Kingdom has risen since 1979 and is more than 10 percentage points higher than in the rest of the European Community. Whereas, on average, in other EC countries about 61 per cent. of people of working age are in work, we have nearly 72 per cent. in work, and the percentage has been falling throughout the rest of the EC during that time.

Our strategy is to improve incentives to work, raise training and education standards, increase the number of people who benefit and boost job creation and enterprise.

On the incentives front, we introduced the child care disregard for family credit—indeed, this Government introduced family credit—and promised the back-to-work bonus as part of the jobseeker's allowance, to encourage people to take part-time work as a stepping stone to full-time work and to give them a potential £1,000 credit when they return to full-time work. We strengthened in-work benefits, not merely by introducing family credit but by proposing a £10 supplement for those who work more than 30 hours a week. We are also carrying out a major pilot study to find out whether it would be effective to extend in-work benefits, equivalent to family credit, to those who have no family.

In total, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I announced a £700 million programme of work and job incentives at the time of the Budget and the social security statement.

It is no secret that, for decades and probably for a century, Britain has suffered from two great weaknesses in education and training—a lack of vocational education and the low expectations of the least able, who represent the bottom third of ability in our schools. We introduced comprehensive reforms to try to cure and overcome those long-standing defects. We introduced the national curriculum and the Labour party opposed it. We introduced testing in schools and the Labour party opposed it. We introduced the appraisal of teachers and the Labour party opposed it. We introduced publication of results and the Labour party opposed it. It is no good Labour Members deciding when their children are of an age to go to secondary schools that they support those things that improve the quality of education, but which they opposed when we tried to introduce them.

The Labour party even opposed youth training, although the noble Baroness Shirley Williams considered such a programme and rejected it. We have encouraged sensible pay for apprentices and a new, improved apprentice scheme so that people are not priced out of training. We have encouraged businesses to accept that the onus is on them to improve the training of their staff and the private sector spends about £20 billion on training.

Mr. Dewar: I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but he is giving us a remarkably complacent view of what has been happening. Will he say a few words about the training budget this year as compared to next, and perhaps during the past two or three years, and about the number of training places? I accept that the quality of training is important, but how many training for work places are there this year and how many will there be next year?

Mr. Lilley: Next year, we expect there to be twice as many training places as under the last Labour Government. Perhaps that is not the standard that we should allow ourselves to be judged by—the Opposition want to be judged by a higher standard than that.

Mr. Dewar: I understand that there will be 55,000 fewer training for work places next year compared to this year. That should be weighed in the balance against some of the right hon. Gentleman's comments.

Mr. Lilley: It does not in any way repudiate the argument that I have just made, or the disproportionate importance of private sector training in firms. To hear the Opposition, one would suppose that the only training that was important and valid was in the state sector, whereas about 10 times as much training takes place in the private sector.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, daily, thousands of people come into the country who do not have our language, who often lack skills, and who do not have capital, but who manage to find

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

work and learn to support and help their families? If they can do that, does not it show that what one needs more than anything else is the will to work and the will to get on?

Mr. Lilley: That is crucial and, as I said, about 29 per cent. of people leave the bottom tenth of incomes and rise, not only to the next decile, but to the one above or higher still within a couple of years. People increasingly have that get-up-and-go in our society, and we encourage that by making—

Mr. Graham: That is sick, Minister: tell that to the people of Renfrewshire.

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that they have get-up-and-go in the constituency of the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) as well.

Our strategy has been pretty comprehensively endorsed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Indeed, many of the measures that we have introduced have been endorsed by the Rowntree report.

The Rowntree report makes a raft of uncosted and often contradictory proposals. For example, it proposes that benefits henceforward should increase, presumably in line with earnings rather than prices. If we had done that last year only, instead of implementing the uprating of benefits costing £1.5 billion, it would have cost £3.3 billion. If we had reviewed all benefits and uprated them all in line with earnings, it would have cost about £35 billion. The impact that that would have had on the level of dependency would have been worse than the cost.

We believe that emphasis must be placed on getting people back into work. That is why we place emphasis on incentives and in-work benefits instead of complacently assuming that we simply have to make life ever more comfortable. I do not pretend that the present level of benefits is anything more than meagre in the long run.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I should like to give the Secretary of State some time to think about the matter, but why does not he at least cost one of the most obvious things that might be done, which is to change the earnings disregard rule so that people would be able to earn something as they went back to work, or to increase their own income? Everyone knows that it needs to be done. Has the Secretary of State costed it? If not, will he do so, and will he tell the House what it would cost?

Mr. Lilley: We have considered it. We propose to change it by the introduction of the back-to-work bonus, so that people will accumulate a credit when they work part time on benefit, rather than being able to stay permanently on benefit with a mixture of part-time work and benefit, which would be hugely expensive.

The Rowntree report proposes to double the disregard from £5 to £10. We propose to make it £10 for a couple instead of only £5 for a couple at present, but to retain the £5 for single people.

The Rowntree disregard proposals would cost £20 million in themselves and probably more than £20 million additionally for the proposal to accumulate benefits.

Mr. Soley *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: No; I have given way to the hon. Gentleman. It might have been more sensible for him to have found out whether the Labour party supported that proposal and was committed to it before he asked me.

Does the hon. Member for Garscadden propose to endorse that policy? Does he propose to reduce, as the Rowntree report proposes, the housing benefit taper, which would cost about £360 million to reduce by 10 per cent., or the family credit taper, which would cost nearly £200 million to reduce by 10 per cent? Does he propose to uprate all benefits, which would cost more than £1 billion extra in the first year and cumulatively increase to enormous sums? Does he propose to extend school meals to people on family credit, which would cost another £115 million?

The hon. Member for Garscadden is sitting there, almost uninterested in the concrete policies of the report that he spent half an hour endorsing.

Today's debate displays yet again the willingness of the Opposition to exploit the problems of less well-off people, while proposing no specific policies to help them. The Government have recognised the challenge posed by the dispersion of earnings power.

I have said that the purpose of my social security review is to focus benefits precisely on those who need them most. I have also described the importance that I attach to work incentives, and announced a package worth nearly £700 million last autumn. Meanwhile, the hon. Member for Garscadden opposes everything that we do, yet lacks the guts to commit himself or the Labour party to reversing it. He welcomes uncosted and costly proposals made by his friends on the Commission on Social Justice and on the Rowntree inquiry, but he will not say whether he accepts or rejects those proposals.

It is time for Labour to allow some light to escape from its own black hole. It is time for Labour to abandon the cynical politics of stooge and stealth, and recognise that our policies are those of compassion and commitment. *[Interruption.]* It is easy for the Opposition to call for policies to level down and policies that would trap people in dependency: that has been the cry of the left throughout the ages.

I invite the hon. Member for Garscadden to consider the saying of the famous republican orator in the Spanish civil war—it is now essential in the Cabinet to know a lot about Spain—who said, when there were demands to do away with the inequalities of Spanish society:

"If you want me to reduce the incomes of the rich to the level of the poor, I will do it in a fortnight. If you want me to raise the incomes of the poor to those of the rich, I will do it, but it will take us a lifetime."

We have a long-term strategy to increase incomes by opportunity, by help and by incentives for the least able people. The Opposition offer nothing.

4.56 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): The Secretary of State concluded his remarks to us this afternoon by saying that the Government had shown compassion and commitment to poorer members of our community. I have yet to notice any sign or evidence that those are the Government's policies. He also told us that Labour's

motion was motivated by the politics of envy. I think that he completely and deliberately distorted the motion that we tabled.

In essence, we shall not be able to build a society at ease with itself against the background of increasing numbers of economically disfranchised people, the grinding and relentless poverty that comes to the attention of all Opposition Members in their constituencies, the absence of employment prospects in many parts of the country, and a future, under the present Government, that will mean more of the same. The Rowntree report effectively highlighted that characteristic of a drawbridge society. It is simply not a sustainable model on which we can build a prosperous future for our country and our citizens.

As Britain heads towards the next millennium, social and economic inequalities are reverting to a more 19th century pattern. In too many situations, life choices are distributed not on merit but on where one happens to live, on who one's parents are and on ability to pay. Discrimination on the grounds of sex, race and gender remains widespread in our communities, and inequalities in health, to which the Secretary of State barely referred, are still with us.

That depressing pattern of inequality is socially divisive and should therefore be unacceptable to any Government, of whatever political persuasion—especially as the Prime Minister, as recently as last week, confirmed that the Government accepted that tackling inequality was a duty of Ministers.

Inequality on the present scale is not only socially divisive but economically disabling, and therefore damages our future prosperity as a society. If millions of our fellow citizens are without jobs—as they are—and millions of them are without the prospect of work, they cannot be consumers, so playing a full part in promoting economic growth. As a result, social security spending becomes inflated as taxpayers struggle to foot the bill for mass unemployment. In turn, that imposes a greater financial burden on those lucky enough to be employed.

For the past 16 years, the Government's consistent response to that question has been the same: deregulation, a reduction in social protection and the laughably described "trickle-down economics". We now know that that grim experiment has been a resounding failure. Last week's Rowntree report, the central figures of which the Minister did not dispute, makes the scale of that failure extremely clear. Far from helping matters, Government policy has made matters substantially worse. Did not J.K. Galbraith describe modern Conservatism as an attempt to find a moral justification for greed?

The Rowntree report confirms the accuracy of that description and shows that incomes became rapidly less equal in the 1980s. In 1984-85, the latest date for which figures are available, income inequality was as great as it was in 1949. Since 1979, the lowest-income groups have not benefited from economic growth, while better-off groups have enjoyed improved standards of living. Therefore, up to 30 per cent. of the population have not shared in the improvement in economic growth since 1979. Since 1977, the proportion of the population with less than half average income has more than trebled. As we all know, during the 1980s more people became dependent on means-tested benefits.

That is a dismal catalogue of incompetence and indifference, of which we saw plenty of examples in the Secretary of State's speech today. A number of factors have contributed to that catalogue of incompetence. First, the Government have been prepared to tolerate levels of unemployment that would have been unthinkable even 20 years ago. Unemployment averaged about 300,000 throughout the 1950s, less than 500,000 throughout the 1960s and about 1 million throughout the 1970s. Throughout the 1980s—the period of Conservative Government—it averaged 2.7 million, and long-term unemployment remains a problem. A third of unemployed men and a quarter of unemployed women have been out of work for more than 12 months. The comparative figures in the United States are 8 per cent. and 5 per cent. respectively. We have a huge burden to shoulder because of the incompetent way in which the Government have managed our economy since 1979, and the consequences of their failure are becoming daily more visible.

Unskilled workers have borne the brunt of the Government's callous tolerance of mass unemployment. Less than 20 years ago, nine out of 10 men who had left school without qualifications were in employment. Today, the figure is seven out of 10 and is still falling.

Secondly, the Government's education reforms have failed to improve education standards for the majority of our children. For example, we have the lowest under-fives provision in the European Union alongside Portugal, and far lower numbers—although they have increased in recent years—attending university than Japan, Germany and France.

Thirdly, the Government have refused to listen to anyone who has drawn attention to what has been happening in our society. The Secretary of State's speech this afternoon was another example of that. Instead, the Government have chosen systematically to ignore the growing evidence that things are going badly wrong for a growing number of our fellow citizens.

A fourth factor which explains the mess that we are now in is the combined effect of the Government's tax and benefits problems. Over the past decade, the poorest 10 per cent. of households have lost £156 a year in higher VAT, national insurance and other taxes. By contrast, the wealthiest 10 per cent. have gained £1,612 a year as a result of income tax cuts alone. The biggest gains of all have gone to the top 1 per cent. of the population—those with average incomes of more than £120,000 a year—for whom the cumulative gain from tax cuts since 1979 has been a staggering £75 billion. That is almost the equivalent of the entire annual budget of the Department of Social Security. When all tax policies over the past 15 years are taken together, the poorest 10 per cent. of the population now pay a higher proportion of their income in taxes than the richest 10 per cent.—43 per cent. and 32 per cent. respectively.

In Cumbria, the position has substantially deteriorated over the past 10 years. The most disadvantaged wards in the county of Cumbria had a lower measure of economic prosperity in 1991 compared with 1981. Over the same period, the extent of economic disadvantage in those wards increased. Most of the deprivation in Cumbria can be found in Carlisle, along the county's west coast, and in the Furness area. However, much of the economic disadvantage in Cumbria is concentrated in my constituency, which includes four of the five most deprived wards in Cumbria.

[Mr. John Hutton]

Present Government policies are simply inadequate to deal with the scale and extent of that disadvantage. If the Secretary of State wants examples, he should attend some of my advice surgeries on Fridays and Saturdays, when he could see the real position at first hand. It is not as he described to the House this afternoon, when he said that growing prosperity was shared among all income groups and across every community in the country. In my constituency, the position is close to a crisis.

Unemployment lies at the background of many of those problems. It is extremely high in many parts of my constituency, where more than 10,000 jobs have been lost since 1990. There is growing evidence of low pay in Barrow and throughout the north. The problem of unemployment particularly affects women in Cumbria, whose average earnings are 11 per cent. lower than nationally. More than a third of Cumbrian women are on low wages, compared with a national average of only a quarter.

Health indicators in my constituency and the north paint an extremely grim picture. In 1992, the northern region had the highest mortality rate in England and Wales, as measured by the standard mortality ratio. The death rate in the northern region was 13 per cent. higher than the average in England and Wales. In Barrow-in-Furness, that rate is 15 per cent. higher than the national average. Those are not bogus or fabricated statistics; they are Government statistics.

Those are the consequences of Tory economic mismanagement combined with incompetent social and taxation policies, which have demonstrated consistent disdain for those of our community who are forced to live on benefit. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) has now left the Chamber. She expressed the view, which is commonly shared among Conservative Members—perhaps not by all those present, but we have certainly heard it before—that the solution to unemployment is to get tough with the unemployed because they are to blame. The theory is that, if the Government prod unemployed people harder and harder, they will find jobs. The truth is that the jobs are not there. They do not exist in my constituency—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) would like to come to my constituency, he would discover that 4,500 unemployed people are chasing 230 job vacancies registered at the jobcentre. There is simply no credible or logical strategy in forcing our unemployed constituents into a fruitless search for jobs that simply do not exist. Moreover, they constantly face the prospect of losing benefit because they are deemed not to have complied with rules set by the Government.

Unemployment is central to the topic of today's debate. It underlines a clear pattern in the growing inequality of deprivation across the country; in pockets, it is now completely unacceptable, both morally and economically. The solution lies with a policy designed to secure full employment, which recognises that full employment is a responsibility of Government. The damage to health caused by mass unemployment is clear. Unemployed people are much more likely to suffer a chronic illness or disability. For example, a middle-aged man who is made redundant or takes early retirement is twice as likely to die within five years as a man who stays in work. Unemployment can also have a devastating effect on psychological health. That has been confirmed by recent research in Edinburgh and Oxford. Unemployed men are between 10 and 15 times more likely to attempt suicide than employed men. That is the reality; it is not as the Secretary of State described to us tonight.

It is also clear from the Rowntree report that urgent action is needed across a range of Government Departments if we are to tackle the distorting effects of growing inequalities in Britain. We need a national debate about how we can bring about a sense of national renewal with full employment, a fair tax system and a modern welfare state as essential preconditions for any return to decency and sanity in our society. Bringing about such a transformation will be Labour's big ideal when we resume responsibility for the government of Britain into the next century.

5.10 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): One of the reasons why these occasions are invaluable is that they give me an opportunity to debate with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I have enjoyed debating with him before, but this is not one of his better efforts. Although no one can doubt the sincerity of what he said, it seemed to me that he was fixing on a prescription and a definition of poverty that simply do not exist. One cannot begin to get to grips with a problem unless one knows what one is talking about in the first place.

There is no doubting the sincerity of the hon. Member for Garscadden or the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), but they were defining poverty in terms of the gap that exists between the rich and the poor.

It is easy to fall into sloppy language and sloppy thinking, but sincerity does not justify that sloppy thinking. It is completely ridiculous to define poverty in terms of the gap between the rich and the poor. It is tantamount to saying that people are better off in countries where the living standards of the poor are lower, but the gap is narrow, than they are in countries where the gap is wider, but the living standards of the poor are improving. That is the reality of the language about gaps. Frankly, it is complete nonsense.

The hon. Member for Garscadden talked about seeing people in his surgery and wondering how they survived under strains and pressures that he had never understood. I quite understand the sincerity of his feelings and his compassion for those people, but perhaps he should talk a bit more to them. Perhaps after a period of Labour Government he should tell them, "Guess what? You are much better off now because the gap is narrower." What help is such language to impoverished or unemployed people? They cannot pay their bills with a gap or take it along to a building society and say, "The gap has narrowed, therefore I must be better off." They cannot pay the milk bill with a gap.

The gap itself means nothing whatsoever. What is relevant is the money that the poor actually have. Opposition Members should also remember that the lowest standards of poverty in Britain would be regarded as well beyond most people's dreams in other parts of the world.

Poverty is an absolute measurement. One cannot talk about it in terms of gaps. A few moments ago, the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness equated the language of

the gap with saying that the rich have had tax handouts. Let us get it clear. The rich have not had handouts from the Government; the Government have simply taken less money from them than the previous Government did. It is about time that the Conservatives had the courage and confidence to say that, whether a taxpayer earns £10,000, £100,000 or £1 million, every single penny—100p in the pound—belongs to him. The Government give nothing; they simply take away. The idea that the poor have been prejudiced because the Government have given money back to the taxpayer—although one does not doubt the sincerity of the language—is sloppy thinking and sloppy thinking does not help the most vulnerable.

I accept that—it will be common ground on both sides of the House—we have to consider those who have to pay tax. On the one hand, if we tax people 100p in the pound, they will do no work; on the other, if we tax them zero pence in the pound, we will raise no tax. Obviously, somewhere between those two extremes there is a level of taxation that will provide the money that the Government need to discharge the functions that are necessary to help those who cannot look after themselves and will enable them to provide enough incentive for those people capable of earning greatly to make them continue earning and paying tax.

When I first started work as a solicitor's clerk in the 1960s, I remember trying to retain a particular barrister who was very popular. I telephoned his clerk in chambers and he said, "Is that a case for a Thursday? Counsel does not work on a Thursday." I said, "Surely the courts sit on Thursday." The barrister's clerk said, "Obviously, you do not understand. Counsel works on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but have you not heard that the tax rate is 89p in the pound? He does not work for the rest of the week. It is not worth his while." That was the position under the Labour Government. Where is that ideal tax line? It is known in economic terms as the Laffer curve.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) understands the debate and I wish he were here today. In 1986, he asked a parliamentary question about taxation. In addition to having prodigious knowledge and talents, the hon. Gentleman has a keen sense of humour and one never quite knows whether the answer to his question was a surprise or something that he had expected. He asked the Treasury to provide a calculation of the proportion of the total income tax that was paid by the rich under the Conservatives and the proportion of the tax take that they had paid under the Labour Government.

Those who talk about giving money to the rich and the gap between rich and poor would assume that if the tax rates came down, the amount of money that the rich contributed to the welfare of others would also go down—not a bit of it. The answers to the questions from the hon. Member for Birkenhead revealed that, as tax rates had come down, the amount of money that the rich contributed had gone up.

That is an inconvenient piece of thinking for the class war worriers who talk about gaps and think that people can pay their bills with gaps. It produced an answer that they find difficult to accept. When the Government leave the rich with more of their own money, there is more money to spend on those who need it. Indeed, we have seen a hint that behind the Follettised exterior lurks a Stalinist soul and the idea that at the end of the day there is not an ever-growing cake; there is a fixed cake out there and the question is how to slice it up. The marvellous thing is that behind the designer suits are the same old prejudices.

Where does one go from there? We had the fact that the rich are contributing more. I am surprised that Sir Iain Vallance has not been mentioned here today.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): We have mentioned him.

Mr. Nicholls: I am pleased about that and I am quite happy to mention him again. I understand that he earns £1 million a year. That has two advantages. First, it enables me to do income tax calculations on my feet and, secondly, it enables me to talk about the contribution that Sir Iain Vallance has made to the poor of the country. Even under the present Government, he will have paid approximately £400,000 into the national coffers to be used in ways of which Opposition Members would approve.

In the bad old days, what happened to people who earned that sort of money? Either they simply stopped work on Wednesday, like my barrister colleague, or they fiddled or went into various schemes which existed to exercise an accountant's ingenuity but really were to save tax. Ultimately, they went abroad. These days, they are here paying their tax. Coupled with that, the idea that we are giving handouts to the rich and the question of the gap become relevant.

The final nonsense which I expect the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) will stand up and justify in a moment is that poverty can be defined by the level of benefits. It really is profound cheek for Opposition Members to urge at every turn an increase in benefits and then, the moment there is an increase in benefits, to turn around and say that there must be more people in poverty.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and telling us again the pet theory of the Laffer curve which no economist takes seriously any longer. Is it better to have Sir Iain Vallance earning £1 million and paying £400,000 in tax than some of the 50,000 people he sacked earning £10,000 or £20,000 and all paying tax? In other words, perhaps we should consider the labour market policies of Japan, Switzerland, Germany or northern Europe, rewriting the whole tax base, rather than hoping that a handful of the rich will throw some crumbs to the poor via the Treasury.

Mr. Nicholls: The kindest thing that one could say about that intervention is that it was completely daft. The idea that there is some correlation between a multi-billion-pound business which has to decide whether it needs a particular staffing level and saying that if Sir Iain Vallance received a smaller salary more people could be employed is ridiculous.

The hon. Member for Rotherham confirms either that that is ridiculous or that he is daft—I am not sure which, but it matters not. The logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument is that everyone could do Sir Iain Vallance's job and therefore everyone should be on the same sort of salary. It is a profoundly silly argument. The idea that efficiency will be increased by imposing penal rates of taxation on those who are truly talented and by overburdening businesses through overmanning is the product of a bygone age. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should advance that argument today.

[Mr. Nicholls]

Having disposed of the language of gaps and handouts—the idea that the rich are in some way the problem whereas, in terms of the money that is needed, they are part of the solution—it is worth while examining what the real problem can be. The cause of poverty, and the breakdown of family life which goes with it, is not that the level of benefit is not sufficient but that the level of benefit is too great.

The American sociologist, Charles Murray, has done some work in this area—both to the right and to the left academically. The breakdown of society in parts of this country is similar to that which occurred in America. The state is no longer the father of last resort; it has become the father of first resort. What does it do to the confidence and moral well-being of a family unit when, at a stroke, the state is prepared to maintain the wife and the children of a union at a greater level than the breadwinner could expect to maintain them himself? That undermines the social fabric and increases poverty dramatically.

The figures speak for themselves. We do not have time tonight to examine Charles Murray's work and statistics. However, a report which appeared in today's *Daily Mail* illustrates my point. The article is entitled "Who needs work?" and refers to a family of five who are living on benefit and netting about £18,500 per year. In a phrase which I think sums up the situation very well, a family member says:

"Wages are disgusting at the moment".

I think that quite a few people would retort, "She would say that, wouldn't she?" That family receives take-home pay of £18,500 a year gratis by virtue of the taxpayer.

What would people have to do to earn wages of that sort? Firefighters do not earn that much money, nor do ambulancemen, midwives, metal workers, prison officers, senior computer operators, classroom teachers, Army sergeants, junior doctors, first-year registrars or ward sisters. Speaking personally, perhaps the good news is that it is £3,000 a year short of what a Member of Parliament earns—but perhaps that will alter in due course.

Why should people work in accordance with their own skills and abilities when someone can sit at home and net that sort of money at taxpayers' expense? That is not about the alleviation of poverty; it is about the creation of poverty, because it impoverishes people's ambitions and desires and their ability to work.

In addition to that sum, the Department of Social Security made the sort of mistake that it is easy to make—it popped a cheque of £6,000 extra into the post. To be fair, the mistake was discovered 10 days later, but by then it was too late. What had happened to the money? About £1,000 had been spent to buy mountain bikes for the children for Christmas, £600 had been spent on a fitted kitchen and hundreds more pounds had been spent on new furniture. None of the money was spent to clear the £1,000 in rent arrears which had resulted in the family's eviction from a previous council house. The article goes on to say that the couple concerned

"are trying to persuade Wolverhampton Borough Council to allocate them a three or four-bedroom house".

That encapsulates what the problem of poverty is really all about: the state has gone so far down a particular road that, instead of encouraging people to stand on their own feet, it mocks their efforts by completely undermining their ability to do so. In the end, it is not enough to say that that is the way in which the scales are balanced, the scales have been applied by Parliament and the adjudication officer can always challenge the outcome. We have to look beyond that argument.

We have to ask whether the benefit rules should be changed drastically. We have to ask whether, having served due notice, we should tell people that the maximum benefit that they can obtain for themselves and their families is the regional average for a person without skills and experience. If we do not do that, we will undermine the position of those who think before they have children about whether they can measure up to their responsibilities. We will undermine the position of those people who come to my surgery and tell me that they cannot get a council house because they do not have enough children, but that they do not want to have more children until they can bring them up in a safe, secure environment. If we do not address that problem, we will create poverty.

We can examine the amount of money which the Government have devoted to addressing poverty at the taxpayers' expense. For all Labour Members' sincerity, it is easy to expose the nonsense of the idea of relative levels of poverty, benefits equalling poverty, and so on. If we do not address those vices, the situation will become a powder keg. I hope that the debate tonight will stimulate the thought process and we will begin to address those issues.

5.26 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I pass on to the House the apologies of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who is unable to attend the debate as she is serving on the Committee which is examining the Disability Discrimination Bill. She asked me to mention that she would have been here if she had not been otherwise detained.

The aim of any civilised and democratically governed country must be that its citizens should be free from the spectre of poverty. I have listened to most, if not all, of the speeches this evening and I think that all hon. Members agree on that point—that people can be enabled to develop their skills and their talents fully; that they can be engaged in worthwhile employment to the benefit of themselves, their families and our society.

It must be a priority to develop and implement policies which enable citizens to live and to work in healthy surroundings, motivated to contribute to our society. A prime function of Governments must be to provide a ladder of opportunity to those who slide down into poverty and despair through unemployment.

Let us not forget the scale of unemployment and the way it has grown in this country in the past four decades. The figures are quite staggering. In the 1950s, the unemployment rate was 386,000 per year. By the 1970s, it was some 976,000. Today it is about 2.5 million, counting only those claiming benefit.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): That is appalling.

Mr. Chidgey: Indeed. Unemployment is linked inextricably to poverty. In 1979, some 5 million people were living on incomes which were less than half the national average wage. About 58 per cent. of that number

were unemployed. By 1991, 13.5 million people were living on less than half the average income, of whom some 78 per cent. were unemployed.

We have heard it argued that that is the result of a general rise in incomes and that, on average, we are all better off. However, it is important that the House should not deny the outcome of the Rowntree report. The Minister said that he was cognisant of it and that he set great store by what it said. We may argue about the statistics, but let us not forget the report's underlying theme.

Income inequality in this country has grown faster and gone further than in any other comparable industrial country. The poorest 20 to 30 per cent. of the population have not benefited from rising national prosperity. Since the 1980s, the incomes of those who are dependent on social security benefits have fallen further behind the incomes of those who are in work.

Just as poverty is linked inexorably to unemployment, so is poor and degenerating health. Unemployed people are less healthy, both physically and mentally, than those who are in work. As the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton)—who has unfortunately left the Chamber—pointed out a few moments ago, unemployed middle-aged men are twice as likely to die within a decade as those who are employed.

The long-term unemployed have weak social support systems and they tend to congregate with other unemployed people. They tend to have a poor social structure which leads to the breakdown in family life. It is interesting to note that divorcing couples are twice as likely to be unemployed as those who are in stable marriages. The mortality rate of children under four years of age is three times higher in the lowest income group than in the highest income group. Deaths from asthma and from similar ailments among children under 14 is twice as high in the lowest income group as in more affluent families.

It is a stark reflection on the division between the poor and the mainstream in our society that Oxfam, a charity established to provide aid and support to impoverished peoples in the third world, is actively considering projects targeted at poverty in the UK. It is against the backdrop of unrelenting long-term unemployment, increasing poverty and widening division in our society that I believe that the Government's policies must be tested.

What, for example, has been the record of the training for work programme? A major stumbling block has been that it has not targeted the long-term unemployed. Those out of work for more than 12 months occupy a minority of places on those schemes—some 42 per cent. last spring. That is broadly in line with the proportion of long-term unemployed within the overall jobless figures. There is little incentive within the schemes for training and enterprise councils to target the long-term unemployed.

TEC schemes concentrating on the long-term unemployed find it more difficult to meet the Government's targets for "outcomes". Less than one third of those out of work for between one and two years entering a training for work scheme end up with a continuing job. For those who are out of work for more than two years, the record is even more disturbing. Less than one in five ends up with a permanent job. Overall, of those entering training for work schemes, more than half end up unemployed and less than a quarter complete their training with a qualification or even a credit towards one.

The Government have decided to cut training for work funding by some 20 per cent. That would be a positive move if the funds were redirected to schemes aimed at getting the long-term unemployed into work, and providing the training that they need to keep them there. But the recent Budget proposals provide little incentive and even less investment. They fail to get to the core of the problem. The much heralded extension of the community action programme has the net result of a reduction in places of some 10,000 compared with the current provision of 50,000 this year.

The introduction of the jobseeker's allowance will deny benefits to some 90,000 people at a time. It will extend means testing and—as is widely argued outside the House—could create disincentives for people to move into work.

The whole tenor of the Budget was to force the jobless from out-of-work benefits and thus into in-work benefits. The JSA and other schemes will have the power to force and coerce the jobless into poorly paid, insecure and dead-end jobs. There is little provision for high-quality training, which is essential to improve employability in the long term.

The one glimmer of light from the raft of the proposed measures to date has been the workstart pilot schemes. The evaluation of the four pilot projects—released, I believe, a month or so ago—shows that nearly 80 per cent. of the participants are likely to be offered permanent jobs. I welcome that. That is an important result from a pilot scheme which shows us what we can do in the future.

Sadly, the Government's response in the Budget was to launch yet another pilot scheme involving a mere 5,000 of the long-term unemployed. With nearly 1 million people on the long-term unemployment list, each costing our economy some £9,000 per year in terms of benefits and lost taxes, here was the chance to grasp the nettle, to take some active measures to try to resolve the problem. I wanted to see a national benefit transfer programme introduced: instead of the benefits being paid to the long-term unemployed, they would be transferred to the employers, as a training subsidy, to improve skills and to secure worthwhile, permanent jobs.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State had to leave, but I wrote to him on this very subject in October last year. I urged him to build on the success of the pilot workstart schemes. His Department replied in November, saying that it was too costly. I wrote again and asked him what the costs were—bearing in mind the fact that it costs us £9,000 per year for every person who has been unemployed for more than a year. I am advised that my queries have now been passed to the Employment Service. I await its reply with some interest, because we should get to the bottom of the figures and show why it is costing so much when we could be saving so much more.

The Government's proposals to tackle long-term unemployment lack imagination, application and conviction. For example, instead of providing a national insurance contribution rebate for 12 months to employers who take on long-term persons, the Government could have taken on board our policies, which would eliminate the lower rates of employee national insurance contributions, taking 50,000 low-paid workers out of tax altogether.

[Mr. Chidgey]

To help small businesses—the job creators of the future—the Government could have taken on our proposals to raise the VAT threshold to £60,000, which would take 125,000 small businesses out of the VAT net. But most importantly, to tackle long-term unemployment and the poverty that it causes, there must be a programme of long-term investment: in a citizens service—as we propose—which would provide opportunities for some 250,000 unemployed people to gain skills for the first time, or to share their skills with young people who are inadequately trained or who are becoming long-term unemployed; in public transport and in our public infrastructure to provide jobs now; and in education and high-quality training, to provide the skilled work force that we need if this country is to compete successfully in the global market-place.

I can only endorse the conclusion of the Rowntree report. We can bandy the statistics around the House until tomorrow morning, if we so wish, but let us look at the conclusion of the report:

"Market forces, left to themselves, cannot deliver the investment that will most benefit the economy and society as a whole."

I urge the Minister to think again, to recognise that mass long-term unemployment is not acceptable in our society and to accept and implement the policies that are at hand to tackle it.

5.37 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): There must be huge sympathy from the whole House for the long-term unemployed, to which both the motion and the amendment refer. The boredom of long-term unemployment, the feeling of waste, the lack of self-respect, and sometimes the loss of hope, are very severe in their effect on individuals and their families. I for one do not agree that it can simply be resolved by the will to work.

The will to work can sometimes help, but it is not always enough. Many of the long-term unemployed are decent, honourable people who are unemployed through no fault of their own. The causes of their unemployment are several, but they certainly include the world trade recession, which in recent years has had a severe impact on employment in all the main industrialised countries, not only in Europe but throughout the world. Of course, a recession in world trade tends to hit hardest those countries which are dependent on trading if—due to relative over-population for the size of their countries—they have to import and export more in order to survive than more sparsely populated countries such as France or the United States, which are likely to be more self-sufficient. As Britain is one of those over-populated industrialised countries, the world trade recession was certain to bite very hard on us and severely damage employment, with the dreadful effect on individuals and families that I have just described.

Secondly, there is the changing technology. I was interested in the reference earlier in the debate to redundancies at BT. I have to declare an interest in BT as it sponsors concerts in which I perform, although I am unpaid. It is, of course, a company which has been greatly involved in modernising its technology and in computerisation, electronics, and so forth. That increase in technology will have reduced the number of jobs, but if it has resulted in keeping down the price of telephone calls and the price of BT's other services, it means that its customers have more money in their pockets to spend on other things. That purchasing power will generate employment in other ways. When considering these matters, one should always look at the knock-on effects.

As the Secretary of State said, unemployment is now falling. It is falling quite fast: it has fallen by half a million in the last year or two. That is a very substantial number. It leaves a tragically large number still unemployed, but it is substantial—it is far from negligible. I have been very surprised that not one Opposition Member has shown any pleasure at the fact that unemployment is currently falling quite fast.

The fact that unemployment is falling fast is due, admittedly, to the beginnings of an upturn in world trade, although Britain has come first of the countries in Europe and among the first in the world in that upturn. I believe that the fall in unemployment is at least partly due to the United Kingdom's having come out of the exchange rate mechanism in the summer of 1992, which I advocated and which I believe was the right thing to do. It had to be done—there was no choice, eventually—and I wish that it had been done sooner. That enabled interest rates to drop further than they had already begun to drop, and faster than they would otherwise have dropped.

Increased purchasing power for individuals and companies who were not having to pay out so much in interest increased the profitability of businesses and their propensity to take risks and make positive investment decisions. I am quite sure that coming out of the ERM has been one of the causes of the improvement in our economy, and I am very surprised when sometimes some people seem to deny it. But it is only one of the causes.

Another cause has been the highly successful management of our economy by the present Chancellor of the Exchequer since he took office. We now have a real growth rate of about 4 per cent. per year in our economy, and that is having a substantial impact on the number of people employed and the reduction of unemployment.

I believe that it is very important indeed to keep that reduction in unemployment steady—falling at a fairly steady rate. It is very important not to try to hike it up artificially: if we do, we shall get once again a speeding up of inflation, which will threaten the very unemployment that it is intended to diminish. The inflation will increase the price of British goods sold overseas, which will limit our opportunities to sell overseas and damage the very employment to which both the motion and the amendment refer. It is vital for employment—I am surprised that Opposition Members have not mentioned this—not to allow inflation to let rip, but to keep a very steady and strong hand on the tiller and not be tempted.

I believe that there are three main threats to the drop in unemployment and the improvement in employment. Two of those come from the Labour party. I should be grateful if the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) would kindly do me the courtesy of listening as I am about to refer to her party policy.

It is very important that the Labour party is not allowed to encourage, by what it says on employment, any increase in inflation. Secondly, it is very important that the party is never allowed, and never given the

opportunity, to bring in the minimum wage that it has proposed, because that would diminish employment prospects, too. But at least we know where we are with the Labour party on that: it would bring in a minimum wage. We would not bring in a minimum wage. The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), who has just spoken, was of course quite unable to say whether his party would bring in a minimum wage or not. He is sitting on the fence, and his party conference disagreed with the leadership.

Mr. Chidgey: It is perfectly clear to anyone who reads our policy documents that we are in favour of a regional minimum wage. I did not mention it in my speech, however; the hon. Gentleman must have been listening to someone else.

Mr. Jessel: How can we know, if the hon. Gentleman's party conference blatantly contradicts the policy of the leader of his party as to what he would do? But as his party does not stand the remotest chance of ever being in office—indeed, when the general election comes his party is highly likely to lose some seats below the fairly small number that it has—this is not a matter which is ever likely to be put to the test.

The third threat to employment—a very serious one which has not been mentioned at all in the debate so far—is the enormous industrial growth of the Pacific rim. As in Britain 40 per cent. of our exports go to the European Union and the other 60 per cent. to other parts of the world, this is an extremely serious matter for us, because that 60 per cent. of our exports will be in competition with exports from the Pacific rim countries. So often we hear discussion, both in this House and in European assemblies, about trade within Europe, and there is not nearly enough discussion of Europe's exports to and trade with the rest of the world.

Let me put the position as it affects employment into perspective. Going back 30 or 40 years, everyone was aware of the growing industry in Japan—first in cameras, then in audio equipment, then in cars—and how all those were selling all over the world. Then we found it emanating from countries like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and North and South Korea. Now we are into a sort of third wave. Many countries in south-east Asia and the far east are developing industries. I went with a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation to India two years ago. The threat to our export industries from the type of modern industry that one can see in Bangalore, and hence the threat to our employment, is very significant.

In Bangalore there is a factory making a telephone exchange—the size of a rugger ball—which can sell to any village, and the telephoning can all be done now by radio, or at least without wires, through this mini-exchange which costs about £3,000. It is selling now to villages all over Asia, Africa and other parts of the world. There is a huge growth of industry in China and a huge growth in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and all over the far east. It is burgeoning, and it is a huge threat to employment in this country. I believe that the policies of the Government must be directed more to how we are to uphold our employment in future in the face of this tremendous threat to it from the far east and south-east Asia.

One of the main causes of poverty, however, has nothing to do with unemployment. The hon. Member for Eastleigh said that unemployment was tied inexorably to poverty—or it may have been the other way round—but it is certainly not true that the sole cause of poverty is unemployment or the state of the economy. I find in my constituency that a major cause of poverty is the existence of single-parent families in large numbers. I am not making any kind of moral judgment; I am just saying, as a matter of fact, that they come to my surgery and write to me. I know that they exist in large numbers, and indeed the remarkable document, "Social Trends"—which was published a week ago—refers to the increasing number. One third of births in this country are now out of wedlock, and "Social Trends" says that marriage is a declining institution in this country, as we all know already. Some of the single-parent families are due to deserting husbands or deserting lovers who have jilted their wives or their partners.

Ms Corston: I note the hon. Gentleman's concern about the growth in single-parent families. Will he explain what policies he would support and propose to the Government for improving child care so that those women do not have to be dependent on the state; they sure as hell do not want to be dependent on welfare?

Mr. Jessel: Of course we need more child care. The hon. Lady will have heard the Prime Minister speak of an increase that he intends, as Government policy, in nursery education and, presumably by the same token, in the provision of play groups. But that is to deal with the symptoms rather than the cause of the problem.

The cause of the problem is the increase in the number of single-parent families. In some cases, the women concerned may wish to have children without being married. In other cases, it may happen because they have been seduced. Whether it is intentional or not, it is tending to increase and it is a major cause of poverty. Unless there is some change in that cause of poverty, it is likely to continue. I mention it because it is completely false to attribute all poverty to the state of the economy or to unemployment.

I wish to turn from that to the subject of diet.

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Small Heath): I represent a constituency with one of the highest percentages of single-parent families in the country. The hon. Gentleman has referred to, as he sees it, the problem of young ladies being seduced. Would he like to enlighten the House as to what his policy would be to try and stop them being seduced?

Mr. Jessel: I think that I might be called to order by Mr. Deputy Speaker if I attempted to give a full answer to that very interesting question, but I will take the hon. Gentleman aside afterwards, if he wishes, and explain to him the facts of life, which I think go beyond the scope of this debate, if I may say so, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was about to turn to the factor in poverty of diet. "Social Trends" gives a considerable description of changes in the pattern of diet. I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will consider this as relevant because other hon. Members have referred to health and education in the context of poverty and the content of diet undoubtedly affects people's standard of living. It is most interesting to see that in the past 20 years there has been a substantial drop of about two thirds in the consumption of sugar, which was a staple for poor families, and a drop in the consumption of beef, veal and eggs—the beef and veal, of course, being relatively expensive items and the eggs a

[Mr. Jessel]

sort of half-way item. The information about healthy eating, whether in terms of cholesterol or in relation to an excessive intake of calories, has diverted people away from those diets. They are eating instead more fruit, more chicken and more cereals.

If more people could be encouraged to have allotments and to grow their own vegetables, if they are in poverty, that would help to relieve their situation. In my constituency, about one third of the allotments are out of use. No one wants to be bothered to grow his own vegetables. People sit in front of the television for hours on end, complaining about their poverty and not growing vegetables when they could do so easily and cheaply. *[Interruption.]* The president of the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd., Lord Wallace of Coslany, is a distinguished Labour Member of the other place. Opposition Members of this House would do well to stop laughing and encourage people who are feeling the pinch—as unfortunately some people are, whether due to unemployment or to other reasons—to go out and take an allotment. That would be a positive step, which could be a healthy activity and at the same time relieve poverty.

Of course expectations change. Going back 50 years, people's idea of poverty was completely different. Today, everyone expects to have a television, for example. I believe—and the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—that more than 40 per cent. of pensioners in this country now run cars, or more than 40 per cent. of pensioner households, including married couples who are pensioners, whereas 20 years ago the figure was only about 20 per cent. That is a remarkable social change and shows that an increasing number of pensioners are not in poverty.

I like to think of elderly people driving around in cars, making visits and going to see their children and grandchildren, which they can do more easily thanks to the large number of main roads that we have built, as these days most people live in a different place from their grown-up children and their grandchildren. It is a fact about the pensioners' standard of life, which contradicts those who say that this country is living in poverty, that so many pensioners now own cars.

Likewise, I have found from our Library here in the House of Commons, which sent me a paper on the matter this morning, that 57 per cent. of households have access to a video, which would never have been the case 20 years ago as there were not any around; that 78 per cent. of the poorest 20 per cent. have access to a freezer; that 85 per cent. of the poorest 20 per cent. have a fridge; that 73 per cent. have central heating in their house or their flat; and that 72 per cent. have a telephone.

Some people are therefore exaggerating the amount of poverty in this country. It remains a serious problem for some people, and we must strive to continue the improvement in our economy, so as to mitigate poverty, but I believe, with Abraham Lincoln, that one cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. The egalitarian policies of the Opposition will, in the end, not benefit those who are in poverty, but will have the reverse effect. So I hope that the House will, by a decisive majority, support the Government amendment and reject the Opposition motion.

5.57 pm

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I was very surprised to hear the Secretary of State for Social Security trot out that hoary old phrase, "the politics of envy". I think it was indicative of his callous approach to the problems of poor people. Does he condemn poor people as being envious, when they aspire to have good clothing, good diet, good education and a neat warm home for their children? When richer people rightly want to give their children the best of everything, that is described as a laudable ambition. When unfortunate people sleeping in the streets envy those of us in our warm beds, are we to condemn that?

It has been my opinion for a long time that working-class people do not demand enough. They are too easily satisfied. They are not envious enough. They set their sights too low and they allow themselves to be ripped off time and again by this Government. Pensioners whose pensions are no longer linked to wages have been ripped off by the Government. Women pensioners, whose pensions are lower than those of men, will be ripped off by losing five years of their entitlement. That will add to the number of women who are living in poverty, and it is women who are the largest proportion of the poor.

When those who have paid national health insurance contributions all their lives are old and need help from the health service, they often find that the help that is needed in hospitals and in the community is no longer there. Those who paid their national insurance contributions in the expectation that, if they were ever unemployed, they would be taken care of by the safety net of the welfare state will now lose half their entitlement. All those people are being ripped off by the Government.

Conservatives rubbished the Rowntree report as left-wing propaganda, but very few noticed that it was in fact in full agreement with a series of reports on deprivation published the previous week by the Department of the Environment. The Department of the Environment has not exactly been known for left-wing propaganda. Its reports set out the stark facts of poverty at the beginning of the 1990s. They showed that 20 per cent. of households, or approximately 20 million people, are living in poverty, and that includes one third of the country's children. They also showed that 10 million people in Britain live in inadequate housing, which means, for example, that their homes are unheated or damp or that older children have to share bedrooms. Seven million people go without essential clothing such as warm waterproof coats or solid shoes because of lack of money, and 5 million are not properly fed by today's standards. We should be taking those standards into account, something that many Conservative Members have not done.

The Rowntree report argued that, left to themselves, market mechanisms will not deliver levels of education, training and investment in human capital that are optimal for the economy and society as a whole. Similarly, the Department of the Environment's reports stated on the basis of past trends that any economic recovery in the 1990s will have very limited impact on the numbers experiencing poverty and deprivation.

Although Government policies have made things bad in the country as a whole, the situation is far, far worse in Tower Hamlets where my constituency is located. There, 38 per cent. of households are forced to live on the

breadline, and 46 per cent. of children—almost half—live in households without any earners and which are dependent for survival on benefits and the help of their families. They have little future to look forward to.

In the east end of London, for every 100 16 and 17-year-olds with a job, 74 are unemployed and 25 are on a Government scheme. Some of those youngsters have been on a number of training schemes, with no job at the end of the line. Half the young population is unlikely to get work in the foreseeable future, and the situation is no better for many of their parents. Thirty-five per cent. of men between 55 and retirement age in the east end have been thrown on the scrap heap and are unemployed and have little prospect of ever working again. The household of the poor child is often also the household of the unemployed older sibling and the redundant father, and there is no role model of anyone in gainful employment. It is no wonder that people become deeply depressed.

However, in the sea of poverty and despair in Tower Hamlets live and work some of the wealthiest people in our society, in what was planned to be "Manhattan on the Water" on the Isle of Dogs. Billions of pounds of public money were poured into it. The Government's policy of voodoo economics has caused some of the greatest social polarisation and poverty that this country has ever had the misfortune to witness, and nowhere is it more glaring than in my constituency on the Isle of Dogs.

Recent research points to the fact that countries such as Japan, where inequalities are fewer than in Britain, have less ill-health among the lower-paid and a longer expectation of life. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) was incorrect when he tried to point out that absolute poverty was the important factor. Because people in some countries live happily on a handful of olives, bread, oil and some rice and nuts, we cannot expect the same in a European country. Conditions are very different.

Conservative Members should take into account the fact that it is not only the shortage of money but relative poverty and inequality that create the stresses which add to breakdown in health. Poverty is relative—that is the important point that the Minister and most Conservative Members have failed to recognise. If that were not so, how would the hon. Member for Teignbridge and other Conservative Members explain the fact that, after decades of rising expectation of life, the trend has now gone into reverse for men in lower-income groups between the ages of 15 and 44? The chances of dying before the age of 65 increased for men in those groups in the 1980s.

Even though the average expectation of life is 79 years for women and 73 for men, among the poorest people, men are more unhealthy and dying younger than those at the opposite end of the income scale. Their life expectancy is 10 years less. Poor people are also 75 per cent. more at risk after surgery than rich people.

That inequality in health begins at birth, or even before. There is now an increase in the number of babies born with a low birth weight in poorer families and there is higher infant mortality and infant illness in deprived groups. The baby of an unskilled manual worker is one and a half times more likely to die in the first year of life than the baby of a professional worker or manager. That is a dreadful statistic.

Asthma is a major problem in my constituency. It is partly due to air pollution, but also due to other social conditions. The number of children with asthma has almost doubled and two thirds of them come from poor families living in cold, damp houses. The poorest children are twice as likely to die from respiratory diseases as children from social class 1.

The Black report showed that material deprivation played a major part in causing ill-health. It is true that poor people have always been less healthy than the rich, for obvious reasons, but since the 1980s the gap has grown wider. That is the disgraceful fact. Stress, unemployment, financial worries, the inability to afford normal social activities—small things such as buying birthday and Christmas presents become very important when one cannot afford them, and repairing broken equipment such as a cooker or fridge is a cause of worry when one has no financial reserves—and the hopelessness of long-term unemployment all bring on depression.

It has been mentioned that the suicide rate has increased by 75 per cent. in Scotland. Young unemployed men are 10 to 15 times more likely to attempt suicide than others and, in some areas, suicide is the third most frequent cause of death in young men after heart disease and cancer. That is not a very good reflection of our society.

When people without hope who are living in poverty and despair are put side by side with those who flaunt their wealth, the former are often seduced into looking for scapegoats and the fascists are only too willing to provide scapegoats, as we saw in Millwall not too long ago. I warn the Government that if the gap between rich and poor continues to increase, the problem will spread to the rest of the country, just as it has spread in Tower Hamlets. All the police and private security guards will not be enough to prevent the breakdown of society.

Despite the philosophy of the previous Prime Minister and this Government—I believe that the previous Prime Minister said that there was no such thing as society—society is about far more than feeding the greed of the men at the top. The overwhelming majority of my constituents and the British public are appalled that £23 million is being given to the heads of electricity companies, while we have children begging in our streets.

As the eminent sociologist Peter Townsend has said:

"poverty kills, this is not a political opinion, it is not a social comment, it is a scientific fact".

6.9 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Anyone who has even a passing acquaintance with the areas of inner London represented by the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) will have some sympathy for the passion with which she spoke about the problems there. Although I represent a constituency which is—in average terms—much more prosperous, pockets of it mirror at least some of the problems which she described. Indeed, when I contested another inner-London seat next door to the constituency of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in 1987, I remember being moved and impressed by the scale and the history of the social and economic problems that I saw in north Lambeth.

The disagreement between Conservative and Opposition Members today is not over the importance of finding the right mix of policies with which to tackle the challenges posed to our country by unemployment and poverty. There is—I believe—common ground and common motivation on that front. The difference between

[Mr. David Lidington]

us lies in our analysis of which policies would be most effective in ameliorating those severe and deep-rooted problems.

Some Labour Members have expressed some recognition of the fact that the problems which we are debating go deep into the history and social structure of the country. The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) spoke about the importance of family circumstances, and he touched on racial discrimination. Indeed, several hon. Members, Labour and Conservative, have focused on the way in which poverty and unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, have become concentrated in particular parts of the country, sometimes in very small neighbourhoods in towns and cities. That should warn us that there is no quick fix.

Roughly 35 million people are unemployed in the developed countries which are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. That is certainly the highest level since such records were kept. The incidence of unemployment, especially of long-term unemployment, is higher in Europe than in North America or Australasia. Indeed, the problems of unemployment are more severe and, if anything, tending to worsen, in the nations of continental Europe which pursue the policies advocated by many Labour Members. Conversely, in the United Kingdom, unemployment is falling sharply, and falling well ahead of the trend in most of the rest of the continent.

I shall speak a little about the Rowntree report, which, rightly, has been at the heart of much of the debate so far. I do not dismiss the report's findings out of hand, but it needs to be looked at critically. My doubts were first stimulated when I considered a paragraph and a graph on—I think—page 9, that sought to compare the position in the United Kingdom with that in other industrial countries. I found that a set of international comparisons compared different countries over different periods of years.

The graph ran from 1977 to 1990 for the United Kingdom, it ran from 1983 to 1990 for Germany, and for France it ran from 1984 to 1989. For other countries, the period studied and used for the purposes of comparison varied from as little as four to as many as 18 years. The author may be a reputable academic, but that failure to compare like with like suggests flaws in the methodology of the report.

My doubts were reinforced when I considered the evidence relating specifically to the United Kingdom. I saw a great reliance placed on one particular measure of wealth—the survey of households receiving below average incomes. That survey, with its strengths and weaknesses, shows that only half of the so-called lowest tenth of the population are dependent on income-related benefits.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, about half those who reported to the survey that they had an income of zero or less spent more than the average for the nation as a whole. In addition, the Rowntree report does not provide any thorough analysis of the movement in and out of the different deciles which it tabulates.

Perhaps most important of all, there are no costings whatever in the report. Of the menu of policy options, some are attractive, and some I have grave reservations about, but, in every case, what is needed and what the report does not provide is a clear economic analysis of the tax measures needed to finance those policy changes, and an outline of the effect that any such changes in this country's fiscal arrangements would have on the broader economy. Money can be spent only once. When it is taken out of the pockets of the workers to pay for what the Government of the day consider desirable projects, it cannot be spent on other forms of consumption or savings.

We need, too, to look at the survey of households in the Rowntree report alongside other measures of wealth and income—notably, some of the measures in the report in the 1995 social trends survey. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out earlier that ownership of consumer goods has grown significantly, even among the lowest tenth of the population with regard to income. However, when one looks elsewhere in the social trends survey at records of wage rises during the 1980s, a very different and much less gloomy picture appears than that described by Opposition Members.

Let us consider the records of gross wages for people in work during the past 10 years. Stripping out inflation and considering the figures at 1994 prices, the average weekly wage of a nurse in 1981 would have been £188, yet in 1994 it would be £316. For a cleaner, the average weekly wage would have risen from £110 to £180, and wages for a waitress would have risen from £138 in 1981 to £157 in 1994.

The same survey estimates net incomes after deductions for tax and additions to income by state benefits. Let us not consider the rich—nobody denies that the wealth of the richer members of society has increased over the past decade—but look at the figures for those on the lowest decile point.

A married man with two children who, in 1981, would have earned £137 net, including earnings and benefits, would have received £174 in 1993, including family credit. The net income of a single woman on the lowest decile point, again with two children, would have risen over the same period from £70 to £172. From those figures, we see the need to treat the despairing noises from the Opposition Benches with extreme caution. We also see evidence that tends to endorse the Government's policy of trying to concentrate money available to be spent on social security towards those people in the greatest need.

Ms Corston: As the hon. Gentleman is talking about incomes in the lowest decile, is he aware that figures released by the Department of Social Security reveal that a single adult in the poorest one tenth of the population, at April 1994 prices and in comparison to 1979, is £364 a year worse off, while a single adult in the richest one tenth of the population is £5,616 better off? That is the scale of the change, and that is what the debate is all about.

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Lady is wrong to assume that an increase in the earnings of the better-off is necessarily a bad thing. It is clear that the evidence I have seen—the hon. Lady did not say which figures she was quoting—from the small print of the Rowntree report and from the broader surveys reported in "Social Trends" shows that the growth in net incomes has taken place across almost every group in society, regardless of whether they started on a low or a high income.

I acknowledge the fact that we confront real problems in deciding how to spread opportunity among people who have relatively little opportunity at the moment, and, above all, how to get people back into work.

It can be inferred from the Rowntree report that the composition of the lowest decile of the population has changed over the past decade. There are far fewer pensioners in that group. The Rowntree report suggests that the regrettable rise in unemployment in recent years has been responsible for much of the pattern in incomes that it reported.

Mr. Clappison: Has not my hon. Friend touched on a very important point, namely, the improved position of pensioners since 1979? As more and more pensioners have the benefit of occupational pensions and savings which are protected from inflation, does not that mean that, in future, it is likely that pensioners will comprise an ever smaller proportion of the bottom one tenth of the population?

Mr. Lidington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as he has put his finger on an extremely significant point. As new pensioners bring with them into retirement the benefit of savings and personal occupational pensions policies to which they have contributed during their working lives, the proportion of pensioners in the lowest income groups will continue to fall.

Having acknowledged the problems, I want to suggest measures which the Government should or should not take to tackle the problems. I want first to consider what the Government should not do. It is vital that they do not abandon a macro-economic policy which gives priority to the need to contain and to reduce inflation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) said, more pensioners these days can take advantage of income other than the state retirement pension. However, as the Rowntree report states, and as we are all aware from our constituency surgeries, there are still pensioners who are not well off. Often they are pensioners whose income is slightly above the threshold at which they become eligible for various state benefits.

However, those pensioners are very often people who were thrifty during their working lives in the 1960s and early 1970s, and who saved only to find that their life savings were eroded, and almost completely dissolved, by the high rates of inflation of the late 1970s through to the beginning of the 1980s.

It was not the free market that betrayed those people; it was successive Governments who debased the currency for political motives at the expense of those people's savings. Whatever our political allegiance in this House, that experience should mark all of us. There should be a common determination to ensure that such a disastrous state of affairs does not occur again.

Nor do I believe that the Government should succumb to the dangers and temptation of protectionism. There was an episode in the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) in respect of which I feared that he was urging a protectionist course on the House, in—in my view—the mistaken judgment that that would help to protect jobs here.

The growing prosperity of countries, like India, which we have previously described as part of the undeveloped or third world, is something that we should welcome. We should welcome it because it means that millions of people in those countries can now seek to aspire to the material standards of living that people in this country and in the rest of the developed world have taken for granted for many years.

In addition, growing prosperity in those countries provides market opportunities for British businesses to go out and sell their goods and services to the consumers in those countries. I want the Government not to shut the doors against world trade, but to encourage our businesses to take full advantage of the opportunities as they present themselves.

With regard to what the Government should not do, I warn them against any thought that redistribution is somehow the answer to the problems facing this country.

Mr. Graham: Why?

Mr. Lidington: I will explain why. Opposition Members should also ask the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) why, because he took great care to tiptoe around specific commitments to redistributive measures. However, implicit in his critique of the Government, and implicit in the critique of every Opposition Member who has spoken so far, was the idea that somehow our problems could be solved by taking money away from the rich and giving it to the poor.

The hon. Member for Garscadden seems to see himself as a Presbyterian Robin Hood preparing to distribute goodies from the undeserving to the deserving. However, the truth is that there is no phalanx of plutocrats waiting to be milked in order to distribute extra resources to the poor. If serious redistributive policies are followed, that will mean very much higher rates of taxation for middle-income workers and their families.

An interesting analysis in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development study on employment suggests that, for the United Kingdom to provide every family with a basic income of 30 per cent. average earnings, it would take a standard income tax rate of about 37 per cent., together with the abolition of housing benefit, council tax benefit and other income-related benefits.

Frankly, Opposition Members are trying to fool the House and to mislead the British people if they seek to insinuate that a policy of redistribution could begin to tackle the problems which this country confronts without causing the need for very high rates of taxation, with the consequent disincentives to work for the majority of the working population.

What should the Government do? In that regard, I want to refer to several areas of policy.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Is it fair that every senior citizen and every gas, electricity and telephone bill payer must pay standing charges? Is it fair that 78 per cent. of Glasgow council tenants receive housing benefit? Is it fair that the Government's policy is to transfer housing stock to Scottish Homes and other housing authorities, thereby leaving local authorities with massive debt? Local authorities have been borrowing for more than 60 years to house a small number of tenants. That situation has been created—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That is a very long intervention.

Mr. Lidington: I am sure that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) will try to catch your eye

[Mr. Lidington]

later, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To take the first of his points only, not every pensioner lives in poverty. Help for pensioners should be concentrated, through the social security system, on those who are in need, rather than there being a blanket subsidy which benefits dowager duchesses as much as people who need help.

When I urge a course of policy upon the Government, their decisions will be influenced by what can be afforded in a certain year and by the competing demands of the various good causes which present themselves to the Treasury every autumn. However, the key seems to be action to reduce unemployment. More could be done to relieve the burdens on business, which still provide disincentives to recruit extra people.

Only this weekend, I talked to small business men in my constituency. They said that they would like to hire extra workers but that the combination of payroll taxes, form-filling and the regulations that apply to adding to a payroll act as a very significant disincentive. I hope that, as scope becomes available to the Government to reduce taxation again, they will look at ways in which to lift further the tax burden on businesses and encourage them to recruit more people. Deregulation, especially through the new powers in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, can play a part.

The Rowntree report and numerous commentators have pointed to the importance of education. It is true that people who have a poor education and few skills are most likely to join the ranks of the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed, or to end up in low-paid, insecure jobs.

The answer is certainly not a matter of money: it is a matter of ensuring that choice, rigorous inspection and testing act together to drive up education standards, so that all children, before they reach the labour market, are equipped for the working world in which they will have to live and in which they will have to be prepared to be adaptable throughout their working lives. Much more could be done—for example through Ofsted—to disseminate best practice among schools.

In the end, it will be partly a matter of money. I hope that, when the pressures on Government borrowing have been successfully reduced by the tough but correct decisions of the previous two Budgets, the Government will place education firmly at the head of their priorities.

My personal view is that primary education is a higher priority than nursery schools, colleges or universities. It is in the five-to-11 or 12 age group that the crucial learning period takes place. To a great extent, it determines whether a child will succeed in his career.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar and I sat on the Education Select Committee inquiry into the disparity of funding between primary and secondary schools. We found that, since the second world war, under Governments and local authorities of both political colours, primary schools had been funded at a much lower level than secondary schools, for no scientific reason but simply because that had always happened. There is a cause that the Government could take up.

The Government must look carefully at their family policy. Again, the Rowntree report mentioned family policy as one cause of the problems of poverty and unemployment. We must look rather deeper than hints about a tax allowance for nannies, such as we have heard from the Opposition.

I am fully aware that one must be conscious of sensitivities in discussing such matters. All hon. Members handling casework on the Child Support Agency have been made fully aware of that. We must be aware also that family policy matters touch on personal morality. Although all Members of this House are honourable, very few of us are candidates for sainthood. We should speak cautiously as a consequence.

We should bear it in mind also that we cannot legislate to provide for human affection, one to another. Having made those qualifications, I believe that Archbishop Habgood was right: the Government should seek, when it becomes possible, to provide an incentive for people to marry and to stay married, perhaps concentrating on families on lower income levels. It has been recognised by the Leader of the Opposition that it is within stable families with two parents present that children have the best chance of an upbringing which will allow them to develop their full potential.

In the past 10 years, the Government have taken many initiatives to tackle the problems spelt out in the Rowntree report and in this debate. I am confident that, not by sermons or indignant speakers, but by the application of practical intelligence in working out a policy day by day, year by year, the Government will continue to succeed in that common endeavour.

6.36 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I hope that I shall not make an indignant speech, but I am certainly very angry about the quality of our debate so far. We have heard some remarkable interventions by Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) wanted the poor to improve their diet. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), if I understood him correctly, suggested that the poor should be made to stay married. Presumably, the rich could gallivant and have what and whom they want. Before that, we heard the speech of the Secretary of State for Social Security. It was a weird mixture of old clichés, such as lamp posts more for support than for illumination, and wonderful metaphors about lights from black holes, which suggests that the right hon. Gentleman knows as much about astrophysics as he does about social security.

The Rowntree report is the bubble that has come to the surface. It has finally exploded and revealed seething uncertainty, fear and anxiety about the growth of poverty in our society. I cannot believe that hon. Members can fail to acknowledge that fact.

This is an important, historical turning point. In 1979, the Conservative party, after a century of it being constructed by many different parties, inherited one nation, with all its frayed edges. When the Conservatives leave office—the sooner the better—they will bequeath two nations as their historical legacy. Those nations will be divided not just geographically. We have the problem of what might be called the M25 Administration—a Cabinet most of whose members represent constituencies

within commuting distance of London. Not one member of the Cabinet represents England's biggest county, Yorkshire.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The hon. Gentleman suggested that in 1979 the Conservative party inherited one nation. Would he describe Britain in the winter of discontent as one nation?

Mr. MacShane: I said that the Conservative party inherited a tradition of one nation, although the tradition was frayed at the edges. I take the hon. Gentleman's point about developments in the 1970s; Opposition Members need not be proud of all of them. But the challenge is to rebuild one nation, not to drive the two sides further apart and create the two-nation Britain in which we live—two nations not simply geographically or politically, but two nations even within so many of our constituencies. There are also two nations as between the genders, and between the cultures of community and of greed.

The Conservative party came to office when family life still counted for something, but it has presided over the single biggest assault on family life. In a sense, the family has been seen as the metaphor for the nation this century. The statistics have already been mentioned—such as the number of divorces and single-parent families, and the growth in the number of illegitimate children.

I believe strongly that the message from Archbishop Habgood is both good and timely: there are fiscal and social policies, many of them cost-neutral, which could be implemented to strengthen family life. As the Secretary of State said in his lecture in Northern Ireland, one of the most important problems today is the absence of the single wage earner—male or female, because modern family life is about partnership—able to provide an income on which a family can grow up in tranquillity and decency.

We need many more jobs for full-time male workers. I know that I shall be criticised by leading members of my own party, but I must court unpopularity by saying that the inability of the male breadwinner to earn a salary sufficient for a family to grow up on is a labour market problem that we have not dealt with. On the contrary, we have made earning such a salary all but impossible for so many of the half of the population who are not women.

The debate is split between social security and employment matters, yet the Chamber is not graced with the presence of the Secretary of State for Employment. No doubt he is off in some rich Swiss ski resort pontificating on various aspects of policy. What a pleasure it must have been. There he was in Davos—a place that ordinary Members of Parliament visit only to be sportsmen and to ski—telling us about our country's policy on the intergovernmental conference. He was Mr. Foreign Secretary there. Then he was Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer and came back and told us what our policy on the single currency should be. I find it deplorable that he is not prepared to come down from planet Portillo, give up being the pontificator maximus of the Cabinet and defend in the House his labour market policy, which is the shame of the modern world.

The modern labour market is rather like an ecosystem; it is something that we must preserve, cherish, support and perhaps change. As has happened over the past 16 years, it can be put grossly out of kilter by elementary blunders. Labour market policy is at the heart of the debate, of Britain's future and of both social cohesion and economic growth.

Not many hon. Members have so far mentioned the example of the dynamic Asian economies, although I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Twickenham, who brought them into the debate. Those economies set out to achieve economic efficiency and found that they had created a more equal society. That is the paradox of the dynamic Asian economies—wage differentials, social and education policies, the total state ownership of all land, as in Hong Kong, leading to progressive housing policies, go hand in hand with—

Mr. Lilley: Will the hon. Gentleman spell out more clearly whether he is advocating that we adopt the tax and benefit policies of, for example, Hong Kong, Taiwan or Korea?

Mr. MacShane: If the Secretary of State stays and hears all my speech, he will realise that I have strong views about the pay policies in those societies. I am nervous of suggesting that the Government should take on the ownership of all land in this country and simply lease it, but doing that has certainly made one of the most important contributions to the development of a stable economy in Hong Kong. The great development of social housing in Kowloon has allowed the workers of Hong Kong to feel that they have not simply been left at the margin of economic development.

As I said, labour market policy is at the heart of the discussion, so I find it deplorable that the Secretary of State for Employment is boycotting the debate; I did not realise that secondary picketing now extended to the Cabinet. We need a policy for pay—although admittedly the Conservatives have had a policy for pay since 1979; Mrs. Thatcher was undoubtedly the greatest free collective bargainer of all time. As a detached political scientist rather than a Labour Member of Parliament, I pay tribute to her.

Conservative Members have said, and have been right to say, that—apart from a tiny blip at the beginning of the 1990s, when we were in the exchange rate mechanism and the recession was biting—pay increases for the people who remain in full-time employment in the private sector have constantly outstripped inflation. However, that has had consequences. There has been a massive redistribution, not just from the bottom decile, full of all those accountants and taxi drivers who declare zero earnings and are thus included, but from all the weaker sections—the bottom 20 or 30 per cent. of society.

The economic consequences of that were that in the 1980s, because the pay policy allowed the private sector significantly to outstrip inflation, our unit labour costs—the key to successful exporting—outstripped those of all our main competitors; hence the growing trade gap and the collapse of so much of our export-led manufacturing industry. The pay gap has widened so grotesquely that even the Prime Minister has had to express concern about the pay awards to the chairmen of the privatised utilities.

The pay rise for Cedric Brown, who started life as a gas fitter in Rotherham and has never changed the company for which he works, means that he now earns nearly 100 times what one of his employees might earn. That ratio is far higher than those in our successful and dynamic competitor or partner economies—certainly far higher than that in any of the successful Asian economies.

[Mr. MacShane]

In a Japanese company, it would be most unusual for the chief executive officer to earn more than 10 times the average pay of his employees.

Compare that with the chairman of Marks and Spencer, who has been set up to head the Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Directors, "turkeys will vote for Christmas" committee to examine how executive pay could be curbed. He is earning about 100 times what one of his employees would earn. That grotesque pay gap has finally woken public opinion to what has been happening in the past 15 years.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Why is the hon. Gentleman concentrating on a comparatively small number of high-profile individuals in the private sector who make major contributions to the industries in which they serve? Has he anything to say, for example, about the huge salaries that are paid to certain sportsmen, media personalities and newscasters? We hear not a word of criticism about those people from Opposition Members.

Mr. MacShane: I did not know that we were debating the salary of the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), but we can come back to that.

I take the hon. Gentleman's point. All leadership is, in my judgment, about leadership by example. When a field marshal is earning 10 times more than a private, that is right. When the Prime Minister earns what he does, that is right also. But when people are earning 100, 120 or 200 times more than their employees—as has happened following the awards in the past three or four years in our banks and big companies—that is wrong, and it is rotting the sense of social cohesion, work loyalty and managerial efficiency that we need.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I realise that there will be more important parts of the hon. Gentleman's speech and of the debate, but will he mention by name who it was who, by salary and share options, contributed £80,000 to the successful campaign of the present leader of the Labour party? Have any of those people, their salaries and share options, ever been mentioned by any Labour spokesman?

Mr. MacShane: I may be open to correction, but I believe that Anita Roddick—who earns about £138,000—chipped in some money. She earns 10 to 12 times the average earnings of the people working in the Body Shop.

In the autumn, I presented a ten-minute Bill about the introduction of a maximum wage, and I suggested a ratio of 20 to one. To my horror, somebody wrote to *The Daily Telegraph*—he or she had not read my speech—to say that we needed a maximum wage ratio of 12 to one. For me to be outflanked on the left in the letters column of *The Daily Telegraph* symbolises how concerned the British people are about the issue.

The issue is not just pure poverty—it is not just the big issue of the people selling *The Big Issue*. Poverty in work is finally being taken seriously. Working hard used to be a way, if not to riches, at least to a decent standard of living. It is no longer. I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary for the honest replies that he sent me, which show that one in six blue-collar workers earn £150 a week or less. Some 2.5 million part-time workers earn less than £4 an hour. One in four women in manual jobs have gross pay of under £132 a week.

The majority of those people have to be subsidised by the Department of Social Security, and I would have thought that that was an extraordinary denial of Conservative economic policy. Massive Government handouts are subsidising firms to allow them to employ people on low wages.

The answer to that is, of course, the minimum wage. I am doubly grateful to the Under-Secretary, because he has sent me detailed figures. The Secretary of State for Social Security held up a visual aid earlier, but I shall not hold up mine. The figures show that in countries with a form of statutory minimum wage—including America, with a rate of £3, and France, Australia and Japan—the rate of employment growth between 1980 and 1990 was significantly higher than in the UK.

Between 1990 and 1993—here, the economic conditions were very different—the rate of employment growth was again higher in most of those countries.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): It would help if the hon. Gentleman quoted the correct figures. He has previously stated that employment growth in the UK over an economic cycle period was just over 1 per cent., but the correct figure is nearly 7 per cent. The hon. Gentleman should look over the economic cycle from 1979 to 1990, when Britain had a faster rate of employment growth than minimum wage countries such as France, Belgium and the Netherlands, which had a high minimum wage, as opposed to the United States and Japan, which had minimum wages so low that almost no one was paid at that level.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful that, at long last, we have had that exchange. The Under-Secretary wrote two letters to *The Guardian* to put me right on the matter. I wrote one letter, and then a second one, which I faxed on paper with a House of Commons letterhead. *The Guardian* did not publish it. I can say now across the Floor that the Under-Secretary is fundamentally wrong. I do not have the time to read out all the figures, as other hon. Members want to speak.

The United States has a statutory minimum wage of £3 an hour, but President Clinton wants to extend it. It is in fact going up, because our currency is going down as I speak.

Mr. Oppenheim: The minimum wage in the United States is £2.60, and it was hardly raised at all in the 1980s. When President Clinton came to power, he committed himself to raising it. Unfortunately, two years later he has still not done so because his Secretary of Labour, Robert Reich, said that it would threaten the recovery. Mr. Clinton waited until there was a Republican Congress and Senate before announcing that he would raise the minimum wage by all of 25 cents. I suspect that he knows in his heart of hearts that the Congress and Senate will throw it out. Why did not he raise it in the past two years when there was a Democrat Senate and Congress? I suspect that it was because even Democrats realise that the minimum wage destroys jobs.

Mr. MacShane: The Under-Secretary is now reading his letters to *The Guardian* at the Dispatch Box, but I shall not read mine back to him. In the United States,

where the minimum wage is set—at current exchange rates—at just under £3 an hour, the rate of employment growth from 1980 to 1990 was 18.4 per cent.

Mr. Wray: Does my hon. Friend agree that we would need a minimum wage of £6 or £7 an hour to deal with the misery that has been created by the Government? People have been left in debt with their mortgages, as they have had to pay 16 per cent. instead of the 8 per cent. rate when they first bought their houses. Has not that been caused by the Government?

Mr. MacShane: Even a minimum wage set at the United States rate of some £3 an hour would be an extraordinary step forward for social justice in my constituency of Rotherham.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): If Labour was in power, what would the minimum wage be?

Mr. MacShane: I am delighted to have an intervention from the most legendary Conservative Member, who must soon be in the Cabinet. The minimum wage will have to be set at a fair level that is not destructive to employment. It must be decided at a time when, in government, we see what the economic data are. It would be preposterous to set any particular figure now.

Working time is also causing much difficulty in our labour market. The figures that the Secretary of State for Social Security quoted did not show the amount of working time that workers have to put in for their wages. All the evidence suggests that working time has increased significantly, and it is another growing inequality in our society.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry boasted in a debate before Christmas about a factory that he had visited in Essex—it would be Essex—where men worked 65 hours a week. That is 120 years after Disraeli legislated for the 56-hour week in the 1870s. The 65-hour working week will make family life impossible and cause immense trouble with cohesion.

The amendment to the Opposition motion welcomes

"the high priority accorded by the Government to education and training".

I wish that the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) were in his place. Yesterday I asked him, "Rhodes, what can we do to improve the quality of education in this country?" He answered that it was an impossible task, that we are 18 months behind all our main competitors in mathematics, that we have lost all sense of standards and that there is no cohesion in Government education policy. In some colleges of higher education, the A-level pass rates have fallen to about 25 per cent. They have to keep up their rolls and do so by keeping on students. Training budgets have been cut by one third.

The Government claim in their amendment that

"employment is the best route to higher incomes".

As I showed when I cited the figures for fair pay, labour market policy must be based on partnership and on planning—as is the best company policy. It must be a labour market policy with some moral purpose. On the latter, it is deplorable that the Prime Minister appears to be snubbing the world social conference in Copenhagen next month, while every other world leader is acknowledging that employment and the labour market are issues that we must take far more seriously.

Planning, purpose and partnership are three concepts that are utterly inimical to the Conservative party. The worst poverty—the poverty that makes me angry—is the poverty of our nation's ambitions. When I was born, three years after the war, we ranked fifth or sixth in the world for gross domestic product per capita. In the mid-1960s, when I left school, we were in the top 10. Italy had half our GDP per capita and Korea had an average per capita income of $250 per year. In some areas, Korea and Italy have overtaken us. We are now sinking into the second or third division of nations.

I am in the House because I have the ambition to put that right. We want a society in which ambition is encouraged and communities are ambitious. We want Britain to rise again, for all its people and, unlike the Conservative party, we want it to rise with all its people. That is Labour's ambition and its programme for the 21st century, and I hope that under Labour we shall once again live in one nation.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that Madam Speaker placed a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm.

7.3 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution. This debate calls for realism and I hope that I am being realistic in reflecting that life is not easy for people on benefits. Many of my constituents suffer similar, complex social problems to those to which other hon. Members referred.

The debate also calls for realism from the Opposition—realism about how they will deliver the high expectations that they set out in their motion. One of the telling points in this debate was when my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) asked the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) how he would flesh out his proposals. There was no answer. The hon. Gentleman was short on delivery throughout his speech.

The debate also calls on Opposition Members to be realistic about something else. They talk of gaps, the redistribution of wealth, relative this and relative that. They must face the fact that there is irrefutable evidence that there has been a massive and widespread increase in prosperity and incomes during the past 15 years.

We have heard much about evidence from "Social Trends", which is plainly evidence of people and ordinary families having access to items that were considered luxuries not long ago. I welcome the fact that people in the lowest decile of the population by income apparently have increasing access to such important items. It is a good thing.

The evidence goes beyond that. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the increase of 39 per cent. in the average incomes of non-pensioner households, which is reflected by a similar increase of 36 per cent. in median incomes for households, according to Department of Social Security figures.

I accept the caution that my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) offered about the Rowntree report and the way in which it was compiled. Even that report, on which the Opposition rely for so much else, shows that there was a substantial increase of 26 per cent. in median incomes between 1979 and 1981. I invite

[Mr. James Clappison]

Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is looking at the report, to exercise some caution. The hon. Gentleman may find that his fingers get burned.

The report surveys the period between 1961 and 1991 and estimates that, after taking housing costs into consideration, median incomes increased by a miserable 2 per cent. between 1974 and 1979. Opposition Members had better be careful when they refer to that report. They might provide evidence that people would be much worse off if the party which was in power from 1974 to 1979 had continued after that time with the policies that were impoverishing the nation by 1979.

Health has also improved. During the debate we have heard many misconceptions about the health of the nation—misconceptions based, to some extent, on the "Panorama" programme last night. It is important to make it clear that, in absolute terms, health and life expectancy have improved considerably. The figures for changes in relative positions on which the programme rested its case were for young men in certain small areas of the country. Throughout the country as a whole during the past 15 years, there has been a substantial increase in life expectancy—two years and six months for men and two years and one month for women. The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) gave figures for the northern region and for regional differences, but those were differences from the national average. There has still been an absolute improvement within that region. The hon. Gentleman is not in his place, but, if he looks again at the figures for 1978, he will find that the regional difference was much the same then as it was in 1994. There has been an absolute increase in life expectancy.

Infant mortality is another indicator; there have been great improvements during the past 15 years. The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) spoke movingly and said how she cared about that subject. If she consults the latest figures from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, she will find that there has been an enormous reduction in infant mortality during the past 15 years. In fact, the reductions have been greatest in the lowest social class—a reduction of 56 per cent. in infant mortality for social class V. I welcome that achievement.

Although there obviously has been a widespread increase in prosperity, we need to tackle the issues that arise in respect of the bottom 10 per cent. of the population. I take note of the words of caution that were expressed about the way in which that figure has been analysed, and I agree strongly with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that it is important to consider the composition of the bottom 10 per cent. and to concentrate on ways of helping specific groups in it. Obviously, in the past 15 years, the number of unemployed people in that bottom 10 per cent. has increased; therefore, it is most important to concentrate help on those unemployed people, providing them with ways out of unemployment and back into high levels of income and prosperity.

I welcome the measures that my right hon. Friends have put in place to help the long-term unemployed specifically, and I do not pour cold water on proposals such as work trial and workstart, which are good ideas, which need to be considered carefully and implemented with great thought. I also do not pour as much cold water as the hon. Member for Garscadden did on the increase in family premiums for unemployed people who want to enter full-time work. That is a valuable measure.

Beyond that, I have no doubt that the most important way of helping those unemployed people and helping people in the bottom 10 per cent. is to continue our policies, which are designed to bring about sustainable economic growth. We have not mentioned that sufficiently in the debate, but it is important that we continue sound economic management, which will provide the growth to return those unemployed people to work. That is our answer to the questions that were asked by Opposition Members about that bottom 10 per cent.

I turn now to what Opposition Members have said. What are their policies, we may ask, for helping the less well-off—those in greatest need? My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), in a thoughtful intervention, asked the hon. Member for Garscadden about that, and especially how he was going to pay for his aspirations. The hon. Gentleman, in an illuminating reply, began to speak about levels of executive pay.

We have returned to that theme repeatedly in the debate. The idea is held on the Opposition Benches that there is a pot of gold of executive pay and high earners, which can be raided to fulfil all the Labour party's social aspirations. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury disposed of that idea effectively in his careful analysis, but, if the Opposition will not take his word for it, will they take the word of a recent Chancellor, who wrote about the subject in his autobiography? He said:

> "There will always be controversy about taxation, and, since it directly affects the interests of every individual, the argument is unlikely to be very objective. My own experience as Chancellor led me to certain general conclusions".

He said that one of those was that

> "any substantial attempt to improve the lot of the poorest section of the population must now be at the expense of the average man and woman, since the very rich do not collectively earn enough to make much difference, and the average man does not nowadays want to punish those who earn little more than he, since he hopes ultimately to join them."

That is the answer to the arguments of the redistributionists. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition Members who are heckling may want to know that that Chancellor of the Exchequer was no other than the former Member for Leeds, East, Lord Healey. He knew a thing or two about taxation. Perhaps new Labour needs to learn a few lessons from old Healey, although all Conservative Members remember the painful price that we paid for those lessons in taxation.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has expressed his ideas for helping the less well-off and for creating employment. In a recent interview for *She* magazine, which is described as "the magazine for women who juggle their lives," he said, in response to a pressing interviewer, that tax relief on nannies was one of the things that the Labour party was considering, although he said that he was cautious about that. I think that he is right to be cautious, because, although there may be some interest in that subject in some parts of Islington and certain other quarters, I do not think that it will have the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) going into the Lobby dancing with glee. I think that he is right—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

7.13 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, and I welcome the way in which the issues of poverty and long-term unemployment have been brought together, because there is no doubt that the two are linked. Coming as I do from Wales, I know that we have had a history for many years of difficult areas that suffer from unemployment and its accompanying problems.

Those problems appeared to be improving for a time, but now we seem to be slipping back rapidly. The problems, which were witnessed decades ago, of real, biting poverty, hitting not only individuals but communities, are returning, especially in the old industrial areas. That is happening in my constituency, the slate quarry constituency, and especially in some of the old coal mining areas—the valleys of Glamorgan and Gwent and the old steel towns down there. People there have become out of work; there is no alternative work; the work that may be available is often poorly paid, part-time work; and the standard of living is deteriorating rapidly. That hits the quality of the physical environment in those areas and has an impact on people's health and well-being.

That surely must be, in part at least, a moral question, not simply an economic one. We have unemployment in Wales of slightly less than 10 per cent. I believe that it is absolutely wrong that the whole burden of the depression should fall on to the shoulders of the last 10 per cent. in the job scale. I further believe that it would be possible to bring those people into work if a concerted effort were made to do so. I accept that that may well mean higher taxation, and it may well mean higher taxation on average earnings, and not only at the very top. I believe that that bullet must be bitten, for social as well as economic reasons.

In Wales, we have watched our gross domestic product per capita drift back in comparison to the figures for the United Kingdom as a whole. In 1977, our GDP per capita was 87 per cent. of that of the UK; it had decreased to 83 per cent. by 1992. Wales has the lowest GDP per capita of any part of the UK, and the counties of Gwynedd, Dyfed and Mid Glamorgan have a smaller GDP per capita than the Irish Republic. The Irish Republic has a greater GDP per worker than Wales as a whole, and soon it will have a greater GDP than Wales as a whole. The Irish Republic is succeeding, while policies in Wales obviously are not succeeding.

Among the factors that bring about the small amount of income per head are unemployment, to which I referred a moment ago, and high inactivity rates, which are highlighted not only in the Rowntree report but in "The Geography of Poverty and Wealth" by Anne Green, published in July 1994. That report shows that many of the areas with the greatest inactivity rate are in Wales. About 300 areas throughout the UK were rated on their degree of inactivity. Ten of the 12 worst are in Wales. They are Rhondda, Afan, Cynon, Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Rhymney valley, Llanelli, Neath, Dinefwr and Islwyn. Eight of the worst 10 areas for women's inactivity are in Wales. They are Rhondda, Merthyr, Afan, south Pembrokeshire, Blaenau Gwent, Rhymney valley, Cynon and Ynys Môn. We are at the worst end of the queue on a whole row of indicators concerned with inactivity.

Other dimensions contribute to the poverty that is rampant in many of those old industrial areas—illness and disability. In the constituencies in the Mid Glamorgan area—Merthyr, the Rhymney valley, the Caerphilly constituency, Cynon, Rhondda and Pontypridd—there are about 17,000 unemployed people and 34,000 people on invalidity benefit. That is largely the result of the effects of old industry. Those factors, together with low activity rates—which some people have in common—lead to the very low incomes on which families must live.

In addition, there are demographic factors. There are older families, sometimes as a result of young people having left the area to seek work. There is a preponderance of older people who depend on state pensions. In Wales last summer, the unemployment rate for 16 and 17-year-olds was 28 per cent. Of those, 89 per cent. had no income whatever. All those factors contribute to the problems that we face.

It is no use saying that, provided that we give those at the top enough money, there will be a trickle-down factor. In Wales, we simply get a trickle-out factor.

Mr. Booth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry, but I cannot give way because we are under a time limit.

Money that goes to those at the top of commerce or industry goes outside Wales and does not trickle down into the Welsh economy. Incidentally, the trickle-down factor does not even work to a great extent within the United Kingdom economy because those with the highest earnings often spend them overseas on items such as holidays and they do not necessarily work through the economy.

It is all very well criticising and explaining the problem, but what can we do about it? We must create jobs to do the work that needs to be done in our communities. There is scope for some 100,000 jobs in Wales. Goodness only knows, the environment needs tidying up and protecting for the future. We need community nurses and even bath nurses and home helps to assist people who, 10 years ago, may have been in institutional care and have difficulty in surviving at home. Work is also needed in terms of pollution control, water quality programmes, education and training, and police and security.

Although jobs exist in those areas, they do not command an expenditure capacity that will immediately create extra jobs. We therefore need public sector intervention not only to create jobs in the categories that I mentioned but to stimulate projects such as the cabling of Wales for the Internet development, which will be important in future years.

Given that unemployment costs on average £9,000 a year when expenditure and taxation are deducted, by spending an additional £4,000 a year to bring unemployed people back into work to undertake the much needed social, environmental and infrastructure work in all our communities, we could solve some of the economic and social problems that face us. I admit that that would cost some £400 million a year in Wales and a rolling programme might cost a similar amount in capital terms. That would mean a couple of pence in the pound on income tax, a slightly greater borrowing requirement, and some extra money from the private sector.

[Mr. Wigley]

That is a challenge to not only the Government but the Labour party. If we are to deliver the programmes that are needed in terms of training, facilities, social work and the environment, we must pay for it. There is no soft option; we must bite the bullet. If it costs a couple of pence extra on income tax—not just for the very rich but for average wage earners—to bring people into work and carry out the work that is needed in our communities, the Labour party as well as the Government must face that fact. Morally, we should be prepared to pay that, because it is wrong to have 100,000 people on the dole in Wales, becoming long-term unemployed because there is no short-term work available.

That is a challenge to this and any other Government and I hope that both sides of the House will bite the bullet.

7.23 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I apologise for not being present earlier in the debate, but I have been sitting on the Standing Committee that is studying the Disability Discrimination Bill. As soon as it adjourned, I felt the urge to race back to the Chamber, if only to fend off the charges of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) that I am somehow a Government stooge in everything that I say on this topic.

The hon. Gentleman would not allow be to rebut that charge and refused to take an intervention from me. I have learned why he was not prepared to take an intervention, interrupting a pattern to debates that we have both enjoyed on many encounters. It is because he, as a man of integrity and a master of his brief, who always enlightens the House with what he has to say on social security, is ashamed of the manner in which his Front Bench has hijacked an issue, distorted it and used it so viciously against the interests of the impoverished, whom he pretends to champion.

Contrary to the motion, everything that the hon. Gentleman said concerned inequality rather than poverty. He tries to parade inequality before the media to suggest that, somehow, those who have earned money are to blame for those who have not. Inequality is unconnected with poverty, but the hon. Gentleman knows that, in the current mood of politics, he can seize on a rich seam of grievance to play that political card.

The Labour party is covering up its lack of a policy to try to alleviate the poverty that should be the proper cause of our concern and focus of our attention. In discussing inequality and poverty, the hon. Gentleman links two unconnected phenomena to try to convey the impression, for his own purposes, that the one is to blame for the other: it is not.

The real issue, which the motion addresses but the hon. Gentleman did not, is poverty and it is separate from the question of what other people earn. The hon. Gentleman has raised the phantom of the issue of inequality before every camera prepared to point in his direction. If one had listened to what he said, one would have heard many an attack on inequality but no solution to the problem of poverty—except, perhaps, one, which was more of the same.

Where the hon. Gentleman and I differ is in trying to study and assess the origins of poverty. One of the main causes of poverty is the very policy that he would like to see more of. That is why, from a sedentary position I said to him, "Socialism." Contrary to what Beveridge envisaged, the workings of the welfare state have gradually impoverished many people, particularly in Scotland.

Mr. Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan: Although we are under a 10-minute limit, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Graham: I shall be courteous and give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to intervene in my speech. Does he realise that, from 1979 to the present day, Strathclyde alone lost nearly half its manufacturing jobs under his Conservative Government? The Government have done nothing to encourage folk to work by stimulating the economy and providing enough money for companies to keep their business.

Mr. Duncan: Stooge though the hon. Member for Garscadden might label me, I assure the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) that it is not my Government. I do not accept his thesis. Socialist Scotland has denied many opportunities to those who wish to be in work.

Let us take the hon. Gentleman's starting point of 1979 and look at the Rowntree report, which based its thinking on that starting point. In a so-called "scientific" exercise, it simply took a household incomes survey and extrapolated it through some extraordinary set of contortions to reach the conclusions that have been broadcast widely over the past couple of days. In 1979, punitive taxation so suppressed, reduced and squashed the earnings of the so-called rich that it was inevitable, to return to a modicum of sanity, that in the years that followed the diversity between the extremes of those who earned a little and those who earned a lot would widen. So what? It is good for prosperity that that should happen.

Furthermore, over those 15 years, the Rowntree report took a moving target for the purposes of making comparisons and drawing conclusions. The definition that it used to say that inequality had increased had itself moved for ever upwards. Therefore, to argue that the poor have got poorer is a falsity. Only because it was a comparative figure for ever moving upwards in the 15 years of the survey was Rowntree able to draw that conclusion.

The Rowntree report revealed a tale of two systems: a system of progress and enrichment based upon capitalist behaviour, which has been shown to work, and an alternative system of welfare, which by comparison has gradually impoverished those who have become increasingly dependent on that system.

Let me once again look the hon. Member for Garscadden in the eye to prove to him that I am not the stooge that he so loves to label me. Let me advance what I believe would be a solution to the way in which those he pretends—and perhaps genuinely wishes—to help have been impoverished, which perhaps is not fully in tune with Government policy.

The Social Security Select Committee has done much work on what should be the future of the welfare system in Britain. We have not considered it in as much detail as I would have liked. One of the problems of the welfare state is that many people have become increasingly trapped by so many conflicting influences in the various

different benefits that are distributed by different offices. We need to address that problem. One solution would be to have a citizens income.

The hon. Gentleman might not have expected to hear this from me, but I favour a citizens income whereby, regardless of people's means, condition or predicament, someone would be guaranteed a basic wage of, for example, £50 a week. That person would be freed from benefit traps, distortions of labour markets and everything else that impoverishes the category of Britain about which he could have spoken more today.

Beveridge said in his principles:

"The state, in organising security, should not stifle incentive, opportunity and responsibility. In establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than the minimum for himself and his family."

At the moment, that principle is not being delivered in practice. If somehow across the Floor of the House the parties can find some common ground for alleviating poverty, we will have done the country a great service. However, we are not going to find it simply by making great political noises and talking only of inequality, which has nothing whatsoever to do with poverty and diverts attention and proper thought from all our duty: to help those who are poor to the best of our means and not to use them as some Opposition Members risk doing—as political pawns for their own political objectives.

7.33 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I am grateful for the opportunity to add my voice to the growing public concern about the divide in society.

Last night, I attended a meeting in my constituency of parents and governors who were concerned about the cuts in schools and the effect that would have on class sizes. The unanimity in that hall and the despair about the damage to the fabric and the future of society was such that one of my constituents pleaded with me that we in the House should forget party politics and agree to halt the deepening crisis. If that constituent had been here this afternoon, he would have realised that it is not so easy.

The Rowntree report, which was published last week, is simply a further particularly authoritative report about the bald facts of the growing divide of income, poverty and wealth in Britain, but it is not even recognised by Conservative Members.

Government statistics—most of the reports are based on Government statistics—analysed back in December by the Low Pay Unit show that the disposable net income of the bottom tenth of the population after housing costs had dropped by 17 per cent., while the top tenth showed an increase of 52 per cent. The report is further evidence of that fact. It leaves Ministers clinging desperately to the statistic of the average, the median and the mean—as the Prime Minister did this afternoon—because that is how they can disguise and hide the deepening divide. Average statistics may be all right, but the Government increasingly use them to mask the truth or flounder in waffle about self-employed accountants in the bottom wealth decile.

If deepening relative poverty is universally recognised, except by Conservative Members, Rowntree has shown us the hopelessness of absolute poverty. There is no question about some of the examples in the report that we all know well. The pensioner couples living on £63 a week are straight poor. It makes a nonsense of the Government's frequent insistence that they are about providing choice. If people are poor, they do not have the choice of private health care or education; they do not have the choice of where to go shopping. They have to take the cheapest possible route.

I am not interested in looking only at the bottom end of the scale; we must also examine the 20 per cent. of people at the top of the scale. I well remember doing just that in Sheffield when the poll tax replaced the rates. In the leafy suburbs of south-west Sheffield, that change represented tax windfalls of up to £2,000 a year. At that time, such a windfall was being enjoyed by a number of Conservative councillors on the council. The council tax never righted that injustice, but every time an essential charge supplants one that is wholly or partly met by tax revenue, the wealthy benefit and the poor struggle to pay or do without.

The examples are too numerous to count. Prescription charges of £5 do not hurt the people in the top fifth of the income scale, but are a struggle for people in the bottom fifth, who may go without. Deregulation of bus fares is no problem for those who have two cars and do not use public transport, but those who are poor struggle or do without. What about water meters? It is no problem for those on a high rateable value to have a water meter, but those charges matter for people who are poor and have large families. That was behind the anger on VAT on fuel. It was thrown out so convincingly because it was a charge on an essential service.

Where do we start? I suggest that in the first instance we have to examine three areas. We must, first, look at wages, salaries and income. At the bottom end of the scale, we believe that a minimum wage adds dignity to people's efforts in the workplace. It tames the excesses of the free market, whereby people are asked to work for as little as they feel they can possibly manage. They survive on the crumbs. There is no reason in a free market why people should not work for 50p or £1 a hour if the market will stand it, but that is not okay for the dignity of people's efforts. Most employers agree that the minimum wage adds efficiency to the workplace and does more than any other penalty system to reduce the problems caused by the working of the cash-in-hand, black economy for the poorest tenth of the population.

It is simply not on to say that the salaries of the top executives and chairmen of public utilities, whose incomes are derived from our electricity, gas, and water payments, should be left to company shareholders to decide. Our money is being creamed off in totally obscene and excessive salaries, share options and pay rises way above the sum that any British household today requires to enjoy a high standard of living.

We must control the top level of wages and salaries. An unfair system breeds increasing unfairness. That was evidenced by the public pay round last year, under which the nurses received a pay increase of 1 per cent., the doctors received 2.5 per cent. and senior civil servants received £150,000 or whatever they deserved according to performance pay. An unfair system puts pressure on the public pay rounds to increase that unfairness, not just for those at the top and the bottom of the wage and salary scale but for those in the middle as well.

[Mrs. Helen Jackson]

We must address the question of equal treatment for all. The Fawcett Society and other pressure groups concerned about equality believe that, if the Government continue on the course outlined in the Pensions Bill, two out of three women who will retire after the year 2030 will live in poverty. The Pensions Bill, which is now being debated in the other place, passes over the needs of part-timers, divorced women and housewives. They are denied any real benefits which will flow from that pensions reform. An enormous opportunity has been lost.

As we saw last Friday, the Government are unable or unwilling to do anything meaningful for the disabled. The incapacity for work legislation will affect those on invalidity benefit as well.

We must recognise the role that public services play in determining standards of living. I was shocked to hear that the Government propose to bring down the shutters on one more tenuous, but valued, route out of poverty—the 21-hour rule, by which people can gain entry to adult education courses. That is an appalling proposal. It shows that, unless core public services are valued as being integral to our standard of living in Britain, the present divide between the rich and the poor will remain for a very long time.

7.43 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The Rowntree report should be a landmark in our public debates. Its tone—calm and reasonable, but earnest and urgent—is in the best traditions of Rowntree and the data that it assembles give us much food for thought. In October 1993 I wrote an article in *The Guardian* in which I said that trickle-down theory had not worked out for the poorest 10 per cent. of the population. It gives me no pleasure that the Rowntree report powerfully endorses that observation.

I shall not repeat the statistics that have been quoted so often today, but they confirm that the standard of living of households on the lowest incomes has not risen since 1979 and that the dispersion of income has widened greatly. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security made a characteristic speech on that subject last November, blending his intellectual rigour with his humane concern.

The Conservative party need not apologise about the main thrust of economic policy in the 1980s. It was in the interests of all of our people to bring down inflation, balance our public finances, deal with some of the rigidities of the labour market and provide managers with the opportunity to manage. We never pursued what the hon. Member for Dumfermline, East (Mr. Brown) called in his article in *The Independent on Sunday* "simple-minded" free market policies.

We were not so naive as to suppose that the untrammelled operation of market forces would optimise social outcomes, and there has been massive intervention and expenditure by the Government in the inner cities, on the education system and on social security—and rightly so.

Of course, we have not found all of the answers and the policies that are appropriate in one phase of our development may become less appropriate in another phase. We may need to alter the emphasis. We should certainly not pursue the reduction of taxation or the reduction of public expenditure as a proportion of national income to the ultimate, and I suggest that we should be extremely cautious about further deregulation.

In its leader last Saturday, *The Times* offered siren advice. It said that the Rowntree findings were "dubious" and it even accused the authors of manipulating the data. It asserted that inequality in Britain was within the bounds of the tolerable. Even at 20p a copy, I fancy that *The Times* is expressing very much a minority opinion. It did find three academics to offer comfort to the complacent—Messrs. Minford, Anderson and Green: see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Admittedly, Professor Minford observed that it is a "savage world".

It is indeed a savage world, and we must respond to that. Our policies must emphasise healing the divisions within our society. It is perhaps all too predictable for me to quote Disraeli, but in "Sybil" he wrote of

"two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy, who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets".

If any hon. Members are tempted to think that that is a purple passage from a Tory Member of Parliament who turned his hand to writing novels because he had nothing better to do, they are wrong. I refer them to chapter 6 of volume 2 of the Rowntree findings if they need to be persuaded that the problem of the two nations is still with us.

The section on "The Location of Poor and Rich Neighbourhoods" shows that there was a concentration of poverty in 8.9 per cent. of wards in this country in 1991, compared with 7.5 per cent. in 1981. Far too many of those wards are the same in both surveys.

Other research shows concentrations of poverty, in Oxford and Oldham, which are geographically cheek by jowl with areas of affluence. They are worlds apart in terms of income, yet extremely close together geographically.

In 1872 Disraeli concluded that the "great object" of the Conservative party should be "the elevation of the condition of the people".

In 1965 Iain Macleod, addressing the Conservative party conference, reiterated those Tory values when he said:

"We shall be called upon to convince the electorate that we stand for humanity as well as efficiency; for compassion as well as competition".

Latterly, we have perhaps been at risk of neglecting that balance and I think that we should attend to its restoration. That Tory tradition is the authentic Tory tradition and it is the only one to which the voters of this country will give continuing loyalty.

Perhaps not many voters read Coleridge, but he observed to Harriet Martineau, an eager radical, that

"Society is not an aggregate of individuals".

It is the role of Government to maintain the cohesion of society—a society that embraces all its members. Extremes of inequality are not acceptable. My right hon. and hon. Friends should note very carefully the outrage that is being expressed at the extremes of pay increases and rewards that are being reaped by the directors of some privatised companies. It is not the politics of envy; it is the politics of fairness. I put it to my hon. Friends that they should not insist that only absolute poverty matters. Relative poverty matters very much indeed because we define ourselves as members of society.

Certainly, our Government should not practise the politics of exclusion. It is wrong to propose in the Jobseekers Bill that some young people should live on £21.70 a week, or even nothing at all if they are sanctioned. It is wrong to chip away at national insurance and the contributory principle, because they are the keystone of our social contract. It is wrong that in the Disability Discrimination Bill we should exclude from the scope of protection people who happen to be employed in firms employing fewer than 20 people.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales observed in an article recently that "markets are social events", as no doubt they are—for those who can get to market. But if the Disability Discrimination Bill largely ignores transport, the disabled will not be able to get to the party or to the labour market. I use the term "labour market" because it is the term that we all use, but we might care to reflect that its dehumanised language may tell us something about our own deficiencies. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend considers the foreign exchange markets as social events, but it strikes me that those young men with their braces and champagne omit to invite the low-paid to their exclusive celebrations.

Efficiency is not the same as fairness, and unfairness is inefficient. If people are to be excluded from our society through unemployment or marginalised through low pay and low skills, we deprive ourselves of their talents and potentialities. The costs of maintaining law and order, of repairing our inner cities or our social fabric are immense. Indeed, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security grimly points out, they are unsustainable. Nor would I wish to sustain the present pattern, and indeed we shall not, of course. Only the extreme short-termism of the Treasury could provide an open-ended subsidy for low pay by way of family credit. We can see it coming: next year's public expenditure crisis will be about family credit, just as this year's—allegedly, at least—is about housing benefit. Mr. Howard Davies was right to say that inequality is a sign of a malfunctioning economy.

If my hon. Friends are not moved by the thought that poverty is a drag on the economy, let them consider what it does to families and children. We find five times the number of children on at risk registers in the poorest areas compared to the better-off areas. There is an estate in Wales where only 7 per cent. of adults are in full-time employment. How can they provide role models for the children? The disadvantages that those children suffer early on—in terms of language skills and health, for example—persist. They are our future. There is an obligation from one generation to the next. As Burke said:

"Society is indeed a contract . . . a partnership . . . between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

The Conservative party must accept the need for public investment, in the interests of us all, in those services that are not going to be privatised. We should not—we could not—privatise education. If we devalue our schools, as I fear that we shall in this year's local authority settlement, it will be as damaging to this generation as devaluation of their money through inflation was to a previous generation. Education is crucial in terms of opportunity—fullness of life—for every individual. It is crucial in terms of the quality of our future society, and in terms of our future competitiveness.

7.53 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): The Rowntree report is no surprise to those who have followed the course of changes in income and wealth in the past 16 years. Even official Government published statistics make the growing gap between the rich and the poor indisputable.

The growth of inequality is no surprise to the Government either. Several times in the past 18 months a succession of my right hon. and hon. Friends have asked the Prime Minister to confirm both growing inequality and poverty. Since 1979, the average disposable income of the richest 20 per cent. of households has increased by £6,000 a year, at April 1994 prices. But the average disposable income of the poorest 20 per cent. of households has fallen by £3,000 a year, compared with the incomes that they would have received if policies and the distribution of earnings had stayed the same. That is one way of bringing out the dramatic and unprecedented growth of inequality in Britain.

The Prime Minister told me, none the less:

"The net disposable income of people at all ranges of income has increased".—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1994; Vol. 238, c. 146.]

He told the late Leader of the Opposition, John Smith:

"There is an improvement in living standards at all levels, even among those who are the least well off."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 1994; Vol. 238, c. 428.]

That was untrue then, and it is untrue now. After the exchanges in the House, which other hon. Members as well as myself have sustained to this day, I wrote a detailed letter to the Prime Minister citing Treasury and Department of Social Security evidence to show that substantial groups of the population now have disposable incomes which in real terms are lower than such groups had in 1979. He dodged the issue, and continued to do so after I wrote again at length. He replied in August 1994, but he and other Ministers continue to dodge the issue because it is too uncomfortable for them.

Even the 1995 jubilee edition of "Social Trends" no longer has the critical table showing the absolute decline in real income of the poorest 10 per cent. and 20 per cent. of the population—it was table 5.21 in the 1994 edition. I can presume only that Government statisticians were under pressure not to publish that table, or were inhibited from doing so by the deliberate deception now being exercised by the Government as a whole on the issue.

This is a key point in the sorry tale of Tory deceit and prevarication, and one which the otherwise admirable Rowntree report hesitates to drive home. It is not just the growing inequality or poverty, but the smaller real income among millions of poor people. Their incomes are falling and, unhappily, more people are joining them. I do not just mean the rise in the number of homeless people, especially the young homeless, although that is tragic enough, but families with children, the unemployed, those in casual, part-time and self-employment, and pensioners, too.

On 31 August 1994, the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People informed me, in response to a written question, that in 1991-92 the disposable income of the poorest 20 per cent. of families with children, after adjustment for composition and size of household, was lower than that of the poorest 20 per cent. in 1979. We are talking about 7 million people in families with children who are worse off than their 1979 predecessors, whether income is measured before or after housing costs.

[Ms Jean Corston]

Among the poorest tenth, the situation is even worse. At 1994 prices, the income of a couple with two children aged three and eight was £996 lower in 1991-92 than in 1979, whereas for the same period an identical family in the richest tenth of the population had an extra £14,300 a year income. That is what has happened under the Conservative Government—and the Prime Minister has the brass neck to tell my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that he agrees that it is a responsibility of the Government to reduce inequality.

Even pensioners in the poorest tenth of the population have a lower real disposable income than in 1979. Single pensioners in that category experienced a decrease of £676 a year, and couples £52 a year at April 1994 prices. The Department of Social Security does have a standard of low income in 1979 terms—buried away in the deep recesses of the "Households Below Average Income" report. It is defined as the median income in 1979 of the poorest tenth of the population, adjusted for inflation to the present day. It would be bad enough if, after 16 years, that figure was still relevant to today's conditions, but the situation is worse than that. It is contrary to all the statistics of average growth. It shows that the number of children living below the 1979 standard of low income has increased—from 790,000 to 1,060,000.

The DSS gives another measure of low income in 1979: half average household income in that year. The number of children in families still below that miserable level has also increased—from 1,310,000 to 1,850,000. The same source discloses that the number of people living below the 1979 standard of low income who are in employment has also grown. That group includes more self-employed people and more people in both full-time and part-time work.

A range of statistics that I received in August was published in *Hansard* on 26 October 1994. When I wrote to the Prime Minister again, he referred the matter to the Secretary of State for Social Security, who did not deny any of the figures that I had put to the Prime Minister. His reply, on 18 December 1994, dodged the responsibility of agreeing on what factual basis we could have a reasoned debate about the implications for action. He added, at the end of his letter,

"The most important point is that the Government should identify what trends underlie the results and put in place policies that ensure that everyone has the opportunity to share in the increasing wealth that the HBAI results show for the vast majority."

The Government must recognise that there is a momentum against the poor: a multiplication of tax, social security, employment and deregulation policies which are reducing Britain's poor to third-world status and desperation rather than merely continuing a process of polarisation. That momentum of divergence has been built into the entire range of institutions and policies in this country. It is like a geological fault built into the social landscape, with sections of the population sliding into an abyss.

We can no longer speak only of the deterioration of the conditions of poor people relative to those of others; this is a deep and deepening social divide, with millions losing absolutely rather than just relatively. It is self-destructive social engineering, manufactured by the Government—

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Corston: No, I have only 10 minutes; the hon. Gentleman can make his own speech.

That self-destructive social engineering is harming the security, the common interests and, indeed, the future prosperity of rich and poor alike.

All that is thrown into stark relief by recent examples of magnified greed. PowerGen's Ed Wallis says that he is worth £1.2 million; British Telecom's Sir Iain Vallance says that his £770,000 salary is "modest"; British Gas's Cedric Brown is revelling in a salary of nearly half a million. Meanwhile, question 18 in the proposed jobseeker's allowance questionnaire asks, "What is the lowest wage you are willing to work for?"

Yesterday, at my constituency surgery, one of my constituents—a qualified chef who used to work for Rolls-Royce—was put in touch with an employer who had a job going in a bakery. He rang up, and was told that the pay was £1.90 an hour. A job was advertised in Bristol just before Christmas at £1.61 an hour. What implications has that for the family credit budget, in which good employers are subsidising bad ones? What implications has it for the "feelgood factor"? Anyone who watched "Panorama" last night would have been shocked to see the difference between the life chances of the rich and those of the poor.

John Maples was right: the people of this country know that the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest, who are getting poorer.

8.2 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I understood from the Order Paper that the debate was supposed to be about poverty. Although I respect much of what the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) said, I intend to return to that subject, rather than wallowing in the politics of envy: I want to get away from the whole business of inequality. Equality is not the sole yardstick that we should use when discussing the crucial and often sad issue of poverty.

I also wish to set a new analysis alongside that of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. I have benefited from the excellent work of the House of Commons Library researchers, whom I asked a number of questions about comparative income, benefit and tax figures between 1979 and 1993. As other hon. Members do not have the result of that analysis before them, perhaps I could devote most of the 10 minutes allotted to me to presenting it. I believe that it is illuminating, and puts in context what has been at the core of much of the debate. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said that the Rowntree report was the fons et origo of the debate from Labour's point of view.

According to the Library, in 1979 the income of the top 20 per cent. started at £11,000, and that of the bottom 20 per cent. at about £1,800. When state benefits are added, the figure rises to nearly £11,000 for the top 20 per cent. and more than £2,000 for the bottom 20 per cent.—in terms of gross income with benefits. When tax is taken off, the income of the top 20 per cent. falls to £8,000 and that of the bottom 20 per cent. is lowered very slightly, remaining at about the same £2,000 level.

Let us then add or subtract—depending on whether we are dealing with the bottom or the top quintile per cent.—the indirect taxes and benefits in kind. That produces a

figure of £7,800 for the top 20 per cent., and just over £2,300 for the bottom 20 per cent. Thanks to the contribution of the rest of us, the income of the bottom 20 per cent. in 1979 has thus been raised by 30 per cent., while 259 per cent. has been taken from that of the top 20 per cent. by the rest of the community. The gap exists.

I need not go laboriously through every stage in the same process in 1993, but hon. Members will know that process: add benefits, take off tax and then deal with indirect taxes and benefits in kind. The top 5 per cent. are now giving the rest of us 290 per cent.: in other words, the tax take from that group has increased by 31 per cent. Meanwhile, the income of the bottom 5 per cent. is up by 28 per cent. The gap referred to by so many Opposition Members is narrowing by 30 per cent., from the top; it is about 2 per cent. in all. I do not want to confuse the House.

Even on those figures—before we employ other yardsticks relating to money and poverty—it is clear that the findings of the Rowntree Foundation, honest and well meaning though it doubtless is, need to be reinterpreted. I believe that poverty should be viewed not only in terms of money and goods, but in terms of ideas. I was grateful to the hon. Member for Garscadden for widening the debate slightly and discussing poverty in those terms, but he did not go on to make the obvious point—he wouldn't, would he; it is a point in our favour—that, while one in eight school leavers went to university in 1979, one in three go now.

The university figures mean that the ladder of opportunity is there for all to see. We have tried to help education in a number of ways—for instance, through the provision of city technology colleges. Apart from a reference at the beginning of the debate, I have heard nothing about that; although, unfortunately, my membership of a Standing Committee meant that I had to be absent for part of the debate.

My time is getting thin, so I shall be quick. The context of our debate has been muddied considerably because we have failed to talk about the reality of poverty as we see it worldwide. No proper reference has been made to the fact that poverty in this country is comparative riches compared with poverty in the third world. A proper analysis has not been made of the various definitions of poverty. Nowadays, apparently, even not having central heating is a criterion of poverty, but there are millionaires without central heating.

Ms Harman: They are not poor, are they?

Mr. Booth: That is why we need to analyse what is and what is not poverty. That is the core of the debate and of our discussion. That is why we need to define it ourselves.

The Bearsden pictures on "Panorama" last night were heart-rending. That is not surprising if one considers what we saw—housing provided by the state, the man who had gone through endless training sessions provided by the state, and the sad woman who was being provided with national health service benefits. All that was a microcosm of the promise of Attlee and of socialism. The scene was poverty-stricken in terms not only of money, but of ideas. Those people's lives had no purpose.

Not surprisingly, we heard in last night's tragic film of a high incidence of suicide. No individuality or uniqueness could live in those drab socialist-inspired buildings. There was no dignity there: that is the other aspect of poverty with which I want deal, and with which socialism does not deal. The solutions that Conservative Members have wanted have not been supported by the hon. Member for Garscadden, or by other Opposition Members during the part of the debate that I have been able to hear.

We have not heard that the number of people on the lowest wages fell from 1975 to 1978. We have not heard that there has been a distortion in the figures, thanks to rich people being able to return to this country following the 1979 election. Some reference has been made to this, but we have not heard much about the fact that, thanks to a strong and growing economy, income support has increased by 24 per cent. for a typical unemployed couple, by 18 per cent. for a typical pensioner couple, and by 30 per cent. for a single pensioner.

Equality is not a helpful yardstick; real poverty is. Compulsory equality, ordained by socialism, communism and Opposition Members—if they ever had the chance—is the one sure recipe for poverty.

8.12 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Like other hon. Members in the Chamber and elsewhere, I rejoice at the increase in incomes since 1979. It would be folly for anyone to deny that basic fact. The debate tonight is different from that. It deals with the impact of rapidly rising incomes. How has that increase been shared? Has it been fair? Is it sustainable? The charge against the Government is, in a sense, a unique charge. It is that, under their stewardship, they have done well in increasing national income, but that a part of the British political tradition has been destroyed.

In the past 400 years, incorporating more people into the body politic has been one of the great movements in politics. Great struggles took place, therefore, for equality before the law, and for freedom before the law. There were the struggles over the franchise. Great efforts have been made in this century to establish greater economic and social equality.

It would have been fair, therefore, to think of British society as being like a train journey. There were first, second, third and fourth-class compartments. The living standards of those in the four compartments were clearly different. One could say with all certainty that the train was heading in the same direction and that all the carriages were linked. The charge that we are making tonight is that, despite the growth in wealth, or perhaps because of the way in which that growth has been gained, the fourth coach has been decoupled and no longer heads in the same direction.

I do not have the statistics that other hon. Members have deployed in this debate. I merely wish to bring some of my constituents and their faces, feelings, hopes and aspirations into our discussions. One can see the faces of the people in that fourth-class carriage, which has been decoupled from the train on the main journey that the rest of us, fortunately, are embarked upon. They are the very elderly poor—those who have had no chance of building up a second pension.

Clearly, important policy recommendations have been made on how everyone can receive those second pensions. Of course we know what to do to ensure that the poorest pensioners can be part of the train journey again. We

[Mr. Frank Field]

could credit them into the state earnings-related pension scheme, so that the entitlement would not live beyond them but die with them, and their standard of living would increase appreciably

We know that single-parent families are one of the biggest groups in that fourth-class carriage. All hon. Members must be worried about the rate of the increase in the number of children who are cared for by only one parent. We all have an interest in their welfare. As taxpayers, perhaps paying up to 5p in the pound for non-payment of maintenance, we have an interest in the Child Support Agency working a little more effectively than it does.

Given that large numbers of those single mums, for they are single mums generally speaking, will get out of the fourth-class carriage by marrying—perhaps the Secretary of State for Social Security should spend more time on how to make that easier for them—we need not be too concerned about them in the long run, although we are immediately concerned about them. We must be concerned about the males in that fourth-class carriage who are semi-skilled and unskilled. If things go on as at present, they will never work again in their lifetime.

In Birkenhead and in Liverpool about 20 years ago, 26 million tonnes of goods came in and out of the port on both sides of the river, and 20,000 dockers were employed. This year, an additional tonnage has gone in and out of the port, and only 400 dockers have been employed. Semi-skilled and unskilled jobs for male workers have been wiped out. What are we going to do about the disfranchised male? That is one of the issues that we must face.

Clearly, as a group, those males are far less able than women to adjust, and to box and cox in the labour market. Males have all sorts of hang-ups about our roles and about what we deserve. Clearly, however, other factors are at work, which prevent jobs from reaching that group. We are concerned about that.

I applaud the Joseph Rowntree Foundation study for considering how the Government have decoupled that fourth carriage of Great Britain Ltd. so that it no longer heads in the same direction as others, but I disagree about where we go from here. I am pleased beyond belief that the Rowntree study talked about self-interest, which is an important part of human motivation. The biggest three motivations are self-interest, self-improvement and altruism. The weakness of the left has been to believe that we can build a social or even an economic policy on altruism. We cannot.

Let us consider what the Rowntree report thinks of as self-interest. It states that middle England—the people in the first three carriages—will give up some of their privileges or the speed of their train for fear that they will be set on by bandits. I have news for Rowntree: if that is so, in the next 10 years middle-income England will be voting for and insisting on corporal punishment to deal with disorder rather than voting for tax increases. Any welfare reform has to be built on the basis that there is something in it for those in the first three carriages. That brings me back to the national insurance fund, a subject that has already been mentioned.

Clearly, we have to rethink the scheme and make clearer the link between people's benefits and earnings. If there is to be a redistribution—the altruistic side that I believe exists—it has to be above board. We must not think that we can kid people that we can fiddle their contributions and pay them to someone else. There has to be a positive decision by the taxpayer via the Exchequer. The reform of the welfare system is, I hope, the task in hand. We need a new system in place soon if there is to be a clear alternative to what is being offered by the Treasury Bench and its supporters.

We have had a clear model of how the Treasury will deal with the inhabitants of the fourth-class carriage who are no longer participating in the journey being undertaken by the rest of us. The Secretary of State devises raiding parties to catch a few and drag them to join the rest of us aboard the main train. He devises back-to-work benefits and the additional bonus, in cases where the Child Support Agency is working and collecting the maintenance, when the mother goes back to work.

All these measures are to be applauded, and every experiment must be examined with interest and extended if it is a success, but I do not believe that we shall get back to the policy of incorporating people into the mainstream of society if we are concerned only with devising even more effective raiding parties. We need a strategy to get the fourth-class carriage back on to the main line to be a part of the journey that the rest of us are, fortunately, making.

I end as I began. I do not dispute the figures that show an increase in incomes since 1979. I rejoice in them, and I am pleased that some have been able to benefit, but the flip side of that is a very—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes.

8.22 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor and Maidenhead): I am sorry to have missed parts of the debate. I was present for the opening exchanges but then had to attend Standing Committee A.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who made a characteristically thoughtful speech. However, I cannot agree that the fourth carriage has become decoupled. That is certainly not the case according to the evidence of the Rowntree report to which I shall refer in a moment. I was, however, intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's idea that the Secretary of State should "cure" single mums by what seemed to be an advocation of serial bigamy. The idea that he should somehow marry them all off was rather nice.

I heard the speech made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden, (Mr. Dewar), but I was rather disappointed. Like other hon. Members, I had a high opinion of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. I once had the honour of working for some time at Toynbee hall in London's east end. I can confirm that the foundation's work in many spheres is widely respected. On this occasion, however, I regret that the foundation has been drawn into the smokescreen beneath which the Labour party is hiding its reluctance to make policy.

The Rowntree report is in many ways a very old-fashioned piece of work. It covers ground which we have been over many times but does not appear to notice that the debate has taken new directions in recent years.

We must all look more widely and deal with the great issues of social change, especially marriage breakdown, over which we all admit that the Government have little or no influence.

The report's proposals are familiar enough. Many Conservatives feel that most of them have been or are being tried, and some have been found wanting. Moreover, it is very important to note that the proposals are not costed and overlook the progress that has been made by the Government in many of the matters under discussion. In brief, the proposals call for a huge increase in public expenditure in nine respects, and that is simply not on.

As well as political doubts about the report, I have doubts about its methodology, a point that some hon. Members have mentioned. The hon. Member for Garscadden quoted from the front page of this week's edition of *The Sunday Telegraph*, but I wonder whether he read as far as page 21 where the admirable journalist Mr. Paul Goodman exposed the flimsy starting point for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's evidence, or what lies at the heart of the report.

In his article, Mr. Goodman makes the distinction between relative and absolute poverty. I shall return to that issue in a moment, but I shall deal first with his point about the report's most important claim, which was also quoted by the hon. Member for Garscadden. That claim is:

"Since 1979 the lowest income groups have not benefited from economic growth".

If that claim were true, it would indeed be proof that the very poorest have experienced an increase in absolute poverty. However, as Mr. Goodman states, the claim is unproven.

The report's judgment relies on two key figures to identify the poorest 10 per cent. of the population, examining their incomes before and after housing costs are taken into account. The claim is that the incomes of this group have remained the same before housing costs are considered or have fallen by 10 per cent. afterwards, but, as Mr. Goodman also points out, those figures are based not on firm evidence, such as tax returns, but on the "Households Below Average Income" survey.

I would go much further: the HBAI figures themselves have a number of important methodological limitations. They are based on a sample rather than a census and did not track individuals for any length of time, so they cannot reveal how many people have seen their incomes rise or fall. The HBAI figures are in turn based on the family expenditure survey whose data are collected mainly from expenditure figures, not from income figures. Moreover, the FES uses interviews to gather data, and we must admit that it is at least possible that some respondents might misreport their circumstances.

We must also observe that the HBAI figures relate to the period up to 1991-92 when interest rates and unemployment were still high. Since then, unemployment has fallen substantially—by more than 500,000. In addition to its methodological problems, the HBAI gives a picture of the past. In more general terms, the survey also provides conflicting evidence about the living standards of the poorest.

A large number of self-employed people such as farmers, taxi drivers and accountants report no income at all, although perhaps we should not be surprised that accountants manage to show no income. Surely it is rather odd that only about half the people in the bottom 10 per cent., excluding pensioners, are on income-related social security benefits. What are the other half doing? That question must be asked.

The Secretary of State cited HBAI survey figures for individuals in the bottom 10 per cent. of income distribution who now have access to freezers, fridge freezers, telephones and video recorders. They show substantial percentage increases in the possession of these consumer durables. That is at the heart of the debate. It is important to note that, in relative terms, things are not as bad as they were. Based on such statistics, Mr. Goodman is right to say that the Rowntree report's main claim is, to say the least, disingenuous.

I should like to comment on the distinction between absolute and relative poverty. There can no doubt that we all deplore absolute poverty, and the ever-increasing billions of pounds that are put into the welfare system are evidence that we deplore it; but we must be careful not be trapped by any absurd definition of an abstract poverty line. It is plainly ridiculous to use any definition in which to be below, say, half the average income or any other similar specification is to be poor. Such a definition would mean that poverty would rise every time average incomes rose.

Others define the poverty line in relation to income support levels and that, too, has severe problems, as does the definition of a poverty line based on average expenditure. What happens to those who save rather than spend? Under that system, some very rich people would easily be classified as poor. None of those definitions will do. Poverty is a very emotional word. If we are beguiled by any of those definitions, relative poverty will, self-evidently, always be with us. I have severe doubts about the use to which the Rowntree report can be put.

There is, however, another much more reliable document which shows what has happened in recent years in the social conditions of the country. I refer, of course, to the annual publication "Social Trends". Unfortunately, I do not have time to go through the various figures that show the great increases in public expenditure, on social security, health and education, and, indeed, show the changes in people's lives that have resulted in the majority of people becoming wealthier. However, the figures from "Social Trends" show clearly that while the country is getting wealthier and healthier, it may not be getting any wiser.

I wonder sometimes whether the great problem which we face nowadays is not relative poverty but relative prosperity. Why will not many people simply accept that they are getting richer and not count themselves as poor? Why do they seem to get more miserable as they receive more of the supposed material benefits of life? That, of course, is another debate, but it has some bearing on today's continued exhibition of the arid politics of envy expressed by the Opposition.

8.32 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): My father was employed as a village schoolmaster in east Devon. When I was seven years old—the same age as my daughter now—we did not have a refrigerator, a television or central heating. Does that mean, as Conservative Members suggest, that when I was seven I was poorer

[Mr. John Denham]

than my present constituents who have a television and a refrigerator? I think that is absolute nonsense. Of course poverty is relative to the wealth, income and life styles of those who live around us. Any other definition of poverty makes no sense at all.

Whatever else the Rowntree report may prove, it establishes beyond doubt that many, many people in our society live in poverty because their income is insufficiently high to enable them to participate fully in the activities of society and to enjoy in a reasonable way the benefits of that society like other people. That is not the politics of envy. My constituents are clear about that and I do not think that a distinction can be drawn between Labour and Conservative voters. If they were to see somebody from the constituency set up a business, work hard and make a success of it, they would wish him good luck and think it right that that person should be rewarded for his enterprise and effort.

My constituents know the difference between such enterprise and somebody who happens to be the boss of a privatised industry, who has the power to write his own cheques on the basis of a monopoly which he can exploit. People understand and do not resent justified inequalities in our society, but they resent rampant unfairness and greed that sit side by side with deep poverty.

The Secretary of State told us that he did not wish to pursue the phantom politics of envy but, rather, wanted to show how the Government were concentrating on helping people to get out of poverty and to help themselves. The Government's record does not suggest any significant degree of success in that self-defined enterprise. Poverty is no longer a northern or a Scottish problem, but a problem which has been made national by the failure of the Government's policies. Let us dwell on some of the measures of that failure.

At Christmas, 400,000 children in Hampshire, Sussex, Dorset, Kent, Berkshire and Surrey—the main southern counties—faced what I would regard as Christmas in poverty because they and their parents were dependent on state benefits. Ministers do not grasp the reality of juggling inadequate incomes to buy presents. In all probability, all too often, people have to borrow money at extortionate interest rates to be able to afford to buy presents at Christmas for their children. That poverty, right across the heart of England, has been created by the Government and they appear to be unwilling to do anything about it.

When people turn to the state social security system, there are certainly plenty of disincentives which prevent them from receiving assistance. The truth is that a third of the applications for social fund loans for items as basic as beds, cots and clothing are refused, not because the applicant does not meet the criteria for a loan but because the cash-limited funds have run out. The Secretary of State has devised a cruel system, which tells people that their needs will be assessed and, yes, by the Government's criteria they will qualify for a loan, which will have to paid back, but, having decided that that assistance is needed to buy a bed, or some clothing, or a cooker, or, dare I say it, even a refrigerator, they are then turned down because there is not enough money in the system.

The Government say that they aim to help the long-term unemployed. What is the position in my constituency and in Hampshire? Between 1990 and 1994, the number of long-term unemployed in my constituency, as well as in Southampton and Hampshire as a whole, trebled. What is more, the proportion of long-term unemployed people rose. We have heard a lot from the Government about helping the unemployed get back to work. Even when one disregards the high point of the recession to be fair, the reality is that the number of people who have gone on to the dole queues, who have stayed there and who are unable to get off, has risen dramatically in absolute terms and as a proportion of those out of work. There is absolutely no evidence whatever that the Government's policies, which they say are directed towards those most in need, are enabling people to get back into work.

A comparison of the figures for long-term unemployment in 1990 with those for 1994, the most recent year for which figures are available, and the impact of Government training schemes, show that a higher proportion of the long-term unemployed who go on training schemes remain unemployed today than four or five years ago. Indeed, 60 per cent. of the long-term unemployed go back to the dole queue six months later and only 16 per cent. of the long-term unemployed manage to get into full-time work after one of the Government's training courses. Five years ago, at least a quarter of those who had been out of work for a year or more managed to obtain full-time work after a Government training course.

Where is the evidence that any of the Government's policies help those who are most in need to get out of unemployment and to achieve security? There is no evidence of that if we consider the operation of the social security system or the operation of the Government's policies towards the long-term unemployed. There is no evidence when we consider the number of people who are trying to raise their children in poverty.

The Secretary of State delighted in a nit-picking performance on the statistics. However, he ignored the real issue, skating over it in about 30 seconds. After spending 20 minutes nit-picking on the statistics, he said that he did not think that there was absolute poverty in this country, inequality was not relevant and therefore there was nothing to debate.

However, inequality is relevant. Poverty is relative and the inability to participate normally in our society is undermining society itself. The Government must recognise that fact. There is a price to be paid for deep poverty, on the one hand, and ostentatious greed, on the other. It is the price of sending the message, as so many Conservative Back Benchers have done this evening, to the country at large that, if people feel excluded, that is the natural state of affairs.

There are great dangers for our society in sending out that message, as so many Conservative Members have done. We need a Government who say that it is a disaster to have so many people whose incomes are so low that they cannot reasonably share in the benefits of the society around them. We need a Government who will say that they will do everything possible to include those people in society.

If the Government do not do that, the whole of society will pay the price of the inevitable breakdown of the sense of community, and all that follows in relation to crime and deprivation. We will all pay a price. The Secretary of State looks pained by my comments. I understand that he does not like what I am saying, but we will all pay a price

for all the children who are raised in poverty and who will not succeed at school as well as they might if they had been raised in wealthier surroundings.

One need only speak to the teachers who are educating those children to understand that many such children—not all—bring a disadvantage to school that is not shared by children who come from wealthier and more comfortable backgrounds. We need an education system that enables those children to overcome that disadvantage. However, the Government are not providing that opportunity because, as we have heard time and time again—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I call the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen).

8.42 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): As this most important debate on poverty was initiated by the Labour party, I thought that it was important that I should be in the Chamber to listen to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). He is a sincere and intelligent man, but I was disappointed by his speech. He drew attention to many problems of which we are all aware, but he failed to make many proposals to tackle those problems. On the rare occasions when he was drawn into proposals on, for example, a minimum wage, he was unable to tell the House at what level it should be fixed and what effect it might have on the employment prospects of the very people who—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not want conversations between the Front Benches while another hon. Member has the Floor.

Mr. Stephen: The hon. Member for Garscadden was unable to tell us what effect a minimum wage might have on the employment prospects of the very people whom the Labour party claims to seek to help.

I was impressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). His was a very thoughtful speech, but, with respect, he too was rather long on diagnosis and short on prescription.

I have read, as I imagine we all have, the Opposition motion which calls for

"a major welfare-to-work programme, a national childcare strategy and action to improve education and skills."

I listened to Opposition Members' speeches and I remain of the view that the only Member of the House who has thought seriously about the matter, who has made proposals and who is doing anything about welfare-to-work is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. In that regard, I refer to the jobseeker's allowance, the back-to-work bonus and the agreement that applicants for the jobseeker's allowance will have to make in future.

Many Opposition Members believe that every unemployed person is desperately seeking work and is quite unable to find it. However, our constituents know, even if we do not, that a great many people are working in the black economy and a great many others are not making a very serious attempt to find work. Therefore, the agreement is important. It is important that a clear programme is mapped out with the assistance of the Department of Employment so that the person concerned can get back into work as soon as possible.

Education is, of course, of great importance if poverty is to be avoided. That is why the Government have introduced some very imaginative reforms which, sadly, have been resisted root and branch by the education establishment and, it goes without saying, by the Labour party.

Those reforms were introduced not because the Government wanted to mess teachers about, but because employers were approaching us as constituency Members and saying, "We spend more money than ever before on education per child, but the results are appalling. You are sending us too many young people who cannot read, write or do arithmetic and, more important perhaps, who have entirely the wrong attitude to work."

That is why we have had to introduce the national curriculum and testing. We are interested not in what children have been taught, but in what they have learnt. If we do not find out what they have learnt until the end of their formal education, it is too late to do anything about it.

The Opposition motion calls for "a national childcare strategy". Opposition Members did not expand on that, but we are all aware that some single parents are genuinely in need. They are single parents through no fault of their own. However, we close our eyes to the real world if we do not recognise that the number of teenage pregnancies and illegitimate births has soared to epidemic proportions. Providing childcare facilities for women in that position involves taking money in taxes from many families who have decided that the mother should stay at home to look after the child. It is not easy for us to ask those families to pay taxes to support those who choose to, or have to, go out to work.

We must, of course, manage our economy well and I congratulate the Government on their management of the economy. Business people in my constituency say that what they need to create jobs is not on offer from the Labour party. They want low inflation, low interest rates and a competitive exchange rate for the pound. The most compassionate society is a society in which no one needs welfare.

In the few short moments remaining to me, I want to turn to what I consider to be an even more important subject, which has not even been mentioned in the debate so far. This debate is about poverty and we have focused throughout on material poverty. I want to refer to spiritual poverty. Throughout the land there are empty churches. The lights have gone out and, perhaps, will never be rekindled. In a very real sense, much of the light has gone out of our individual and collective lives. That has happened in the past 30 years, not just in this country but throughout the western world. The most important phenomenon throughout those 30 years has been television, which has found its way into every house in the land.

On television today, religion is treated as though it were a science—as though it were part of biology, physics or the like. Every day on our television screens we are treated to examples of people and communities where the lowest standards of personal behaviour are to be found. Today, morals are like clothes—they are whatever suits the individual. Perhaps D.H. Lawrence put his finger on it when he said that whatever is natural is right.

We have so much of a man-centred attitude to our lives today that one feels almost embarrassed to mention God in the House of Commons. There has been a breakdown

[Mr. Stephen]

of respect in our society in the past 30 years—a breakdown of respect between men and women and between parents and children, and a breakdown of respect for all forms of authority. There has been a breakdown of respect within and for the family.

It seems that in order to reach the highest ranks of the Church of England one has to show that one does not believe in God. The Church used to be a rock upon which we could found our lives. It is now much more like shifting sand.

Of course, the economy, education and social security are important, but, however wealthy in material terms we may be, a nation which lives in spiritual poverty is truly destitute.

8.51 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I have listened to the debate with great interest. As usual, Conservative Members have said that Opposition Members' speeches are not so good. The reason for that is that Conservative Members do not like the truth when it is spelt out to them.

The hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) mentioned lone parents. I shall quote to him some facts and figures on lone parents. Three in five lone-parent families, compared with one fifth of couples with children, live in poverty. Seventy per cent. of lone parents receive income support—1 million lone parents in all. Nearly all lone parents would like to have a paid job at some point, and 55 per cent. would do so sooner if child care was available. Instead of castigating lone parents, the Government should do something to help them. They have the power and position to do that. It is time that they got off the backs of lone parents and gave them some assistance.

I heard the Secretary of State reply to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). It was the old theme of "on yer bike" to look for a job. The hon. Lady said that people must get up and go. What absolute nonsense. The Secretary of State agreed. He said, "If you get up and go, you will get a job." I live in an area which has suffered unemployment. The local factory, which employed nearly 7,500 folk at one time, has shut. I am not saying that we are devastated—we are too proud to be devastated and we have talent—but we must get access to the finance markets. We must have access to something which gives us life. Many folk who worked in our factories are dead and buried, but their families live in the area. They have no job and no income. They rely on the state. It is nonsense to tell them and people in other parts of Scotland to get up and look for a job when nearly 300 to 400 kids chase one job and nearly 4,000 folk chase one job.

The Secretary of State agrees that people should get up and go. I have always believed in people getting up and going, but there are some folk who cannot possibly get up and go for the job market that the Government have made unavailable to them. In Strathclyde alone, we have lost 50 per cent. of our manufacturing jobs. If we do not have producers, we will have nothing. If there is wholesale slaughter of companies, manufacturers and industry, how will Britain get out of the pit? It will not get out of the pit with the Government. They have no vision to get Britain working again. We provide work only by producing and selling goods. The Government have no intention of doing that. They keep trying to shift us into the services market.

A taxi driver in my constituency drove me to the airport today. He told me about his wife who had a job. Do you know what the job paid, Madam Deputy Speaker? It paid £2 an hour. She was making sweets. I know the company for which she worked. I can take you there any day, Madam Deputy Speaker, and show you people swanning about, guzzling champagne and stuffing themselves with steak, when that wee woman will be lucky to have a bit of cheese and some milk while her husband struggles as a taxi driver. Get up and go—would you get up and go for £2 an hour, Minister? Would his family work for £2 an hour? That is the Minister getting up and going. I am in favour of getting up and going. The Government should provide a minimum wage for workers such as that woman. She wants to work, but not for £2 an hour. She wants to bring her money to help to put bread on the table and put food in her family's belly. Two pounds an hour will not go very far, Minister. Is that the society that you want to create? I could go further.

I now refer to the iniquitous extension of VAT on fuel to pensioners. Obviously, I know that there are pensioners who have a few quid, but I meet pensioners all the time in my constituency, and I ask them what they had for breakfast, dinner and for what we call tea. It is shocking to hear of the poverty of people in Scotland. I know that that happens all over Britain. When they are told that the Common Market will give us a wee free handout of milk, eggs, butter, cheese and a can of mince, they say to me, "Will it come here, Tommy? It was good the last time." That breaks my heart. Their husbands fought for this country and probably saved it from slavery and fascism, but they now live in poverty that was created by a cringing creature of a Government who are not looking after our people at all. There is too much poverty, yet the Minister says that there is none. I have lived in poverty; I have been unemployed and I know what it is like.

I know what it is like to sweat because the electricity bill is coming in, and to sweat when I see that my son has holes in his shoes, because my wife or I will have to find the money to buy him new ones. I know what it is like when there is no job available; I have suffered that indignity. I was a fully qualified engineer, but there was no work. I have an older brother who worked for 37 years and had never been unemployed before. He is a design draughtsman, yet he cannot get a job. He is trying everything—further education, the lot—but there is no job for him. I have another brother who suffered unemployment for a long time until he got a job.

Does the Minister realise what problems that creates in households? Last week in my surgery a woman was breaking her heart because her house had been repossessed and she was desperate to be housed. She and her husband had split up. I asked her what she had done with her money, and apparently her husband worked in a shop, but because of the economic depression and the lack of money in the community his hours were cut and therefore so were his wages.

Then the man was ill with a stomach problem and his wife spent the money on dietary requirements, which were not subsidised by the national health service. She had put the money in to try to keep her man well, and at the end of the day the mortgage did not get paid and they lost their house. Now they are out of the house and have been

split up, so there is a huge problem. The man is still in a low-paid job and has been separated from his wife and child because they cannot live in their home and are having to sleep in other people's homes. That is what poverty is, Minister.

It is all right for the wealthy folk who have a few bob, such as the folk here. When people earn £36,000 a year they can put their hands into their pockets and buy their way out of any trouble. Our folk cannot buy themselves out of trouble. They cannot find the jobs to earn the wages to buy what they need. I shall give one more example. I tell you, Minister—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman tell me, rather than telling the Minister directly?

Mr. Graham: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Poor diet causes obesity, tooth decay and loss, anaemia, rickets, coronary heart disease, strokes and cancers. I believe that the worst cancer that Britain has had for the past 16 years is the Government. Only through a general election will we able sensibly to get Britain back to work and enable people to earn a wage so that they will not have to live off the state. There are many jobs that need doing in this country. The roads are falling apart, and so are the schools. We need new schools and hospitals, and we need care and attention. I say to the Minister, "Get our folk back to work, and we shall not need to pay so much money to keep folk out of work."

9.1 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): As the debate is based on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's inquiry into income and wealth, I thought that I would devote a few moments to some observations about that foundation as a whole. I entirely endorse what the Secretary of State said at the beginning of the debate when he pointed out what a left-wing bias the foundation has.

I should have more confidence in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's reports if there were any recognisable right-wing figures among the trustees. Sadly, such people are missing. The foundation will sponsor any number of inquiries into topics dear to its heart, but I should like to see it accept a few propositions put to it by right-wing organisations. Why, for example, did it not examine a paper about the breakdown of the family, or an analysis of family responsibilities? Or am I asking too much?

I find the report emotive and biased; the foundation is damned if it can recognise good news and it relishes bad news. The report makes the simple claim that the poor have got poorer since 1979, but does not back that up with any hard facts. It is based on figures from the Government publication, "Households Below Average Income", which contains information collected on the basis of samples designed to provide illustrations of spending rather than on the basis of numerically sound income statistics.

The report is therefore impressionistic, and gives no proof of widespread impoverishment. No allowance is made for the black economy and the report cannot explain why even the very poorest in the bottom tenth of society now have access to a video recorder. It does not distinguish between different types of the poor. For example, there are many more students today than there were in 1979, thanks to the Government's policy of pushing up standards in schools and getting young people into further and higher education. Grants have, of course, become more strictly controlled, but a temporary lack of funds does not make students a social problem. After all, students—by virtue of their education—are likely to achieve reasonable prosperity.

The report makes false assumptions that the very poorest are always the same downtrodden group. That is not so. Some people who were very poor in 1979 are not poor today; I refer particularly to pensioners who, because of higher state pensions and better occupational pensions, have to a large extent improved their position.

We should look at groups that are held in the benefit trap. Fifteen years ago, 600,000 people collected invalidity benefit. Today 1.6 million people do so. Is there really so much more long-term illness and injury about, or has a culture grown in which living off the state's money is normal and acceptable?

The same question must be asked about another group—the single, never-married mothers. They make up a significant group, and are bereft of support from the fathers of their children. Those absent and feckless fathers are rightly chased to support the children by the Child Support Agency. The group is interesting because the problems of poverty caused by single parenthood are often of the parents' own making. I have yet to see any mother in the never-married category who has given any thought to planning a structure for her life when mothering a child. What discussions has she ever had about commitment with the father of her child? Nobody can blame the Government for the breakdown of a relationship between a man and a woman.

I welcome the remarks of the Archbishop of York, Dr. Habgood, who is suggesting that he would support a tax devised to make marriage more attractive, which would thereby bring children within the family circle of parental commitment—above all, the father's commitment—to the family good. I can say only that children always do far better when there are two parents rather than one.

Let us look at the definition of poverty. The goalposts have moved so significantly that we take comforts for granted today, which we would never have taken for granted 10 or more years ago. Even the one tenth of society at the bottom level have improved their living standards. For example, in 1979, 47 per cent. of people had a telephone, while today the figure is 68 per cent. In 1979, 42 per cent. had central heating. Today, the figure is 70 per cent. When one starts looking at those basic goalposts of poverty to see how things have changed, one understands that the debate has gone off on completely the wrong tack.

I draw the House's attention to a story in the *Daily Mail*, which states that the Watters family legitimately claim £18,000 a year in social security handouts. On top of that, they went on a spending spree with almost £7,000 extra that was wrongly sent to them by the Department of Social Security, which is not claiming the money back. The Watters family spent the money on Christmas gifts, including £1,000 on mountain bikes for their children. Some £600 went on a fitted kitchen and new furniture, while £2,000 was spent on a Montego car.

The Watters family have admittedly been hit by ill-health. Both parents are on disability living allowances, and one of their five children has a groggy knee. But it must be said that while they are unlucky in health, they are fortunate in welfare. Are the poor getting poorer under the Tories, as the Rowntree foundation insists? Ask the

[Lady Olga Maitland]

Watters family, and they will tell another story. Indeed, hard-working taxpayers who heard that story today may be forgiven for wondering whether we have lost our plain common sense. The truth is that that family are a symptom of how far we have gone in generous social benefits and show clearly how the goalposts of poverty have moved.

In the short time remaining, I shall cite another example of how the definition of poverty has become unreal. The case of Paul and Georgina Stokes was reported in *The Daily Telegraph*. They provide a good home for their three obviously happy children. Mr. Stokes is a computer technician, who lives with his family on an estate in south-east London on a disposable income of £156.60 a week which, in the view of the Child Poverty Action Group, puts them on the poverty line.

Let us consider the family's life style. Admittedly, their flat is cramped, but it is warm. The children are well cared for. There is no denying that it is not easy to meet costs each week—it takes planning. After the bills are paid, the couple say that they are lucky if they have £20 or £30 a month for luxuries. Neither drinks or smokes and a luxury might be a Chinese meal once in a while. Mr. Stokes has a car, although it is in his father's garage at present as he cannot afford the running costs, and meanwhile he goes to work on a small motor cycle.

Last year, life improved sharply for Mr. Stokes when, having been unemployed for two years, he went on a Government retraining scheme and thence into a job. Although he is still reckoned to be on the poverty line, today his children are well clothed and have toys and Pinky, the cat. Using catalogues and hire purchase, the family can afford a stereo system, colour television, fridge, freezer, washing machine and microwave.

Over and above all that, this Conservative Government have given that family the peace of mind of knowing that the children will grow up certain of a real education—an education with standards, which will get them into further and higher education, to university and into professional life. They have the peace of mind of knowing that they need never worry about hospital bills, unlike families in other countries in the developed world.

In view of the very prosperous conditions that this Conservative Government have given all the people, this debate on poverty should be revised.

9.11 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): One thing is certain—the contribution of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) was a good example of impoverishment of thought, vision and compassion.

I must also take the Secretary of State for Social Security to task on part of his statement, in which he quoted the percentages of families who have fridge-freezers, washing machines, cars and television sets. He reminds me of the prerequisite for a cynic:

"A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."

The Secretary of State certainly demonstrated that in that part of his speech.

If the Secretary of State had wanted to deal with people who are really affected by poverty or impoverishment, he would have considered those who do not have good housing or eat well and whose children do not have the best education facilities because of the area in which they live. Those people do not have good transport and cannot afford holidays.

Despite the roseate glow that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam painted on society, my experience of life with my constituents does not fit in with her philosophy. There are various types of inequality—inequality between people and groups and, perhaps most important, inequality between regions. I speak for a constituency that is the 63rd most impoverished out of 623. All life within the constituency is based on that fact. The inequalities are a result of deliberate Government policy. It is no good the Government saying that they are accidental and that the trickle-down effect does not work.

Nothing new has come out of the Rowntree report. The truth has probably been obvious for the past seven or eight years to anyone who has been prepared to read about those things, although it has not been put quite as starkly as it is in the report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) mentioned that deprivation brings about bad health. That does not appear to cause too much concern to the Government, judging from the way in which they treat the health service. A study that was carried out—albeit about two years ago—by the university of Bristol, said that, in the north-east, Easington, which is adjacent to my constituency, and Sunderland were two of the bottom five districts for bad long-term health. That proves that the 15 years of Conservative Government have been a failure for the health of the people in my constituency, and in the region in general.

Government policy has guaranteed that we shall get low pay in large amounts. The legislative thrust has been for the weakening of trade unions and the abolition of wages councils. The Government's various economic policies have ensured that there has always been a large number of unemployed people, to be used as a threat to other people who were in low-paid employment and therefore would not be in a position to better their conditions.

It is coincidental that New Zealand was quoted as having a record of disparity of distribution of wealth similar to that of this country. That does not surprise me, because I was talking recently to a chap whom I went to school with—*[Interruption.]* If the Secretary of State would like to intervene, I am willing to sit down.

Mr. Lilley: Much of the period covered in New Zealand was under a New Zealand Labour party.

Mr. Etherington: I accept that, but it certainly does not apply to the 15 years of misery that we have had in this country. The Secretary of State might like to reflect on that.

Hardly a week goes by without the introduction of a piece of legislation that disadvantages unemployed or sick people or, in some cases, both. Since Christmas, we have had the Jobseekers Bill and legislation to prevent the payment of mortgage interest for unemployed people. Legislation has also been introduced to make things worse for people who are suffering on invalidity benefit. Perhaps worst of all, we have had the Government's revenue support grant estimates, which have decimated the services that local councils can provide, most of which are of benefit to the poor. If one is wealthy, one is not too

worried if the citizens advice bureaux close or if there are no welfare benefits officers, but if one is poor, that can be one's lifeline to try to bring about a little bit of improvement in one's life.

It has been shown beyond doubt under the current Government that, every time that there has been a boom, the wealthy have benefited, and every time that we have had a recession, the poor have paid. It is no surprise, therefore, that the gap is opening up between the wealthy and the poor. It is intentional. It is an indictment against the Government and, if they had had anything about them, they would have done something about it many years ago. It may well be that, with the coming general election, the Government might start to show a little bit of compassion, purely to win votes, which is about the measure of them.

The tax policies that have been carried out have exacerbated the gulf. Every tax policy that has been introduced by the Government, which has helped to direct tax away from direct taxation to indirect taxation, is a bigger burden on the poor and less of a burden on the well-off.

I shall finish, because I know that time is short and I promised that I would wind up by 9.20 pm. The Secretary of State mentioned the back-to-work bonus three times. I cannot help being slightly cynical about that, because it reminds me of the story that I once read in which there was a crock of gold at the end of the rainbow. The problem is that the Secretary of State does not recognise that most people are busy trying to find the rainbow, and there is no chance of their finding the crock of gold until they find the rainbow.

I am pleased that we are now receiving more publicity for the results of the dreadful policies pursued for many years by this deplorable Conservative Government. The sooner that we have a general election to get rid of the present Government, the better.

The Government have made the mistake of assuming that economic success will lead to a successful society. They have not learnt the lessons that everyone should have learnt from the failures of the Webb policies. I am pleased that my hon. Friends on our Front Bench are listening attentively. It will not be enough to get rid of unemployment and get the economy moving a bit better. Something radical must be done about a proper redistribution of wealth, to get rid of the comparative poverty that is becoming worse daily.

9.19 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): This debate has shown clearly that the Tory Government have presided over growing divisions. But it has also shown that they are not prepared to address the problems that they have helped to create. So we have a divided Tory party, a divided Cabinet and now a divided nation.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report highlighted two principal causes of the growing divide: long-term unemployment and low pay. The Tory Government will act on neither, because they are locked into the ideology that wealth will trickle down from a privileged elite to the rest of Britain, that inequality is essential for economic efficiency, and that the free market and deregulation will ensure prosperity for all.

It has been made clear in this debate that making the rich richer has not made the poor better off. The Government cannot deal with poverty and inequality by waiting for wealth to trickle down. They must take action to attack poverty and inequality at their source, which must mean dealing with long-term unemployment and low pay.

Not only are the Tories a divided party with a divided Cabinet presiding over a divided nation, but some of them seem to be divided even in their own minds. For instance, the Secretary of State for Social Security clearly has two voices inside his head. The one we heard tonight tells him that everything is fine, but the other tells him that the earnings gap is growing. In a speech that he made in Ulster, which was very different from what he told the House tonight, he said:

"Over the last couple of decades, although average earnings have grown strongly, the differentials have widened.

This widening of earnings differentials lies behind or is intertwined with many of our social problems . . . the break up of families, the growth of lone parenthood and a growing welfare dependency."

He went on:

"It may even play a part in explaining delinquency and crime".

Outside this House, he can accept the facts of growing inequality and recognise the social and economic consequences of growing inequality, but he will do nothing about them, because the Tories are locked into an ideology which, even where it does not prevent them from observing the problems, prevents them from doing anything about them.

The divisions were spelt out in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's chilling report. Those problems demand action. Those on low pay struggle to survive, working harder and harder just to stand still. The experience of millions of families is summed up by the words of a man to whom I spoke in Islwyn:

"We feel like we are running up the down escalator . . . every time we try and get ahead . . . we are pulled back down"

or the woman in my constituency of Peckham, who said:

"My husband works all hours that God sends . . . he's always exhausted but we've still got no money at the end of the month."

Does the Minister accept that low pay is a problem for those people?

Low pay is a problem for people trapped on benefit who cannot go out to work, because the only job that they could get would make them worse off than if they stayed on benefit. It is also a problem for the public purse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) said, employers who pay low wages leave the taxpayer to pick up the bill in family credit and housing benefit.

I challenge the Minister to admit, when he winds up the debate, that, according to his figures, 75,000 people receive less than £1.50 after an hour's work. I shall give way to him if he will seek to justify the fact that, in this country and this day and age, people work for £1.50 an hour or less.

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Lady should bear it in mind that, although the £2 a hour she quotes is low, only four workers in 1,000 get paid less than £2.90 a hour. We would all like people to be paid more, but it has to be sustainable and based on the productivity and efficiency of the economy. Unfortunately, just to impose a minimum wage by political diktat would merely replace low pay with no pay for hundreds of thousands of people.

Ms Harman: The Minister's response has done two things. He has sought to defend the indefensible and say

[Ms Harman]

that £1.50 is acceptable, and he has suggested that all the Tories can offer is the choice between £1.50 or no job. What a testimony to economic failure that is.

Mr. Lilley: Will the hon. Lady tell us what she considers the minimum wage ought to be?

Ms Harman: I was expecting the Secretary of State to get up and ask that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] If hon. Members will get back into their prams for a moment, I shall reply.

The difference between us and the Conservatives is not that we want one level of minimum wage and they want another, but that we consider that low pay is a disgrace, and that there should be a floor under wages.

When Ministers tell us what the level of national insurance will be after the next election, if they win it, or the level of taxes or other benefits, it will be reasonable for them to ask us what the minimum wage would be. It is a sign of their desperation that the only way to avoid justifying their figures and their appalling record is to continue asking us questions that we have said we will decide at the time of the next election.

Low pay is a problem, and it is getting worse. There are now more people on low pay than there were in 1980. While the gap between the low-paid and the rest has been getting smaller in many other European countries, here in Britain the gap between the low-paid and the rest has been growing.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and I agree with her that low pay carries with it enormous problems for households and for the public purse. If she believes that there is a minimum wage that in principle would be high enough to alleviate poverty satisfactorily and to attract people into work who at the moment are discouraged from working, but not so high that it would discourage employers from offering jobs, I do not ask her to tell me what it is, let alone what it will be when the next general election comes, but on what principles and by what methodology she would establish what it should be.

Ms Harman: We see the minimum wage as part of our welfare-to-work strategy, so that there is a floor under wages and the in-work benefits are used to top up wages as an incentive for people to go from benefits into work, whereas at present in-work benefits are being used to top up the bottomless pit of low wages.

Of course it is possible to have a floor under wages, and it has been done in every other country. Britain is the odd one out. Other countries have been able to have a minimum wage, and better records of job creation.

The Government are against a minimum wage, because they do not care about low pay, and they are crying crocodile tears when they say that they are worried about the effects of low pay. While we condemn the growing divide, the Tories excuse it. Sir Iain Vallance, the chairman of British Telecom, earns at least £180 a hour, following the privatisation of BT, while a security guard in Rotherham earns £1.80. [HON. MEMBERS: "So what?"] Conservative Members say, "So what?", but they always excuse top pay and perks. They never condemn them or act to stop them. They are always on the side of privilege and never on the side of people.

As for young people at work, there is no evidence that the low pay they receive will improve as they get older. They are stuck in a low-skill, low-pay trap with no prospects.

Professor Patrick Minford, spokesman for the Tory right, was on the radio again this morning. He was echoed by the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth), who spoke earlier in the debate. Professor Minford said that inequality does not matter—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and Government Members agree. According to Professor Minford, all that matters is keeping people out of absolute poverty and deprivation. But that is not all that matters. Society must work together so that everyone has a stake in the future and is part of future economic prosperity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made that point very powerfully, using the analogy of society as a moving train. He said that the fourth carriage has become unhitched from the rest of the train and is being left behind. Society is not working if thousands of people face only worsening prospects while others are better off. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) showed in her forensic dissection of the Government's figures, absolute poverty matters as much as relative poverty. The plight of the poorest 10 per cent. of the population is worsening.

Professor Minford and Government Members ask why we are against huge pay rises and perks. Professor Minford says, "Why not reward success?" He says that we should reward those who bring joy into our homes. But the directors of privatised utilities do not bring joy into our homes. What is he talking about? As the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) recognise, their only achievement is to award themselves millions of pounds in pay and perks, while telling those who work for them that they have to "act responsibly" and see their pay fall or lose their jobs.

We believe that there must be fair taxation. Why should company directors receive thousands of pounds by way of executive share options, while everyone else pays more tax? Huge pay and perks are not about rewarding for success; they are about some getting super-rich on the backs of everyone else.

The Tories say that low pay will cure unemployment. We say that low pay and unemployment go hand in hand. In the poorer areas of this country, we see low pay and unemployment—the twin symptoms of Tory economic failure. Every month, the Tories greet the headline claimant count unemployment figures with a blanket of complacency. They say that things are looking up, and that unemployment is no longer a problem. They accuse Labour of simply talking the country down. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who says that?"] Government Members say that—those opposite obviously have worse cognitive dissidence problems than we thought.

Every time that Ministers tell the people of this country that everything is all right—as they have done tonight—they confirm people's absolute certainty that the Government are out of touch and do not care. They reinforce people's sense of despair.

Unemployment remains a major problem—it is a problem for those who are locked out of the labour market, and it is also a problem for those who are in work.

They feel insecure, and they worry that each pay cheque might be their last. Of course unemployment is worse than the claimant count describes.

There are pockets of structural unemployment. My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) spoke about the problems of unemployment in his constituency. One in three people on Merseyside are unemployed, and two out of every three young black men in London are unemployed. It is no good telling those people to wait until the economy grows, and then the benefits will reach them. They will not. Structural unemployment must be addressed by specific measures.

For example, the Government should establish a national child-care strategy for single parents who want to go out to work instead of bringing up their children on benefit. As my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) said, there is a simple choice: the Government can provide child care or pay the income support bill for women who cannot go out to work, and who are condemned to bring up their children on the breadline.

To deal with unemployment, the Government must also act on the lack of skills among the unemployed. What a joke that the Government say in their amendment to our motion that they are improving skills in this country. They have failed on youth training. The figures show that it is not working, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) said. They are also cutting training. They have cut the number of places on the training for work scheme by 55,000. They fail to understand the strong connection between long-term unemployment and inability to get a job.

People with low skills or no skills are the first to lose their jobs, and they take the longest to find a job. That is why it is a particular disgrace that the Government have cut down on the 21-hour rule. Instead of extending the hours that one can study before benefit is cut for an unemployed person, they are reducing them. One can now study for no more than 16 hours before one's benefit is cut.

That is throwing an obstacle in the path of people who want to study, to improve their skills and qualifications and improve their chances of getting back to work. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) said tonight, it is a kick in the teeth for people who want to get skills and want to get on.

Of course international factors such as global competition and technological change have affected the labour market, but the Government could do one of three things: nothing, make things better and ameliorate the problems, or do what they have done—make things worse. They stand guilty of failing to act on unemployment. Unemployment is not a price worth paying. It is a problem not just for the unemployed but for the whole community. It is also a problem for the public purse.

In the face of that, however, the Conservatives have resorted to their instinct to blame the victim. The single effect of the jobseeker's allowance is that it will make the unemployed poorer. It will produce not one extra job. Not one person will find work as a result of it. It will simply make people worse off.

What question do the Government now seek to ask the unemployed when they go to claim benefit? What question is in the forefront of the Government's mind? The booklet that will be given to unemployed people—they will be asked to fill it in—asks:

"What is the lowest wage you are willing to work for?"

That is the question that the Government choose to ask the unemployed. Of course, they had better give the right answer, or they will get no benefit at all. There is a clear message in that question: there is now no bottom line; whatever an employer is prepared to offer is what one must be prepared to accept.

I ask the Minister to tell us tonight: what is the amount that one can put in that box without losing one's benefit? What is the bottom line? That is a question that he is asking unemployed people. He should be prepared to answer in the House tonight. Of course, there is only one point in asking that question. It is a green light for employers to offer lower and lower wages, and the public will be left to foot the bill, because if employers do not pay the wages, the taxpayer will have to pay—in family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

No doubt the Government will say, as they always do, that all Labour proposals mean extra public spending, but let me remind Ministers that they promised to cut public spending, but they did not. Instead, they spend more and more on the consequences of economic failure: unemployment, crime and poverty. They have spent less and less as a percentage of our national wealth on the things that would bring economic and social renewal, the things that are investing in the future. The Government have not cut public spending: they have spent more and more on mopping up the consequences of their own economic and social failure.

Howard Davies, the director of the CBI, said:

"At present, far too much of our public spending is devoted to compensating for the effects of failure, rather than investing in the ingredients of success."

Of course, low pay is a growing problem for the public purse as well. Family credit has become a subsidy for low pay rather than help for large families. As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) pointed out, its cost has more than doubled in just four years, and that cost will double again. The Government are topping up what is turning out to be a bottomless pit of low pay. They are turning a blind eye to low pay and making the taxpayers pick up the bill, and the taxpayers will not stand for it.

We firmly believe in a welfare-to-work strategy that uses the benefit system as an incentive to put people into work rather than paying them to stay out of work, but the public purse cannot go on topping up low pay indefinitely. There must be a floor under wages: there must be a national minimum wage. The failure of Tory economic and social policy has scarred millions of people, destroying communities and holding Britain back.

People in this country do not want to see growing divisions, rising crime and the poverty and alienation that come with a divided Britain. They do not want to see their taxes constantly mopping up the consequences of the Government's failure, never building for the future. People in this country want a nation at work, not a nation on benefits; they want a nation of people working together, not growing apart. That is why we tabled the motion, and we shall vote for it tonight.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): I am grateful for the chance to reply to today's debate. I listened carefully to nearly all the speeches—I was sorry to miss one or two—and particularly enjoyed that by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), which I thought extremely thought provoking. I also enjoyed the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), which dealt very effectively with the flaws in many parts of the Rowntree report, and especially effectively with the issue of trade.

I was interested by what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), who was particularly enlightening about the relationship between vegetable consumption and the birth rate. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) also made a number of good points. I hope that the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) will forgive me if I say that, although I did not agree with everything in his speech, I thought it balanced. I think that most Conservative Members enjoyed it and found it enlightening.

I particularly welcome the opportunity to debate the key issue of the relationship between unemployment and poverty. The debate has shown the complexity of the issues involved in any sensible discussion of the subject. It is, I think, fair to say that all of us—regardless of party—would like to see the incomes and living standards of all our people rise. Later in my speech I shall examine the Government's policies in that regard—and, of course, the Opposition's—but, first, I shall dwell briefly on the Rowntree report, which has been widely quoted and occasionally even misquoted. Like most good reports, it rewards careful reading.

One of the less well-reported aspects of the study is the fact that, in 1979, of the bottom 10 per cent. of the population, one third were pensioners, compared to only 12 per cent. now. Since 1979, average pensioner incomes have increased faster than those of the remaining households—a point that was made very effectively by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere. Perhaps Opposition Members should also examine more closely the passage and graph relating to the growth of income inequality: it is interesting, because it shows that the growth in inequality began not in 1979 but in 1976, fully three years before Mrs. Thatcher came to power.

We have heard much today about the growth in poverty, which was mentioned by the hon. Members for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) and for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane). It is worth pointing out that the basis for the claim that poverty has grown is the so-called European decency threshold—three words that probably cause tremors in the spines of most of my hon. Friends; they are pretty bad individually, but together they are devastating. The threshold was introduced in 1977, and currently assesses the poverty line for Britain at nearly £12,000 a year. That level of income would not be recognised as poverty by most people. That is why no European Government have accepted the definition, and why the previous Labour Government did not accept it when it was introduced in 1977.

Mr. MacShane: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will let me get on for a minute and then I shall let him intervene.

The report talks about the polarisation between households with two earners and other households, but it also shows that participation in the labour market by women from low-income households has been catching up with participation by those from high-income households, and that women's pay is now closer to men's pay than at any time in our history.

One important facet of the Rowntree report, however, should, and does, concern all hon. Members. It rightly points out that the growth of unemployment is one of the main causes of poverty. We must not duck that issue. If I were in opposition, however, I would not take too much comfort from that, as people have not forgotten that the Labour Government doubled unemployment in the five years they were in power. Unemployment rose at a faster rate between 1974 and 1979 than it has since 1979. The Labour Government's record on unemployment was worse than that of the European Community as a whole, whereas now we are doing considerably better.

Ms Harman: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that unemployment is still almost 1 million higher than it has ever been under any post-war Labour Government, that long-term unemployment remains at almost 1 million and that the United Kingdom is the only Group of Seven country that has had no rise in employment since 1979? In short, will he start telling the truth, instead of just covering the argument with lies?

Mr. Oppenheim: I thought that the hon. Lady had made her speech earlier. She should recognise that, when the Labour party was in power, Britain's record on unemployment was significantly worse than that of the European Community as a whole, whereas now we are doing better.

I would be the first to admit that unemployment is still far too high in Britain, as it was when the Labour party was in power; but let us not forget that, if some panacea existed for the problem, which afflicts almost the whole of the industrialised west, France and Italy would not be suffering from unemployment rates of close to 12 per cent., nearly a third higher than in Britain.

Equally important, Britain has not only fewer people out of work, but far more people in work. In Britain, more than two in three of the adult population—

Mr. Graham: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: I shall make a deal with the hon. Gentleman: if he will sit down for a few minutes and stop making those animal noises, I shall do my best, if he sits still—

Mr. Graham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have not made any animal noises. That is an insult.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): The occupant of the Chair did not hear any.

Mr. Oppenheim: I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am extremely fond of animals.

Mr. MacShane: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: If the hon. Gentleman relaxes for a minute or two, I shall give way to him in a minute.

In Britain, more than two in three of our adult population are in work—a higher figure than in Germany and far higher than in Italy or France. The figure is

certainly far higher than the figure in socialist Spain, with its highly regulated labour market and national minimum wage, where less than half the population are in work, and where nearly a quarter are unemployed.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to the Minister, to whom I gave way twice for very lengthy interventions. The pontificator maximus has arrived—wonderful, here he is. No Opposition Member mentioned the European decency level. We are Europeans and he is not very decent, but I suggest that he make his speech in Rotherham, and that he tell the people there that no poverty exists and that unemployment is not a problem—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister should be allowed to make his speech to the House.

Mr. Oppenheim: I thank the hon. Member for Rotherham for his intervention. He was good enough to give way to me twice in his half-hour speech and I appreciated that.

The only way we shall create more secure, high-quality jobs for all our people is if our economy is a success. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s we were consistently bottom or near the bottom of the league of major industrial countries on growth in manufacturing productivity, industrial output, inflation and manufacturing output, in the 1980s—and since then—we have been at least as good as the G7 average and, in the case of manufacturing productivity growth, as good as the best. That is why, while productivity and real pay stagnated at all levels from 1974 to 1979, the massive rise in productivity since 1979 has allowed for a large rise in real take-home pay at all levels.

A single man in the bottom 10 per cent. of earnings has seen a real increase of 23 per cent. in his take-home pay since 1979; the same person would have seen a fall of 1 per cent. under the previous Labour Government. Under Labour, the rich got poorer, but the poor did not get any richer.

Mr. Graham *rose—*

Mr. Oppenheim: I must make progress.

Mr. Graham: He is a big fearty.

Mr. Oppenheim: That is not a description that my hon. Friends would recognise.

Anyone who pretends that there is an easy, painless panacea is perpetrating a cynical con on the less well-off. This seems to be a good point at which to examine the Opposition's policies. How would they help the unemployed and reduce poverty? They have a policy—it is called the minimum wage. We know that because, on 5 January, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) proudly trumpeted it in a letter to Labour group leaders. Unfortunately, she cannot tell us at what level Labour would introduce the minimum wage, whether there would be different levels for young workers and trainees or what it would do about differentials. If the hon. Lady is now going to enlighten the House, I shall gladly give way.

Ms Harman: Will the Minister answer this question:

"What is the lowest wage you are willing to work for?"

That is the question that he is asking the unemployed. What is the bottom line?

Mr. Oppenheim: I shall give the hon. Lady the answer. The answer is that people will not have to accept wages any lower than they had in their previous job. I have answered the hon. Lady's question; will she now answer mine? I see that she is not prepared to do so.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must settle down. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Oppenheim: Although I have answered the hon. Lady's question, she will not answer mine.

Let us see what other Labour supporters have to say about the minimum wage. Baroness Castle backed a report which concluded that the higher the minimum wage, the greater the increase in unemployment, which is why she did not introduce one. John Grant wrote recently in *The Guardian* that it was a "pious hope" to expect better-paid workers not to want to maintain differentials—and he was the low-pay Minister under the previous Labour Government.

Only a few months ago, Lord Healey said:

"Don't kid yourselves—the minimum wage is something on which unions will build differentials . . . therefore the minimum wage becomes a floor on which you erect a new tower".

The deputy leader of the Labour party said:

"A minimum wage would cost jobs—any fool knows that".

Well, apparently, only some fools have groped their way to that enlightenment. At least the deputy leader of the Labour party has spelled out his economic policy, which is:

"Society should tolerate relative inefficiency in labour intensive sectors".

In other words, local authorities should be able to employ more low-skilled staff.

Let us briefly refresh our memories about the performance of those local Labour authorities, which will play such a large part in Labour's job creation plans, with the words of Mr. Leo McKinstry, who was the political researcher of the hon. Member for Peckham and a former Labour councillor. He said:

"I could see only too clearly the spirit of Labour in local government—that mean-minded cocktail of political correctness, bureaucracy, intervention and abuse of public money—pervaded the whole party".

Let us add that to the shadow Chancellor's pronouncements:

"Our new economic approach . . . is rooted in the world of economic ideas, ideas which stress the growing importance . . . and the growth of post neo-classical endogenous growth theory and symbiotic relationships."

There we have a crystal-clear vision of where Labour wants Britain to go. The deputy leader wants a nation of low-skilled public corporation workers and the shadow Chancellor—well, no one is quite sure what he wants.

I quite understand that Labour would prefer to be coy about its policies. It says that it wants a minimum wage, but can tell us nothing about the level or differentials. It says that it wants to clobber the high-paid, but cannot tell us to what level it would raise the top rate of tax. It seems enamoured of the Rowntree report, but cannot tell us how many of that report's 20 recommendations it would implement and what it would cost.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Oppenheim: I am told that there is a Labour party publication entitled "Women Today", which recently held a competition which said:

"Win a day in Parliament. All you have to do is say in no more than 100 words what the policies and priorities of a Labour Government would be."

We will just have to wait until those good ladies have returned their answers before we can have some clear Labour policy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Oppenheim: In the meantime, let us refresh our memory about the Labour Government's record on equality and fairness. Under Labour, while real earnings for the majority stagnated, one group did very well indeed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Graham: He is a fearty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is fairly obvious that the Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am not sure what a fearty is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it a parliamentary expression or not? I seek your guidance.

One group did very well under the last Labour Government—those able to exploit their industrial muscle to secure the largest possible pay increases, while weaker groups, such as pensioners, looked on helplessly as the resulting inflationary binge destroyed their savings.

Let us not forget that, in the 1970s, pensioners formed a far higher proportion of the bottom 10 per cent. of households than they now do, and although two thirds of unemployed people now get a job within six months and can move out of that bottom group, once those pensioners, under Labour, were in that bottom 10 per cent., they were stuck there, watching doomed as Labour's policies ate into their life savings.

We all agree that unemployment is one of the main problems that we face. Regardless of party, we all want to see people enjoying a better standard of living. The question is how to achieve that. We say improve training, boost productivity, so that employers can afford to pay people more on a sustainable basis. Labour says put up wages regardless of productivity. That would simply replace low pay with no pay. Since our economy is so much more productive now than it was in 1979, real pay has risen at all levels in contrast to the record under Labour, when both pay and productivity stagnated. That was the time when Britain risked becoming a low-wage skivvy economy—not under this Government, but under the last Labour Government.

We have heard a great deal of loose talk from Labour Members and there has been much use of the word "obscenity". I shall tell the House what is obscene. It is obscene for politicians to pretend to the less well-off that there is some easy, painless route to higher pay. It is obscene for the Opposition to have spent three years since the last election without telling people at what level they would introduce the minimum wage, what they would do about differentials and whether they would have a differential rate for young workers or for trainees. It is obscene for the Opposition to pretend that the minimum wage in other countries, such as the Netherlands, Belgium and France, has not resulted in unemployment levels that are two or three times the UK level. It is obscene for them to deny that a minimum wage would cost jobs. I urge the House to support the Government amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 252, Noes 291.

Division No. 72] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'd, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*

Jones, Nigel *(Chelt'nham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'bury)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Galle, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David

Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'tw'th S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Salisbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shephard, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 251.

Division No. 73] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bitten, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry

Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yhth)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. David Willetts.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric

Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'ty NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the fact that the vast majority of people are significantly better off today than in 1979, and notes, in particular, that the average pensioner is now more than 50 per cent. better off; approves the Government's policy of ensuring that social security spending does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay while focusing resources on those who need it most; applauds the fact that the Government has channelled an extra £1 billion a year to low income families, and an even greater sum to poorer pensioners, since 1988; welcomes the high priority accorded by the Government to education and training; recognises that employment is the best route to higher incomes, and commends the package of work incentives, including the child care disregard and the Back to Work Bonus, which the Government has introduced; applauds the Government's achievement in reducing unemployment by over half a million since 1992 and notes the fact that a national minimum wage would increase unemployment; and deplores the Opposition's failure to reveal the level of their national minimum wage, how they would deal with differentials, their social security policies and their costs.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I propose to put together the Questions on the 10 rating and valuation motions.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Docks and Harbours (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Electricity Distribution Lands (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Electricity Generation Lands (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Electricity Generators (Aluminium) (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Electricity Generators (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Electricity Transmission Lands (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Formula Valuation (Revocations) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Mines and Quarries (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft British Gas plc. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 23rd January, be approved.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill [*Money*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State under or by virtue of the Act.—*[Mr. Bates]*

10.29pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I ampleased to be able to speak for a few moments on this money order. I am also pleased that a number of Ministers have seen fit to come here to welcome the order.

The order has come before the House because it is required for my private Member's Bill on safety in activity centres. It demonstrates the commitment of both sides of the House to the measures contained in the Bill. I do not wish to detain the House unduly, but I seek a few reassurances about the funding of the legislation.

Since the Bill's Second Reading on 27 January, a number of further causes for concern have arisen. I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister will avail themselves, if they have not already done so, of a copy of the Radio 4 programme, "Face the Facts", broadcast last week, which uncovered the activities of Mr. Christopher Reynard and the fact that the literature for his outdoor activity centre was full of bogus claims of accreditation. That is further evidence of the need for the Bill. I am sure that the Minister will be aware of a case that came to light last week of another man who has given out bogus certificates of accreditation for leadership and has now received three months' imprisonment for his criminal activities in that regard.

I make those points because, despite the Lyme bay trial, the considerable publicity that my Bill has had and all that has been said and done, some centres and providers still have a cavalier attitude to decent standards of safety for children in activity centres. The attitude of sales before safety will continue until it is stopped by the Bill.

The funds within the order are required to implement the Bill. The sums needed are modest but extremely important, and I seek one or two assurances from the Minister. Funds are needed to pump-prime the whole scheme, although I accept—I believe that the Government also accept—that, ultimately, the accreditation scheme for safety in outdoor activity centres contained in the Bill should be self-financing. Will the Minister come to the Dispatch Box and say whether sufficient pump-priming money will be available? That money is needed to set up the licensing body and inspection scheme. Some funding will be needed to advertise the accreditation scheme, because accurate information is required by parents and teachers. Most of all, informative and accurate literature, rather than the misleading information currently being distributed by some providers, is needed for consumers.

I hope that the Minister will say tonight that funds will be available in sufficient quantity and over a sufficient period to ensure full implementation of the Bill. The modest funding required by the Bill is a small price to pay for parents' peace of mind.

10.33 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on his private Member's Bill and on the initiative that he has taken. It will affect the position not only in England and Wales but in Scotland, where we face a massive local government reorganisation.

In my area, Strathclyde regional council, which covers a population of more than 2 million, will be split into 12 or 13 local authorities. At the time of the local government reorganisation, the Government's sentiments were that quality of provision and financial resources would be maintained. Alas, over the past 12 months we have learnt that that guarantee will no longer be provided and the birth of the new unitary authorities will be accompanied by a severity of financial resources.

The need, therefore, for a commitment from the Government to finance for outdoor activity centres in Scotland, as in England and Wales, is urgent and their commitment to the inspection and accreditation schemes is important. The Government have been very good at providing citizens charters in the past. What I would like to see accompanying the Bill would be a safety charter for young people so that it is in writing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying a little from the money order that we are debating.

Mr. McFall: I will return to the need for money. If the proper finance is not provided, it will be a hollow Bill. Given the tragedies that have occurred in the past and the initiative from my hon. Friend, it would be a travesty. The need for the Government to be up front and say that finance will accompany the Bill is urgent and important, not just for right hon. and hon. Members but for the thousands of young people who will use the centres in the coming months and years.

10.35 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): I am happy to provide the assurances that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), the promoter of Bill, has requested.

We know that the activity centres would have to pay a fee to a licensing authority to cover the cost of licensing and we assume, not unreasonably, that there would be a joining fee and an annual fee. Most of the centres may also have to incur costs by making improvements following the inspections that would be part of the regime in the hon. Gentleman's Bill.

I accept that the Government would incur costs, perhaps at the margin—we do not yet know—in a pump-priming mode, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, in the first two or three years to get the scheme off the ground; after that, however, we hope that it would become self-financing.

The level of fees and the way in which they would be payable would depend on the precise details to be specified in the regulations which would follow if the Bill receives parliamentary approval, following consultation, as we agreed on Second Reading. We would want to consult thoroughly on matters such as appropriate frequency of inspection, the number of inspectors, what

[Mr. Eric Forth]

is to be inspected and how, the activities to be covered, the nature and details of the licensing authority and the mode of inspection.

We envisage that the number of inspectors would be in the tens and not the hundreds, and that fees would be in the low hundreds of pounds, not thousands, to give it a framework or perspective.

Subject to consultation on all those matters, we envisage that initial pump-priming moneys would be made available, subject to the details being worked out about the precise nature of the licensing, the fees payable and so on, but at this stage I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the assurances that he requested in the spirit that he requested them and I hope that the House will be sufficiently assured.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): My hon. Friend is aware that in the debate concern was expressed by Conservative Members that the fees should not be too high so that some of the smaller excellent activity centres would not be pushed out of business. Could he say something about the Government's awareness of some of those smaller activity centres because considerable concern has been expressed that the bureaucracy and the rules and regulations which will flow from the Bill could result in some of the smaller centres, however good they are, being driven out of business?

Mr. Forth: Yes, indeed; my hon. Friend accurately reflects the concerns expressed on Second Reading.

We are conscious of the potential for adverse impact of the measure on some of the smaller centres and we want to strike a balance—I think that this was also the hon. Member for Devonport's view—between ensuring as far as possible a safe regime for the young people using the centres and trying to ensure the centres are not unnecessarily driven out of business. That was very much the spirit of the debate on Second Reading. The Committee will provide the opportunity for us to examine the background in proper detail to see whether we can strike the appropriate balance in Committee and beyond.

We may want to consider the nature of the fees that are chargeable, although that matter cannot be finalised until we have completed the very thorough consultations that we envisage will take place following the Third Reading of the Bill. We are sensible of the points that my hon. Friend has raised today and on Second Reading and that sensibility will be carried through the Committee stage and beyond.

Question put and agreed to.

ACTIVITY CENTRES (YOUNG PERSONS' SAFETY) BILL [WAYS AND MEANS]

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the charging by the licensing authority of fees under regulations made under the Act; and

(b) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.39 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): As chairman of the all-party parliamentary pro-life group and together with colleagues from both sides of the House, I raised during the debates on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 the need for the Secretary of State to ensure that the membership of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority was both balanced and credible.

Some of those who supported me in expressing those views are here tonight. I thank them for their support at this late hour. I welcome in particular the hon. Members for Bootle (Mr. Benton) and for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), and my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant).

I have sought the debate tonight because it is clear that those calls were not heeded, and that there are fundamental flaws in the structure, the membership, the partisanship and the funding of the authority. In recent months, it has displayed a breathtaking superficiality of understanding and paucity of logic in its work.

Our criticisms of the authority were set out in some detail in a document entitled "A Response from the All-Party Parliamentary Pro-life Group to the Report of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority on Donated Ovarian Tissue in Embryology Research and Assisted Conception", copies of which have been widely circulated and have also been deposited in the Library.

That document followed the success of my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston in bringing forward an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill in the last Session to prevent the use in infertility treatment of eggs scavenged from the ovaries of aborted baby girls.

The public rightly viewed such proposed practices with considerable repugnance and ethical outrage. The House and another place debated carefully the proposals of my hon. Friend and enacted them. Yet the then chairman of the HFEA, at a press conference to launch its own pronouncements on the matter, accused my hon. Friend of seeking to

"rush a clause into a piece of legislation where it clearly does not belong".

I believe that such a suggestion is an affront to the House, and I hope that the Secretary of State will remind the new chairman of the HFEA that she derives her authority from Parliament and is answerable to it—not the other way around.

When the HFEA undertook what was immediately exposed as a charade of a consultation exercise on that matter and on the use of eggs from adult cadavers, it demonstrated not only its predisposition to allow such practices to go ahead, but a total lack of understanding of the moral views opposed to such techniques, which are held by the majority of people in this country and by the majority of hon. Members.

The report of the HFEA on the matters made it clear that it was merely the existence of an unfavourable "social attitude" that dissuaded it from approving such practices. That conclusion is reinforced by the authority's statement that it has "no objection in principle" to the use of eggs from cadavers, and that it "will reconsider" the licensing of such treatment at a later date.

The objections to the practice overlap to a large extent with the objections to using eggs from foetuses. The authority has no real objection "in principle" to either practice, and there is no reason to doubt that the authority's apparently less equivocal rejection of the use of foetal eggs is only as a result of the practice already having been made illegal. I hazard the assumption that the authority is biding its time only until public opinion can be massaged and swayed in favour of those repugnant practices.

The report of the HFEA demonstrates that the authority is fundamentally out of touch with the moral concerns of the people of this country, and that the dominant philosophy of those on the authority is that of the technocrat who sees scientific progress as the source of all human happiness, and is blind to any greater moral consideration. The authority was patronising in its clear indication that moral objections cannot possibly constitute a genuine reason for not doing something, and that they are merely irrational superstitions which must be smiled at in the short term and defeated in the long term by extolling the benefits of technology.

As we said in our report, that such a body should have been put in charge of regulating reproductive technology is a manifest case of the fox acting as gamekeeper, and confirms the view, set out in the previous Session, in early-day motion 1244, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill and myself, that the authority is

"in need of urgent reform and that its membership is not the 'broad cross section of society' claimed by the Secretary of State for Health; notes that not one of its 21 members believes in the protection of the human embryo from destructive experiments and that among the inspectors it has appointed are employees of hospitals with a direct financial interest in fertility treatments involving the abuse of the human embryo; and believes that last year's staff cost of £¼ million, operating payments of £¼ million, and rules which require 50 per cent. of funding to come from licensing, build an intolerable system of financial inducements into the sales of licences, rather than a sound system of ethics."

Even if we were to accept as inevitable the bias in the membership and the views of the authority, and the fundamental financial pressures to permit ever more abuse of the human embryo, we would have hoped that we could at least look to it to monitor effectively the health effects on children conceived through the techniques that it licenses.

When considering perinatal mortality, it has always been accepted that, for every baby who dies, others live on suffering from some abnormality. It is an alarming dereliction of its duties, therefore, that the HFEA has not initiated or encouraged any research revealing the rates of malformation or long-term medical problems of children conceived by in vitro fertilisation.

Figures in the authority's third annual report, in 1994, show a perinatal death rate of 25.8 per 1,000 babies born from the most popular IVF technique. Although the authority, somewhat glibly, says that that is due to the high rate of multiple pregnancies, even singleton IVF pregnancies end in a perinatal death rate of 15.6 per 1,000, which is more than double the overall perinatal death rate for England and Wales of just 7.6 deaths per 1,000. Furthermore, for as yet unexplained reasons, the latest perinatal death rate for IVF babies is admitted by the authority to show a marked increase on the 1991 figures.

In January last year, Dr. Valerie Beral, director of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund's epidemiology unit at Oxford, described as "crazy and irrational" the fact that no system of monitoring IVF children had been established in this country.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I am sure that, like me, many hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome the hon. Lady's initiative in bringing this subject to the House's attention. I agree with her that it is disgraceful that not a single member of the HFEA holds the sanctity of human life in any reverence: that helps us to understand the decisions that it has made.

Did the hon. Lady see the results of research carried out in France, published in last week's *New Scientist*? It was discovered that, after being frozen, mouse embryos were more likely to develop a disability of some kind. Is the hon. Lady aware that no work has been done on those matters in this country, and does she agree that both the HFEA and the Department should examine the issue with a view to introducing new protocols to prevent the freezing of embryos and consequent unnecessary disabilities?

Mrs. Winterton: The hon. Gentleman has made some valid points. More research is definitely needed, and the article in the *New Scientist* provides much food for thought.

Although the Minister cited in a recent parliamentary answer—on 14 December, to be found in column 685 of *Hansard*—the work of Dr. Beral, published in 1990, he had clearly not kept abreast of developments. If he had, he would have noted that Dr. Beral had told *The Observer* on 9 November 1994 that, in 1991, she had been compelled to abandon her work by those with a vested interest, who saw it as an unwarranted intrusion into their patients' privacy.

Although my hon. Friend sought to portray Dr. Beral as clearing IVF of posing dangers to children, she went on to say:

"We simply have no idea if IVF techniques pose a real danger to the subsequent health of the child."

I am sure that the House will agree that IVF is now a major industry, generating extremely large fees for many doctors and scientists, and providing comfortable sinecures for members and staff of the HFEA.

As well as betraying the moral conscience of the nation, the authority has let down infertile couples, neglected the welfare of children conceived through IVF, exposed many living human beings at their earliest stages of development to use as human guinea pigs for research purposes and betrayed the trust that the House was persuaded—in many cases against its better judgment—to place in it.

There can be no tenable defence of the authority's structure, its membership, its partisanship or the superficiality of its understanding of ethical issues. In short, the time is long overdue for a root-and-branch review and reform off a discredited body that has been responsible for a series of grave errors of judgment and demonstrated a total lack of effectiveness.

10.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): Let me say something about the origins of the HFEA. As the House knows, the techniques that we are discussing were introduced in the 1970s and 1980s. Some form of regulation was clearly needed: apart from the views of those who disapprove of the techniques and wish that they did not exist, there is a general feeling that they could be abused and put to uses other than those on which the House finally decided.

Following the Warnock report, Parliament decided that an authority should be set up to ensure that the feelings expressed in the House were taken into account and the work that was done was carefully monitored. There were fears that it could result in cloning or the development of hybrids, and such activities were banned. One of the main provisions of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 was that embryos should not be allowed to exist beyond 14 days, and other time limits were placed on the work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) has made much of the membership of the authority. She knows that Mrs. Ruth Deech, a distinguished professor of law, has recently been appointed as the chairman of the authority, succeeding Sir Colin Campbell, under whose excellent leadership the authority successfully negotiated its first four years of existence.

The chairman, deputy chairman and members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Health for a maximum term of three years. The authority has the benefit of a broad and balanced set of views

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Sackville: May I continue a little further?

The authority's members do not represent specific interests. They are appointed as individuals.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: I served on the Committee that formed the legislation on animal experiments. A similar body was set up at that time. The then Minister, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), gave an undertaking to the House that people who were sceptical about experiments on animals would be given a place on the licensing authority. Obviously, they would not, by any means, form the majority, but a voice could be expressed. Will my hon. Friend explain why the same facility should not have been afforded in relation to people who license experiments on the human embryo?

Mr. Sackville: The people who serve on the committee are all respected in their sector. They are reasonable and, as I said, they do not represent specific interests. They have been appointed because of their individual qualities and experience. I am satisfied that they are well qualified and able to examine and advise on these sensitive issues.

Candidates for membership, for example, are not asked about their religious beliefs. They are, however, expected to participate in all the functions of the authority. That includes visiting, inspecting and making decisions about licences for clinics that carry out fertility treatments and research. It is important, therefore, that, before appointing individuals, it is ascertained whether they have personal convictions that may make it difficult for them to participate in the full range of the authority's responsibilities.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Is my hon. Friend aware of the number of authority members who believe in the sanctity of human life? If he is not, does he think that he should be aware of that?

Mr. Sackville: I cannot give that information. All I can say is that those people are a very highly qualified group, and come from a wide range of sectors. I have met many of the members and attended meetings. I cannot agree with the rhetoric about sinecures and betrayed trust. Those people have done a good job in trying to regulate a sector that is fraught with difficulties and sensitivities. They have done that with great skill.

Mr. Alton: Did the Minister read the comment of Lady Warnock, who, when asked about the composition of her committee, which, after all, was the precursor of the HFEA, said that she had excluded one person from it when she found out that he was a Catholic? Does my hon. Friend think that that is a reason for disqualifying someone from membership of the committee?

Mr. Sackville: I am not aware of anyone having been excluded for such a reason. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are talking about membership of the authority.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I understood what the Minister said, and appreciate his giving way on this point. People were asked their views on certain matters. Is that not a form of exclusion? Will he respond to the point raised by the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton)? If some members are associated with hospitals that specialise in such treatments, could not a monetary advantage be involved?

Mr. Sackville: That is something that I should like to examine further, because any accusations of a conflict of interest must clearly be considered. As I said, members will be people who have done a good job in a very difficult field.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton and others mentioned abnormalities and the effect of freezing on embryos. The HFEA keeps such matters under review, and also keeps a register of all children born as a result of these techniques. It is my understanding that there has been no incidence of abnormality.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I have been very much involved in these matters for many years, and sat on the committee that set up the authority. No one is saying that the members of the authority are not well qualified; that is not the argument. When the authority was set up, we were assured that it would reflect a balance of views, and that some of its members would recognise the sanctity of human life as a genuine, moral reason for examining various practices. If it is possible to involve all shades of opinion when considering animal research, would it not be fair, moral and right to do the same when considering human beings?

Mr. Sackville: I understand what my hon. Friend says but we are talking about a group of people who have to

regulate in a sphere where the underlying techniques may be entirely disapproved of by some people. However, Parliament has decided that such an authority should be set up to regulate these techniques. If Parliament wanted to ban them completely, it could have done so. It did not. It decided that these techniques should be legal under certain conditions and should be regulated in a certain way. That is what the authority was set up to do, and what I believe it does, with great skill and distinction.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 15 February 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Drug Abuse

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

10.4 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am most grateful for the opportunity to raise this very important subject today and to be part of establishing a new tradition, only recently started, of Wednesday morning debates.

I want to discuss the size of the problem of drug abuse among young people. It is notoriously difficult to get accurate statistics, but Home Office figures suggest that, of young people living in inner-city areas, some 42 per cent. of 16 to 19-year-olds, and 44 per cent. of 20 to 24-year-olds, have taken drugs at some time. We had a recent reminder of that in my constituency, with a haul of £25 million of drugs on board a catamaran that was towed into our new Sovereign harbour, and another reminder when there were some expulsions from a prominent local public school.

The figures vary quite dramatically. Home Office figures show that the total number of drug offenders has risen by 190 per cent. since 1983, in a 10-year period. Of course, the Home Office also makes the point that there is likely to be a significant understatement of the figures of drug addiction and drug use. In a survey in 1993, it was said that only 52 per cent. of boys and 57 per cent. of girls had not been offered any of the named drugs in year 11, aged 15 to 16. Those are, on any view, dramatic figures.

Nor, indeed, are the problems limited to urban areas. The East Sussex Drugs Advisory Council—ESDAC—produced the statistic that the incidence of drug taking in the north Wealden district of east Sussex was almost the same as that of Brighton, and that more than one fifth of 14 and 15-year-olds had tried an illicit drug, and, of those, 5 per cent. were likely to develop problems because of drug abuse.

I am particularly grateful to Mrs. Penny McKay, of the Eastbourne community drugs team, for producing other figures, such as those from the South Thames (East) regional drug misuse database, which suggest, for example, that the average age of first use of cannabis is under 15 years old. There is evidence that young people most often experiment with substance misuse between the ages of 10 and 14. For example, solvent abuse is the highest cause of unnatural death between the age of 10 and 16, after road accidents. We must ask ourselves why. What is the attraction?

The *British Medical Journal*, in its own investigations, felt that the most common reasons cited were

"to feel big, show off, look grown up . . . because friends do, trendy."

I should like this morning to concentrate only on cannabis, the most widely used of the so-called "soft" drugs. As the Government consultation document, "Tackling Drugs Together", said, the burden is on those who wish to legalise or decriminalise soft or hard drugs. One of the arguments that is made for legalisation or decriminalisation is that those drugs are no worse than alcohol or tobacco. That is rather a bleak argument. I am particularly impressed by something that was said by Detective Chief Superintendent Des Donohue, head of Dorset CID, who, a few years ago, received a Churchill fellowship to study the police response to drug abuse. When the point was put to him, he said:

"If I had been a bobby in the 16th century I would have nicked Sir Walter Raleigh for the illegal importation of drugs.

We are stuck with the social problems of drink and tobacco but that's no reason to legalise cannabis."

Another argument often used is that legalisation would reduce the criminality that tends to surround the use and supply of drugs. Of course, if one legalised burglary, the crime statistics would doubtless improve. But that is not the way to tackle that particular problem.

There are also some practical difficulties. First, how could a workable system be established that distinguished between possession of drugs for personal consumption and possession for trafficking purposes? Secondly, I assume that even those who advocate legalisation would want a system to protect children and young persons. Thirdly, how would we deal with the question of driving under the influence? There is much evidence to suggest that driving under the influence of cannabis, which can take a week or so to leave the human system, is rather more dangerous than driving under the influence of alcohol.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Would not the legalisation of so-called soft drugs such as cannabis act as a gateway to harder drugs such as heroin, and would not that be extremely damaging? The best idea, surely, is to introduce drug education into as many schools as possible to show our youngsters at an early age how damaging the use of cannabis can be.

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend is right. I shall develop the "gateway" or "pathway" argument shortly.

Legalisation would also involve Britain's withdrawal from the United Nations convention on narcotic drugs, thus risking our international isolation. It has been argued that legalisation would reduce the allure and attraction of drugs, but I consider that argument flawed. I also think that comparisons with tobacco and alcohol are meaningless, as those substances are not legally restricted in any real sense except in respect of minors.

Why should drug barons and others who currently make a good living from organised crime not seek to control an ever-expanding market, albeit a legalised or decriminalised one? As for the "libertarian" argument—the John Stuart Mill approach—I fear that we are dealing with the real world, not that of philosophers.

It is interesting to note that even the Dutch Minister of Justice recently announced to the United Nations that his country was reviewing its so-called "coffee shop" policy, whereby cannabis dealing and use are tolerated at certain outlets, because of a perceived sharp increase in the availability of drugs.

[Mr. Waterson]

Let me deal next with the arguments against the legalisation of cannabis. The argument about its effect on human beings has raged for many years, but there is no conclusive proof that so-called soft drugs are non-addictive or completely harmless. As the Royal College of Psychiatrists put it,

"There can be no reasonable dispute that cannabis can cause acute mental impairment in terms either of intoxication or a transient but very bizarre and worrying psychological experience."

There is a growing body of medical opinion on other physical effects. A recent article in *The Big Issue*—not a publication renowned for its slavish support for pro-establishment views—set out some of the evidence that is emerging, particularly in America, of damage caused by cannabis or marijuana. Apparently, research shows that it can damage the human immune and reproductive systems and the brain. There is also strong evidence that the drug is more carcinogenic than tobacco. According to Professor Sridhar of the university of Miami's cancer research centre,

"Cannabis smokers develop cancer 15 to 20 years younger than you would expect. I am convinced it is a highly dangerous drug."

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): At a time when most commentators agree that there is a need for even more health education and even more effort by those leading social policy to persuade people to give up substances such as alcohol and tobacco, would it not be wrong for hon. Members or anyone else to be seen to endorse a product that involves many of the same difficulties? It would run contrary to all the current social thinking.

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend is right. The fact that we allow the legal consumption of alcohol and tobacco does not mean that, if we started with a clean sheet in respect of both commodities, we would find ourselves in our present position.

Cannabis is very much an unknown quantity. It took some 50 years and literally thousands of research projects, papers and investigations to discover that smoking tobacco causes cancer. I believe that there are about 100,000 tobacco-related deaths a year in this country alone. It is hardly surprising, however, that cannabis is harmful: it contains more than 400 compounds that convert to over 2,000 chemicals when it is ignited.

The element THC, which is the main ingredient of cannabis, is important in terms of its strength in a given dose and the way in which it builds up in the body over long periods. Some scientists estimate that the present levels of THC in cannabis are some 16 times higher than at the time of the Woodstock festival, which some of the older hon. Members present may remember. There are also suggestions that cannabis can reduce fertility, as well as weakening the immune system and the body's protection from infection. Studies show that cannabis smokers are up to six times more likely to develop serious mental illnesses.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): In my constituency, as in my hon. Friend's, the problem of drug abuse among young people is particularly serious. The effect of cannabis consumption on health has been particularly marked in Blackpool, and Dr. Mohammed Musa, who works in my local drug advisory clinic, strongly believes that it adversely affects the general health of all drug users in the town.

Mr. Waterson: I am not surprised. I do not know whether Dr. Musa has a view on the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans)—the extent to which the use of so-called soft drugs leads to the use of so-called hard drugs.

Picking one's way through the mass of literature on the subject, it is difficult to arrive at a clear, definitive medical answer. It would be dishonest not to accept that opinions vary, but I stress what I said at the beginning of my speech: the burden of proof must be firmly on those who wish to legalise or decriminalise those substances.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Even the Government now state that, as well as affecting psychotic illnesses and lung diseases, cannabis affects the user's judgment, leading to pregnancy and numerous other spin-off problems.

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the most dramatic illustrations of that point is contained in research into road and train accidents, particularly that conducted in the United States.

According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists,

"It is clear that a person who uses cannabis is statistically more likely to try other illicit drugs than one who does not."

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The argument that the hon. Gentleman is about to deploy is a familiar one, but what he has just said is unexceptional. Obviously, someone who starts using cannabis is statistically more likely to move on to another substance; but it is equally true that someone who drinks a dry sherry is statistically more likely to end up as a total alcoholic. What point is the hon. Gentleman trying to make?

Mr. Waterson: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was at Woodstock. I was about to deal with his point, which some experts call the "pathway" argument. I am not saying that everyone who tries cannabis will move on to something harder, and I do not entirely disagree with what the hon. Gentleman has said. A number of studies show that, as people become adjusted to a drug such as cannabis, there is a tendency to increase the dose, or to move on to something that is somewhat stronger.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Is my hon. Friend aware that there are now variants of cannabis that can cause hallucination, so the idea that cannabis is some sort of safe drug with a recreational flavour is inaccurate? Skunk, a variant of cannabis, is imported from the Netherlands. Such variants can cause hallucinations that can drive people on to experiment with harsher drugs.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. I know that he has made himself very much an expert in those matters, and that he has spent a great deal of time and effort in his constituency trying to combat drug abuse problems, especially among young people.

Another argument is that, if cannabis is legal, in a sense, it loses the attraction of being out of bounds, especially to young people, and they may choose to move on to something that appears to have a more superficial romance about it because it is illegal. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) talked about

pathways. It is true that many addicts, perhaps even most addicts of, for example, heroin have previously used cannabis. Some of the studies that I have read show that it is equally true that alcohol is a pathway. Children who start drinking alcohol at a young age—and it is surprising how many do nowadays—will graduate to the other drugs that I am talking about. That is an important point.

The next argument against legalisation is that it reduces social disapproval of the use of those drugs. People may argue that drugs should be legal, but I doubt whether many people argue that they are positively beneficial. By legalising them, one would send a confusing message to our young people, a point made by Sir Paul Condon recently, when he said:

"By continuing to debate the possibility of legalisation we are diminishing the dangers of drugs in the eyes of the young. We must take the utmost care not to make drugs appear attractive."

Merely by debating the possibility of removing legal constraints, we may unwittingly be encouraging their use.

Another argument often put forward is that legalisation would reduce the street price. Again, the evidence is clear that, if the availability and ease of access to drugs is increased, one will increase use and abuse, especially among young people. As Professor Griffith Edwards of the National Addiction Centre said,

"access to drugs has been proved significantly to encourage use of drugs."

There is abundant research evidence from America, both in the medical profession and among American ground troops in Vietnam. In both situations, for different reasons, drugs were freely available and there was a much higher level of addiction than among the rest of the population.

On health costs, I have said that there is no conclusive proof that cannabis is non-addictive. There is ample proof that it damages health. If one considers the problems that we have in society with alcohol and tobacco, which are already legal, one may realise the sort of difficulties that a massive expansion, potentially, of drug use would cause, plus other costs to society.

What I call the social effects are often ignored. The regular use of drugs often involves a surrender to unreality, a retreat into a world that has neither pain nor achievement. That has a long-term effect on any society.

The evidence, therefore, is clear. I feel that no responsible group or political party would advocate legalisation or decriminalisation, except possibly one. As you will know, Madam Speaker, the Liberal Democrats voted to decriminalise cannabis at their last party conference. I see hon. Members shaking their heads. I am willing to give way on that point.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I hope that I might catch your eye later, Madam Speaker, to explain that the Liberal Democrats did not vote for that. I spoke in the debate and I shall ensure that the House understands exactly what we did vote for. We voted for a royal commission to consider a range of issues, including whether there should be a change in the legal position. That is clear and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will no longer misrepresent what we decided.

Mr. Waterson: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman. This is an important and disturbing issue, which surfaced in my constituency. I have taken great trouble to ascertain the true facts about the wording of the motions, and the two separate votes that took place. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is free to say whatever he wishes in the Chamber, but some of the points made by his friends in my constituency border on the libellous. They are certainly attempts to rewrite history. For the record, let me assist the House.

There was a separate vote to refer these matters to a royal commission. It is probably not unusual for a Liberal Democrat party conference to pass motions that are contradictory because, after all, it does the same thing every day of the week in this place. However, it had a vote and then a separate vote, where conference called for

"The decriminalisation of the use and possession of cannabis in order that the police and Customs and Excise are able to target their resources on the vital battle against the use of hard drugs."

The vote on that was 426 in favour and 375 against.

Mr. Hughes: Only because the hon. Gentleman is being so misleading, I should point out that he read part of a sentence—I have the motion as passed here. I hope that he will listen and not misrepresent the position again. The wording of the sentence is:

"Conference calls for the establishment of a Royal Commission to investigate and consider strategies for combating drug misuse, including"

and there is a list of six things, of which the last is the question of decriminalisation. The royal commission, therefore, would consider six issues, one of which is what the legal position should be. For heaven's sake, the hon. Gentleman must not lie in the House.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hughes: I am sorry, Madam Speaker. I withdraw. The hon. Gentleman must not misrepresent our position in the House.

Madam Speaker: I am obliged, of course.

Mr. Waterson: I did not intend to spend a long time on this and I am running rather late, but it is time to nail that gross misrepresentation by the Liberal Democrats. I do not blame them for being embarrassed by the vote. Their leader was extremely embarrassed. I seem to remember that he stormed off the platform. They should be embarrassed. This is a disgrace.

As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is so much in love with the facts, and I am looking at the Liberal Democrat agenda paper for Monday 19 September last year—

Mr. Hughes: We were there.

Mr. Waterson: I sometimes wonder. I have already accepted that that conference passed a separate motion by a separate vote to refer the matter to a royal commission, but, at the same time, it passed by another vote a separate motion. I have already read out proposal 6 in Amendment 1, put forward by the Saffron Walden constituency and moved by Alan Dean.

Lest the hon. Gentleman would try to persuade the House either that black is white and white is black, or merely that this is a brief aberration on his party's part, let me remind him of his own words in his role as community affairs spokesman. He said:

"Lots of absolutely perfectly respectable, normal members of society take drugs as normally as many of their fellow citizens smoke, drink beer or have sex."

[Mr. Waterson]

If the hon. Gentleman wants to withdraw those words, I am happy to give way.

Nor was that vote just an aberration. At the Scottish Liberal Democrat annual conference in 1993, delegates also voted to decriminalise the possession of cannabis. I draw a line under that part of my speech.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning not only the Liberal Democrats' vote at their party conference to legalise cannabis, but the vote to make contraception available to 11-year-old girls without reference to their parents? Did he share my horror on reading in *The Times* this morning that this year they are going to debate euthanasia? What is happening to the Liberal Democrat party?

Madam Speaker: I hope that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) will not pursue that line of argument. It is not part of the Adjournment debate.

Mr. Waterson: I had no intention of doing so, but I shall make two points. First, I would not wish to remind the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey of more than one issue on which his party is attempting to distance itself from the actualité. Secondly, has my hon. Friend read the comments of Mr. Alan Hope—Councillor Alan Hope, I beg his pardon—of the Monster Raving Loony party who, after the Liberal Democrat conference, said:

"They are becoming loonier than we are. We are being out-loonied by the Liberal Democrats . . . We can't believe some of the loony policies they are advocating—legalising cannabis, condoms for 11 year olds and abolishing the monarchy. You can't get loonier than that."?

Mr. Hughes: He got his information from *The Sun*, like the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Waterson: I was quoting from the *Western Daily Press*. Let us move on now that I have put the record straight. The next time a Liberal Democrat councillor or spokesman in my constituency accuses me of lying or falsehood, as has happened here today, I shall take action. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to repeat what he said outside the House, we shall get to the heart of the matter. I am conscious of the fact that time is moving on. I have accepted many interventions and been provoked beyond what is reasonable.

What are we doing to deal with the problem? As a country, we spent more than £500 million on the problem in 1993. I have already mentioned the excellent work of the community drugs team in my constituency. The Seaside centre in my constituency has also done excellent work under the leadership of Pat Armstrong. ESDAC draws together all the threads of information and policy to combat drug abuse in east Sussex. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), who has been stalwart in his fight to increase awareness of those problems in east Sussex and in his support for organisations such as ESDAC.

The Sussex police have been active in many ways, especially in providing schools with liaison officers. I had a letter from Peter Westcott, the deputy chief constable, which sets out in detail the measures in which the police have been involved. It is estimated that in the country as a whole some 1,300 police officers are involved solely with drugs work.

Of course, health education is very important and some excellent leaflets have been produced by the Department of Health, East Sussex county council and many other bodies. Hon. Members may have seen the draft circular on this subject from the Department for Education, which makes excellent reading. Drugs education is now firmly a part of the national curriculum.

I believe that the formation last year of the central drugs co-ordination unit, under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Lord President, has done much to focus attention on the problem. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will have much to say about the impact of the consultation document, "Tackling Drugs Together". It contains many useful ideas and focuses commendably on the importance of educating young people about the dangers of taking drugs. It is interesting that that very detailed document firmly rejects arguments for the legalisation of drugs. In fact, in a sentence that sums up the theme of my speech, it states:

"So, in general terms, the strongest arguments against legalisation of controlled drugs are the risks of wider use and addiction; these are very serious risks which no responsible Government should take on behalf of its citizens."

I agree. The Government must promote responsible policies that educate our young people about drug abuse.

In conclusion, the last thing that we want is the crackpot policy peddled by the Liberals, which would merely encourage drug abuse by our nation's young.

10.34 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for being called to speak and I welcome the debate on this matter, not least because it is the first since the Government published their Green Paper entitled "Tackling Drugs Together" to which the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred. My colleagues and I were under the impression until today that only politicians of our hue debated this issue, so the hon. Gentleman has done his party a service by putting it on the agenda.

It is perfectly obvious that the topic is hugely important. It is generally accepted by police forces across the country that two thirds of thefts are drug related. In a recent sample taken in the north-west, 95 per cent. of young people convicted of criminal offences admitted to using drugs.

I shall deal with, but not linger on, the point that clearly obsesses the hon. Member for Eastbourne—what is and should be the legal position of drugs. For a long time, there has been a debate about whether there should be decriminalisation or legalisation of any currently illegal or criminal drugs. Many people such as members of the judiciary, police officers and academics agree with those Members of Parliament who support the proposition that the law should be reformed. The tragedy has been that, until now, the debate has taken place not among elected representatives of the people but in the media, which have often misrepresented it—although that is not true of the serious press, which has dealt responsibly with the issue.

Legalisation or decriminalisation is certainly on the agenda in the country at large. According to some opinion poll soundings, more than 30 per cent. of the people support the argument for decriminalisation. If one walks around the streets of an urban constituency such as mine and talks to young people, one of the first issues that they raise is this very question because, as the hon. Member

for Eastbourne said, many young people not only talk about drugs but often turn to them as their first choice recreational activity. That may apply more often to 15-year-olds, but also much younger children are involved, including those in primary schools.

Let me make it absolutely clear once and for all, although I am prepared to debate the matter with the hon. Gentleman in the House, in Eastbourne or anywhere else, that my party and, as it happens, I personally, have not been persuaded to support legalisation or decriminalisation. We believe, however, that there should be an informed and objective debate.

Mr. Heald: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No, I am trying to be brief and I wish to make this point categorically.

There are, of course, strong arguments against decriminalisation and legalisation, some of which the hon. Member for Eastbourne outlined. It is reasonable to argue that, if one alters where the line is drawn between what is forbidden and what is legal, the subsequently forbidden fruit is the fruit which is potentially more dangerous. Decriminalisation or legalisation may make it more likely that drug addicts or drug users will move here, as they have previously moved to Holland, a country which, I accept, is rethinking its position. Legalisation might not necessarily cut crime because crime would simply be connected with more serious drugs.

I disagree fundamentally, however, with the idea that having a debate determines whether more young people use drugs on the street. That is nonsense. Huge numbers of youngsters use drugs and they think that we are completely out of touch because we do not discuss the issue, and they do not understand why not. I am also not persuaded that the price goes up rather than down if drugs are legalised or decriminalised.

The Green Paper stated every reason against legalisation because its brief was to do so. That is not good enough. The matter must be looked at independently. Lord Nolan and his committee are respected because they take an independent view of matters of major public concern and everyone is looking forward to hearing what they conclude, because it is authoritative and not party political. If standards in public life can be the subject of objective analysis, recommendation and conclusion, exactly the same can be done with another central issue in today's modern society: how to deal with the amount of drugs in our society and on the streets. The Green Paper says:

"it is clear that the debate can be conducted in good faith by responsible people who can respect each other's views."

Amen to that. It means that the hon. Member for Eastbourne and his colleagues must not misrepresent what is decided in a democratic party, where, unlike them, we have the right to vote and debate amendments to motions.

Mr. Waterson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No, I shall not give way.

The motion that was finally agreed by last year's Liberal Democrat conference says:

"Conference calls for:

The establishment of a Royal Commission to investigate and consider strategies for combating drug misuse, including:—

1. Greater resources to be given to HM Customs & Excise . . .

2. The police to be given more resources . . .

3. All schools to be obliged to offer advice and guidance to all pupils . . .

4. Immediate action to set up rehabilitation centres throughout the country;

5. Much stiffer penalties for all convicted drug dealers;

6. The decriminalisation of the use and possession of cannabis in order that . . . Customs & Excise are able to target their resources".

That is the list that we want on the agenda of a royal commission, and the items are of equal importance.

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No, I shall not give way because I am trying to be speedy.

The motion was clear, but, of course, must be read as a whole. The Liberal Democrat party and the responsible members of the press who were at the conference understand that. Other politicians have understood that, too. Yesterday, the Prime Minister confirmed that he is not yet persuaded, but thinks that there should be a general debate on the single European currency. Equally, there should be an independent and well-informed debate on drugs. That is where we stand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), who is on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, has also made it clear that the Liberal Democrats' Scottish conference voted, on an advisory basis, in favour of decriminalising cannabis.

Mr. Heald: That is all right, then.

Mr. Hughes: No. The Scottish conference does not make policy for the federal party, because the legality of drugs is a United Kingdom matter. Federally, the party made its decision at last year's federal conference.

In 1984, the Government set up an Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, which recognises the need for effective, broad-based education programmes. The Department of Education and Science, as it then was, provided £4 million to fund the appointment of drug education co-ordinators for each local education authority in England and Wales. They did very well and worked with schools and the youth service, but that initiative has fallen by the wayside and funding for those preventive health education workers ended in 1993 and was switched to schools.

Co-ordination through local authorities is far more effective than trying to get the work done with small amounts of money in individual schools. The Secretary of State acknowledged the key role of health education co-ordinators, but only £32 million was provided between 1986 and 1993 for that project. Moreover, it is not to be repeated. An average LEA with about 300 schools now receives about £30,000, which means that each school is expected to provide training for a total of about £100. With only that sum, teachers cannot be properly trained and equipped to deal with such a huge issue.

The Green Paper and the Department for Education's draft circular "Drug Prevention and Schools" have some encouraging aspects. The emphasis has changed from an uncompromising search for total abstinence, which was the original Home Office position in 1989, to acceptance

[Mr. Hughes]

that substance abuse has become a part of modern-day society and that education should concentrate more on constraining its expansion and lessening suffering.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hughes: I am glad to see that the Minister agrees. Schools have been encouraged to develop a repertoire of responses to drug-related incidents. The Office for Standards in Education has been instructed to inspect the quality and effectiveness of schools' drugs policies as part of its school inspections. Alcohol and tobacco are also now in the DFE's draft circular, although they were not mentioned in the Green Paper. If we are to discuss drugs abuse among young people, the misery caused by the long-term health problems of alcoholism and tobacco addiction should be included.

It is important to discuss how we should persuade young people to make the right decisions. Given that the figure for illegal drug use among 14 and 15-year-olds is thought to be between the 14 per cent. that is given in the Government's document, albeit without statistical back-up, and the much higher and more realistic figure of 36 per cent., we must ask why young people decide to take drugs. A prevailing view seems to be that it is because they are under pressure, yet professionals on the subject say that it is because young people want to try drugs, as they want to try all sorts of other things. The Green Paper does not seek to tackle the root of the problem. Yesterday, we debated poverty and unemployment. Many issues contribute to young people's use of drugs, but poverty, lack of social activities, the rundown of the youth service, lack of work and broken homes are among those issues. We must tackle the causes that lead young people to make those decisions, and I hope that we shall do so.

The debate on this subject has only just begun in the country. I am glad that the Government are beginning to enter the mainstream of the debate, but we should have an objective assessment of the position for the future. My colleagues and I have argued for that and the Nolan committee shows that it is worth while. I hope that the Government will not now have a knee-jerk reaction, suggesting that only they and their advisers can get the matter right. Let us have a royal commission—even a standing royal commission—but, for the present, let us give education authorities the resources to co-ordinate dealing with the drugs problem in schools throughout their areas and the youth service the resources to work on the ground. We must be tough with dealers. We must recognise that young people know more about what is going on than older people, so we must take their advice and listen to them. We shall then understand how to deal effectively with drugs, which often harm their lives.

I hope that this is the beginning of an important debate that will be objectively carried on outside this place from now on.

10.47 am

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): I join other hon. Members in welcoming the debate and in thanking my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), for initiating it.

I find myself in complete agreement with many of the points made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), but I do not agree with his attitude to legalisation, to which I shall return in a moment, nor with his statement that the issue has not been debated. It has been much debated both within and between our parties. Most significantly, it was debated by the Council of Europe three years ago when it had 23 member states, and every representative of every party of every member state unanimously supported a motion against legalising drugs. To say that the debate has not begun is misrepresenting the pace. Today's debate is a useful continuum.

The fact of the matter, as is accentuated in the Green Paper, is that cannabis as well as other more serious drugs is harmful. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne pointed out, it is harmful to the heart, the nervous system and the reproductive organs, particularly those of young girls. It is also harmful because of its influence on a number of psychoses. It is a tragedy that those who argue for the legalisation or decriminalisation of cannabis play down those harmful effects, so that young people who are tempted to try cannabis and other drugs are reassured by those people's belief that it is harmless. That idea must be scotched and I hope that the debate will contribute to that.

Mr. Booth: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) suggested that the young know a lot about drugs, but does my hon. Friend agree that the medical evidence that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) have quoted demonstrates that young people do not have access to that evidence?

Mr. Rathbone: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend and I thank him for reiterating that point. Every doctor with knowledge about the problems of drug misuse has accentuated and reaccentuated the possible dangers of a drugs habit. We must do the same in the House and outside.

Legalisation would be harmful. Those who support it have conceded victory to drugs users—the weak-willed members of society and those people who feed that habit. That defeatist attitude sends exactly the wrong, negative message to our youth and that of the world.

The black market exists because demand exists. It will continue to exist whether cannabis is legalised or not as long as that demand exists and until more is done to reduce it. Legalisation of cannabis, should it ever happen, would inevitably lead to more frequent misuse of drugs and the mental and physical suffering that goes with that—just as we have found with alcohol. Alcoholism is still a far greater problem in this country and around the world than drug misuse because alcohol is readily and legally available. If we cannot learn from the problems of alcoholism and apply them to drugs, we are denying history to the detriment of the current generation and future ones.

I welcome the Green Paper, which accentuates the importance of demand reduction and the need for ever-greater emphasis on health education and prevention. We await keenly the Government's reaction to the consultation period, which has recently finished. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister will offer us a keyhole insight into the Government's likely reactions.

I have the honour to be the chairman of the all-party parliamentary drugs misuse group. We put together a precise submission to the Government and I should like to stress two elements of it. The first is the hoary old question of funding, which must be considered. It is crucial that the necessary funds are made available to pursue the policies outlined in the consultation document. I agree with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that funding should be available to teachers to educate young people about drugs. It should also be available for better treatment of drug addiction within the national health service. The list goes on. Allocating the necessary funds for the Government's eventual plans to be published in their eventual White Paper will require some hard bullet biting.

My second point relates not to funding but to strategy. The Government have set their way by publishing the consultation document. They have drawn together the various Government Departments in England and they must now continue that co-ordination by including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. I praise the co-ordination unit and all those who work in it, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, but that co-ordination is required in strategic terms across the country. In this united kingdom we still fall down because we do not have a United Kingdom strategy to further the Government's efforts in every part of it and their contribution towards the fight against the problems of drugs misuse worldwide.

10.55 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I, too, welcome the debate that has been initiated by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I endorse what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said about the need for a continuing debate on a subject of great social significance in this country and around the world. We should debate politically sensitive matters in the House without predictable knee-jerk reactions.

I have considered this matter for some considerable time and I have personally come to the opinion—I stress "personally"—that we should legalise so-called soft drugs such as cannabis. I proposed that a royal commission should consider all the possible options for tackling the drugs problem long before the Liberal party did so. The evidence of medical people and those involved in enforcement should be further scrutinised to see whether we have got it right in Britain and whether people have got it right anywhere else.

I hasten to add that my call for the legalisation of cannabis is dictated by my own views and is not in any way connected with the policy of my party, which remains as determined to resist legalisation as the Conservative party. Our Opposition Front-Bench spokesman will make that quite clear today. I should also say that I am speaking for no more than a minority of Members who agree with me. Many hon. Members are prepared, however, to consider that possibility more openly.

It is worth dealing with the point about establishing a pathway, because I am quite certain that some hon. Members have used cannabis in the past. A number of hon. Members have told me privately that they have done so, but that they are not prepared publicly to endorse the use of soft drugs or any other drugs because of the political implications of doing so. They have not turned into potheads or ended up mainlining heroin any more than anyone in this House who has had a dry sherry in the past has turned up as a hopeless alcoholic in the Strangers Bar or anywhere else. Certain people will, of course, naturally move on from drinking sherry to alcoholism or from using cannabis to using heroin. That will happen naturally to some people, but the vast majority do not make that progression and that must be recognised.

Mr. Booth: The crucial argument is that medical evidence suggests that at least 4 per cent. of the population—it could be more than double that—are prone to become addicts. We do not know who they are, but we must protect them.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman could be correct, but he is being imprecise when he says that it could be 4 per cent. of the population or double that. I should like to deal with precise facts rather than anecdotal evidence. That is the important point. I agree that there are obsessive people in our society, as there are anywhere else, who will progress from one particular habit to another. Someone who starts by a turning a car over and stealing a radio might eventually become a serial killer—there would be a connection—but, for the vast majority of people, that causal link simply does not exist. I am simply asking the House to be prepared to consider coolly and rationally a subject as significant as the one that we are discussing, and not to rely on anecdotal evidence and knee-jerk reactions.

Human beings have used drugs and alcohol since time immemorial. Many of the so-called "illegal substances" that we call drugs, which we now ban, used to be freely available to people and were prescribed by doctors, even to members of the royal family. The Balmoral records, which were made available a year or so ago, show that laudanum and opium were prescribed for Queen Victoria's pre-menstrual tension. We have changed our attitude towards the use of drugs but, throughout history, human beings have used alcohol and have used drugs. It is simply that there are prevailing moods in societies that cause us to say at some moment that we do not like what is being done, which is why America moved to prohibition in the 1920s. We know about the chaos that that caused.

I feel it necessary to put on the record, as I have to do regularly when I become involved in this fairly politically sensitive area, that I have never used cannabis or any other illegal substance. I do not say that from any moral point of view, as the permissive 1960s appear to have passed me by altogether when I was at university—a matter of profound regret in my old age. I have tried to make up for those things that I missed in the 1960s, but I hasten to add that one of the things that I have not tried to make up is the use of drugs.

The fact that I won a competition recently on a television programme to roll the longest joint, in which I beat a number of prominent pop stars who readily confessed to using the stuff, was merely a sign of my proficiency with nicotine in my earlier years when I "rolled my own". I still have that skill, although I no longer smoke nicotine.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne mentioned 100,000 or so smoking-related deaths. From a health point of view, it is far more damaging for people to smoke cigarettes or to drink alcohol than to use cannabis. Many of the

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health-related side-effects of using cannabis occur because cannabis is mixed with nicotine. That is the important thing. If someone were to take cannabis in a "space cookie" or a cup of tea, some of those medical side-effects would not be present.

Mr. Waterson: I remind the hon. Gentleman that I argued that it took a long time, a great deal of use of cigarettes and nicotine and a great many studies to discover that nicotine was harmful—indeed, deadly—and we are much less far down the road in terms of cannabis. If use of cannabis were widespread, one might discover, some years on, exactly the same or worse effects.

Mr. Banks: Tobacco companies continue to resist the link between nicotine and lung cancer for straight economic reasons. I am happy for those matters to be considered, which is why I spoke about a royal commission. There is conflicting medical evidence, but if one is able to lay it out, as it were, and we are able to approach it objectively as legislators, and if, in the end, it is our considered opinion that the medical side-effects of using cannabis overwhelm any freedom arguments, of course it would be right for us to reaffirm our political position with regard to the enforcement of cannabis as an illegal substance. I am simply asking the House, as it is perfectly proper to do—unusual, perhaps—to examine the facts before adducing the arguments.

The title of the debate on the Order Paper is "The abuse of drugs by young people". It is right to link those two together. There are obvious links between the circumstances in which many young people find themselves and their use of illegal substances. The Cambridge study that was published today, which received considerable coverage on the radio and in the newspapers, shows that the link between unemployment and crime cannot be denied, however much Ministers might like to do so. They are responsible in great measure for high unemployment, so, for God's sake, they do not want to be linked with the fact that crime has also increased. We know that it has. One can no longer deny that link.

Many young people are using drugs because the use of drugs is linked with ignorance, with poverty, with the absence of hope and with unemployment. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne said, drugs offer relief—an escape from reality. Reality is harsh and unpleasant for many people, especially young people, and they want relief. It is escapism. It does not work, because one has to return to reality. It is the people who do not want to return to reality who tend to move on to harder and harder drugs, seeking a bigger and bigger fix because they cannot bear to accept reality.

The reality for many of our young people is one of hopelessness in our society. Where are drugs most readily available, and where is all the criminal activity associated with a supply of drugs rampant? The answer is, in the black communities, especially in the United States and indeed in this country, because those communities make up the social group that finds it most difficult to secure a stake in United States society or in this society. I do not want to make too much of that in a short debate, but a royal commission should be prepared to consider those issues.

We have a drugs problem in my constituency and in the borough of Newham. Newham is the most deprived local authority area in the country, so it tends to fit in with the image that I am describing, but the problem is not of cannabis as much as of solvent abuse—glue-sniffing. The substances that are used are not illegal as such. They are freely available in shops and people are able to buy them. In many ways, we tend to be sidetracked in the House on to issues such as cannabis, but there is an awful lot of abuse of substances that are available in shops which inflict far more damage on young people's health than cannabis would ever do. That has not been mentioned until now.

I say without fear of contradiction that drug abuse is a serious social problem in this country and elsewhere, and I think that it has two main causes: first, drugs are illegal and, secondly, large numbers of people use drugs. When it comes to it, what are we going to do with the 3 million to 5 million people in this country who use cannabis? Are we going to put them all in gaol? It will not work. One can no more ban the use of cannabis in this country than one could ban prostitution.

We have taken a step to regulate and control prostitution. I think that that is the way forward for the use of cannabis—regulation and control. When we do that, through legalisation, we shall be able to tackle the serious social problems that the use of illegal substances poses to our society.

11.6 am

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on raising this important subject and in hoping that it promotes a wider debate on some of the issues. It is important also for another reason. The problem is not confined to inner-city areas. It affects outer estates, such as those that I represent, and rural market towns. Every part of Great Britain is affected to some extent by the abuse of drugs by young people. It is important, therefore, that we discuss those matters in the House and develop strategies for tackling those problems.

I start by setting the record straight on the position of the official Opposition on the legalisation of cannabis. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) characteristically and generously said that the opinions that he expressed were very much and distinctively his own, not those of the Labour party, and I can confirm that that is precisely the case. I might say of my hon. Friend, for whom I have boundless affection and respect, that, in relation to that issue, although perhaps not to many others, he shows an uncharacteristic attachment to market forces. However, no doubt he will reconcile that apparent contradiction in the fullness of time.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the legalisation of cannabis. Does he hold an opinion on whether the clear vote at the Liberal Democrat conference to legalise cannabis was helpful or unhelpful?

Mr. Simon Hughes: The deputy leader of the Labour party said that it was helpful.

Mr. Howarth: I shall come to that point. The hon. Gentleman is trying to prompt me into saying what the deputy leader of our party may or may not have said. I can hold a speech together without the hon. Gentleman's help.

I shall come to the Liberal Democrats in a moment. The Labour party believes that, whatever the merits or otherwise of cannabis, the party would send out entirely the wrong message to young people if it were to subscribe to the legalisation argument. The real crisis in our society at present is that too many young people become involved in the drug culture, for many different reasons. It is not appropriate for an official, a political party or the House to send out a message in favour of the liberalisation of any drug laws—particularly those regarding cannabis, which is commonly available. We do not support the legalisation move.

I have listened to the various exchanges between the hon. Members for Eastbourne and for Southwark and Bermondsey, but I am none the wiser as a result. Whatever happened at the Liberal Democrat conference, the impression created—

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: I shall finish the point that I am making and then give way, although my speaking time is limited.

Whatever the precise wording of the motion that was passed at the Liberal Democrat conference, the message that went out to young people in particular is that the Liberal Democrats condone the misuse of certain categories of soft drugs. I understand that the Liberal Democrats were attempting to have a serious debate and I am not knocking them for that. However, we must be very careful about the messages that we send to young people. I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale).

Mr. Whittingdale: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I shall try to help him in his confusion about Liberal Democrat views. Does he agree that the Liberal Democrat conference voted clearly for an amendment in favour of the decriminalisation of cannabis which made no mention of a royal commission? Does he agree that that was deeply irresponsible?

Mr. Howarth: I do not wish to follow that path. I want to make some serious points—I am not saying that the hon. Gentleman is not making a serious point—but, to be honest, I have not read the text of the amendment or the motion, as the hon. Gentleman has clearly done. I do not want to get involved in trying to confirm what did or did not happen at the Liberal Democrat conference. It is probably the most irrelevant of all events in the political calendar.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that of more relevance are the two reports that were published last year—one from a right-wing think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs, and another from a left-wing think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research—both of which concluded that ending the prohibition of soft drugs will cut the profits made by the people pushing those drugs, reduce consumption of those drugs and also reduce drug-related crime?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend has known and trenchant views on that matter. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West, he shows an uncharacteristic faith in the ability of market forces to resolve the problem. I do not subscribe to that view. I think that I have dealt sufficiently with the issue of the legalisation of cannabis.

In talking about young people and drug misuse and abuse, it is important to differentiate very clearly—as the hon. Member for Eastbourne has done in choosing the title for the debate—between younger people who use drugs and older drug users. The problems of each group are different and therefore must be dealt with differently.

Young people often first use drugs experimentally—that does not excuse it; I am simply commenting that it happens. In most cases, a brief period of experimentation with drugs is followed by abstaining from any drug misuse. Although most young people who experiment with drugs do not misuse or abuse them in later life—we are dealing with the pathways argument—a minority move on to addiction and the misuse and abuse of often harder drugs. We must be concerned about that pathway which exists, albeit in a minority of cases.

Mr. Waterson: On that point, is the hon. Gentleman aware of the statistics in the House of Commons Library research paper which show that 40 per cent. of deaths due to solvent abuse in 1991 resulted from apparent first-time drug use?

Mr. Howarth: That is another kind of abuse of substances which are readily available in high street stores. It is a serious problem and one about which we must be equally concerned. I am conscious of the fact that, because I have given way so much, I have taken up more time than I should have. I shall try to move towards a conclusion.

The Green Paper entitled "Tackling Drugs Together" is very welcome. I wrote to the Lord President on behalf of the Opposition and, despite a few criticisms, I confirmed our support for the approach taken in the Green Paper. We must try to build a consensus across the Floor of the House and within the Government themselves: first, that the problems of drug misuse and abuse must be dealt with; and, secondly, that they should not be tolerated.

On that point, I do not believe that the case for reducing the number of customs control staff has been established properly. The Labour party and those who work in the service fear that the Government's recent announcement about redundancies in that area may curtail the ability of Customs and Excise to intercept—as it has done so successfully in the past—the illegal importation of drugs. I hope that the Minister will give more attention to that matter.

It is important that we send out two messages to the community: first, drugs are harmful and wrong; and, secondly, there is a growing consensus that the problem must be dealt with as part of mainstream politics and government. Those messages should be upheld at every opportunity.

11.16 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I do not often have the opportunity to welcome a consensus approach in the House, but I welcome the offer by the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on behalf of the Opposition for a consensus approach to this matter. I also welcome his positive response to the Green Paper.

As for the hon. Gentleman's point about customs officials, the Government intend to target their effectiveness and we do not wish to see their excellent work in seizing illegal drugs undermined in any way. I

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welcome the hon. Gentleman's opposition to the decriminalisation of cannabis as a way of tackling the scourge of drugs. I hope that members of the Liberal party will come to their senses and join in that consensus in the House so that we can send the clear message that we will have no truck with drugs in our country.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): The Minister is being uncharacteristically unfair. Surely he must understand by now exactly what occurred at the conference when we asked that a royal commission be set up to consider six matters, one of which was the decriminalisation of drugs. That is a most serious matter. Is the Minister suggesting that we should not have discussed it and opted in favour of establishing a royal commission?

Mr. Forsyth: I do not know whether the hon. Lady remembers how previous Governments set up royal commissions in order to kick problems into touch. Royal commissions take a very long time to consider matters and we must deal with the serious drugs problem immediately.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) distanced himself from the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) when he said that the Scottish Liberal conference had voted for decriminalisation and added that, of course, in our federal system it does not make policy for the United Kingdom as a whole. The hon. Lady speaks for the Scottish party and she must take the consequences of what her party members voted for at that conference. It would send out a very positive message if she were to confirm that the Liberal Democrats will join the Labour party and the Government in denying that decriminalisation of drugs is the way forward. I shall happily give way to the hon. Lady to allow her the opportunity to do that now.

Mrs. Michie: As the Minister invites me to intervene, let me explain again that the Scottish Liberal party made a decision that was supported by a majority, although many voted against it, including me. Is the Minister saying that we are not allowed to discuss such a serious matter and reach a conclusion? The conclusion that the Scottish Liberal party reached was that a federal United Kingdom Parliament would then legislate on such matters. That was the conclusion of the Scottish Liberal party, to which the federal party then has to listen.

Mr. Forsyth: Of course I am not saying that the Liberal conference in Scotland does not have the right to vote for the decriminalisation of cannabis—I am most grateful that the hon. Lady confirmed that it did so—but it is a thoroughly irresponsible message to send to the country and the Liberal party must take the consequences for what its members decide. It is no good Liberal Members coming to the House mealy-mouthed, trying to distance themselves from their decision. If the Liberal party is serious about tackling the problem of drugs in the country, it ought to join the Government and the official Opposition in having no truck with decriminalisation as a way forward.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): Does my hon. Friend find the hon. Lady's intervention rather strange, given that, as a member of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which discussed drug abuse in Scotland, she voted for the Labour chairman's draft report which called for the decriminalisation of cannabis and voted against an amendment by my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), seeking to remove that from the report?

Mr. Forsyth: Like all of us in the House, the hon. Lady is entitled to take a view. It is clear that the Liberal party sees decriminalisation as the way forward. We do not.

Mrs. Michie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forsyth: As I referred to the hon. Lady, I shall give way once more to her.

Mrs. Michie: That is kind of the Minister. If he speaks to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), he will find out exactly what happened in the Scottish Affairs Committee when I was not allowed to move an amendment on the Chairman's report, so it was put out lock, stock and barrel.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady is stuck with a party which has voted for the decriminalisation of cannabis, and all the protests, floundering and flummery we have heard this morning show that, in their hearts, she and her colleagues know that it is an absurd policy. I feel very sorry for them and hope they will use all the power and rhetoric at their command to get the policy changed. It is deeply irresponsible and underlines more clearly than anything else how unfitted the Liberal party is to hold any office or responsibility in Britain.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He must realise that we voted to set up a royal commission, and the party political posturing by his party does him no justice whatsoever. Drug abuse is a serious issue and everyone in the House should be working towards eradicating it.

Mr. Forsyth: If it is such a serious issue, it is a pity that the hon. Lady was not here to hear the excellent debate, instead of cruising in at the end of the debate. If she considers it to be so serious, I should have thought that she would want to hear the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne. I congratulate him on choosing this topic.

It is particularly difficult to assess the extent of drug misuse among young people, not least because it is a clandestine, illegal activity. However, all the evidence shows that drugs are a growing menace, particularly among the young.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said, in the inner cities 42 per cent. of 16 to 19-year-olds and 44 per cent. of 20 to 24-year-olds have taken drugs at some time. Drugs are not restricted to inner cities; they afflict rural communities as well. There is not a community or school that is immune from the menace, nor is drug misuse a problem peculiar to Britain; all the indicators show it is a growing problem across Europe.

Whatever the experience of others, however, we must be concerned about what is happening in Britain. Why do youngsters get involved in drugs? For many teenagers, any illicit drug use tends to be occasional or experimental rather than habitual. For those young people who at the weekend take cannabis, LSD, amphetamines or other drugs, it is no longer a conspicuous statement of anti-authoritarianism; indeed, it is much more a matter of fashion, of "picking and mixing" among licit and illicit

intoxicants, in the words of Professor Howard Parker of the university of Manchester. Some of the key leisure industries of our time—popular music and, above all, television, provide the necessary backdrop by placing drug misuse prominently in the fast lane of soap opera life. Key developments in the popularisation of drug use include its spread among young people of all social classes, coupled with the growth of an extremely pervasive black market.

Drug misuse attacks the fabric of our society and the welfare of individuals in different ways. We know that drugs may directly cause or contribute to other criminal behaviour. Without doubt, a proportion of all acquisitive crime is committed to obtain the funds to purchase drugs, but those funds also come from a wide range of sources—legitimate earnings, state benefits, prostitution, begging, and so on.

Drug addiction is a serious health problem in Britain. Addiction or experimentation with drugs has serious and dangerous physical effects. Young people need to know that they can never be sure what substance they are taking, how strong it is and how their minds or bodies will react. The deaths of young people who have taken Ecstasy at raves, perhaps for the first time, are all too tragic a reminder of the ultimate price which is paid.

As well as the physical consequences, drug misuse can have a devastating effect on a young person's life at school and college and in employment, training and personal and social relationships. Taking drugs is illegal and there is a real risk of prosecution or even imprisonment. Family life may be disrupted by the worry that children may be involved in drugs. Families can be thrown into turmoil when a young person is found to have a drugs problem.

On a wider scale, drugs can harm entire communities. The greatest concern is crime committed by addicts to pay for drugs. Drugs misusers, particularly those dependent on drugs such as heroin or crack cocaine, can become involved in committing acquisitive crimes to help to fund it.

Drugs are a threat to the whole of society, but the young are particularly at risk. Our first response to the problem must be to reduce the supply of drugs as much as possible. There are three essential elements to our fight against the dealers and traffickers who supply drugs to young people. First, we must have effective, vigorous enforcement action. Secondly, genuine tough penalties must be available to the courts to deal with those whose involvement in that evil trade is established. There was consensus in the House today that the pushers and traffickers of drugs should be given no place to hide. The legislative framework is already in place. Trafficking in drugs such as cocaine and heroin carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Thirdly, we must ensure that the courts have the powers to seize drug traffickers' ill-gotten assets, and we introduced that power in the Drugs Trafficking Offences Act 1986.

I believe that, with concerted and innovative action on the prevention and education front, we can have a positive influence on young people's attitudes and behaviour. We have examples that such changes can be made: witness the 60 per cent. reduction over the past 10 years in the number of fatal and serious road casualties involving drink driving—a reduction due in no small measure to the publicity campaign which started in the late 1970s.

We have heard today about the terrible threat posed by drugs. Drugs are widely available and young people are experimenting with them and putting themselves at great risk. Those who get hooked risk their health, the well-being of their families and their lives. Drugs also generate crime and damage the lives of many innocent people in the process.

We must tackle drugs misuse together. We look to the police and customs to continue their vital work in tracking down the traffickers and dealers and in intercepting the drugs being targeted at us.

We look to the courts to punish severely those found guilty of trafficking and dealing. But we must all become involved to protect our young people from the scourge: parents, teachers, youth workers, police officers, probation officers and representatives of all the other agencies involved must work together with young people, with sensitivity and understanding, to inform and educate them about the dangers of drug misuse. Co-operation and partnership are the key.

The Green Paper contains our strategic plan, which proposes the most far-reaching action plan on drugs. It focuses on what the Government and other agencies, nationally and locally, can do over the next three years to tackle the problem. The strategy is founded on the principle of partnership. At the heart of that strategy are proposals to help young people to resist drugs. I am sure that the House would wish to do all that it can to achieve that important goal. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne on raising the subject in today's debate and welcome the Labour party's constructive approach to the issue.

Breast Cancer Services

11.30 am

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I shall first explain why I am introducing a debate on this distressing subject. First, in purely chronological terms, an all-party group on breast cancer was formed about one year ago today. The hon. Members—including my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who are present—who were instrumental in setting it up were rightly determined that the group should not consist only of women. I think that that is why I was urged to attend meetings and was installed as secretary.

I have attended all the group's meetings. A string of experts have talked to the group over the past year to explain the problems and issues involved in breast cancer. We have all been struck by the unanimous message given by those experts, and it is that message that I and others want to relay today.

The second reason for the debate is a particularly Scottish one. Half way through last year, a campaign was formed in Scotland called the Scottish Breast Cancer Campaign. It has been a truly remarkable campaign; it was begun by a woman of tremendous drive and determination called Audrey Jones. With great energy and organisation, she created a network throughout Scotland that has campaigned on breast cancer services and research. It is on those two issues that I want to focus this morning.

The network's efforts culminated last Tuesday in a magnificent lobby of Parliament and a march on Downing street, with a petition of more than 200,000 signatures, obtained in less than six months. That was merely the end of the first phase of the campaign and the group is now determined that the campaign should link up with groups in England—it wants a United Kingdom campaign. That is why I am pleased that today's debate is on not just a Scottish issue, but a United Kingdom one. The problems and challenges are the same in Scotland, England and Wales.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I fully accept what my hon. Friend says about this being a United Kingdom-wide debate, but is not it deeply disappointing that there is no Scottish Office Minister present to listen to it?

Mr. Chisholm: I would have to agree with my hon. Friend on that, but we shall see what the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), says. I wrote to the Scottish Minister responsible for health, who is in another place—which always creates problems during Scottish health debates—and suggested that he should have a word with the Under-Secretary of State. I hope that he has managed to give at least a brief message to the Minister who is to reply.

As I learnt more about the subject, I became more aware of the scale of the problem. I was immediately struck by the horrendous statistics on breast cancer in this country. I learnt that one in 12 women is likely to develop it and two thirds of those women will die. According to the chief medical officer, the survival rate here is worse than in other European countries and north America. The mortality rates for breast cancer in the United Kingdom are the worst in the world. Another stark fact that drives the message home is that breast cancer is the single biggest killer for women between the ages of 35 and 54. A sobering and shocking thought is that, in the course of today's one-and-a-half hour debate, three more women will die of breast cancer.

It is not just the statistics that are horrendous—we have all heard terrible stories about the contrasts in treatment that women receive. We hear of misdiagnoses, long waiting times for women being referred for initial diagnosis and inadequate treatment. Balanced against that, we also hear of excellent treatment in many of the breast cancer units, such as that in my home city of Edinburgh.

The stories about things going wrong are not just media scare stories. The fundamental message given to the group by the experts was that there is a tremendous unevenness in the treatment received by women. That is the key message that the experts have given to us—they want something done, and it is up to us as politicians to take up that message and do something about it.

One of the experts who spoke to us was Professor Karol Sikora, professor of clinical oncology at Hammersmith. He has expressed the problem as follows:

> "Britain's high death rate for breast cancer is not due to lack of medical knowledge, but to bad management. America has a higher incidence of breast cancer—one in eight of the female population. But proportionally a staggering 50 per cent. fewer women die. The difference is that in America diagnosis and treatment are organized better.
>
> In Britain, surviving breast cancer is a lottery. The recent mortality-rate 'atlas' released by the Department of Health shows shocking geographical variations."

The problem can be considered in terms of when people are referred for treatment and, more importantly, where people are referred for treatment. There was an example of the time problem in Scotland recently at Ninewells hospital in Dundee. Due to a staff shortage, some women had to wait three months before they were seen for an initial diagnosis—because of the campaigning in Scotland, that problem appears to have been sorted out. Women must be referred promptly once there is a suspicion that something is wrong.

The issue of where women are referred is even more important. According to the experts who talked to us, the key issue is whether women go to a specialist unit where there are experts who deal with breast cancer on a regular basis. The experts said that the most alarming factor was that so many women are still referred to general surgeons or medical staff who do not deal with the specific problem for a great enough proportion of their time. The experts explained that that was the fundamental problem in the organisation of breast cancer services.

I was alarmed by the statistics for some—I think, two—Thames regions. Only 20 per cent. of women referred for breast cancer surgery went to hospitals where more than 100 women were operated on in a year. Some 25 per cent. went to hospitals where between 75 and 99 women were dealt with, 20 per cent. went to hospitals where between 50 and 74 women were dealt with and 22 per cent. went to hospitals where between 25 and 49 women were dealt with. Some 9 per cent. went to hospitals where between 10 and 24 women were operated on for breast cancer.

I asked for figures for the whole of England and Wales this week, but was told that they were not available. I received figures for Scotland and they show that the scale of the problem is not quite so dramatic there. However,

we know that many women in Scotland go to general surgeons who are not used to dealing with people who have breast cancer.

It is the experts who are telling us all that. Some medical practitioners are saying that some of their colleagues should not deal with breast cancer because they do not spend a sufficient amount of their time dealing with it. We are told that half of women are referred to general surgeons when they should be referred to specialists. That is the core of the organisational problem that has to be tackled. One result of that is that the treatment that women receive is not as good as it should be. Without getting too technical, I can give one example of that.

I am told that when women are operated on, lymph glands should be sampled routinely. It is staggering that 50 per cent. of women under the age of 50 who should have such sampling do not get it. We hope that that will change. We are told that women under 50 should be given chemotherapy routinely, but the experts tell us that that often does not happen. The problem has been graphically described to us.

The answer has to some extent been taken on board by the expert advisory group on cancer set up by the Government. It has come up with the model of cancer services centralised in cancer centres, of which 20 are proposed for England and Wales, and cancer units, of which a much larger number is proposed. I thought that the same model was to be introduced in Scotland, but when I wrote to the Minister of State, Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, about the matter, he said that the model might not be appropriate. At present, we have five cancer centres and no cancer units. I believe now, however, that the Scottish Office is beginning to take the problem on board. In Scotland, we certainly need a large number of cancer units to complement the five cancer centres.

Dr. Godman: I am given to understand that Lord Fraser, who is the Scottish Office Minister with responsibility for health, is to appear before members of the Scottish Grand Committee to be questioned on health matters. Perhaps that would be an appropriate moment to question him more closely on this important subject.

Mr. Chisholm: My hon. Friend's point illustrates to our colleagues the difficulties that we have in Scotland in questioning the Scottish Minister responsible for health.

The best general structure of cancer services has been agreed, but specialised breast units are needed within it to complement the cancer centres. The British Breast Group has published a study and argued for specialist breast units. It said that they should be located either within the cancer centres or within the cancer units. So everyone knows what the correct model is.

Within the specialist breast units, surgeons, radiologists, oncologists, nurse specialists and others would all work in co-operation in teams. It has been agreed that that is the correct model, but implementation of the model may well be another matter. There are two sets of problems with implementation. They are resource problems and problems connected with the internal market. We do not want to be too party political on this issue, but we must face up to the fact that the internal market creates obstacles.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): My hon. Friend was at the same meeting that I attended, at which consultants and professors told us that the abolition of the regional health authorities was a great worry because they had played such a crucial role in setting up the screening programme. The internal market is fragmenting the programme.

Mr. Chisholm: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that purely English issue. I have had correspondence with the British Medical Association about the effect of reorganisation on screening. I hope to read some of its letter later to convey that particularly English problem.

Professor Karol Sikora has said that about £300 million would be needed to provide the required number of specialists, including breast care nurses, and additional equipment for the units. That nettle will have to be grasped if the model is to be implemented. As for the internal market problems, Professor Sikora made the point that the development of the internal market meant that purchasers were less likely to buy from specialist units because they tended to be more expensive. That issue will come up next week when the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund brings out a directory of services to be provided to GPs so that they can refer patients to the best unit. There will be a problem in whether health boards have contracts or would be willing to have such contracts with those units.

There are also problems on the provider side. Many provider units may not want to lose their breast cancer work as part of their general surgery. In a private conversation, a leading consultant told me that, particularly in England, many general surgeons wanted to keep the work because it was part of their private practice. That is another issue that will have to be tackled. It is important that breast surgery and breast cancer treatment should be on separate contracts. They should not be part of general surgery contracts. They should be contracted for separately. That is another recommendation of the British Breast Group report.

We are told that one of the differences between Britain and other countries in its provision of breast cancer services is that we have far fewer oncologists, both clinical and medical. That is another funding issue, which is also connected to the issue of special units. I have been told in answers to parliamentary questions to which I have received replies this week that the number of oncologists has not increased very much. There are slightly more for the whole of the United Kingdom. We now have 272 clinical and 68 medical oncologists. To put that into perspective, I am told that there are 2,500 medical oncologists in France.

We have also been told that each clinical oncologist in Britain sees 560 new patients a year. The recommendation is 350. We are told that in America they see 200 and in Norway they see a staggering figure of only 75. So there is the problem of the number of oncologists, who are essential to the work of breast cancer units and general cancer units and centres.

Apart from the problem with the number of oncologists, there is a problem with their funding. That became an issue in Scotland last year. As a result, I tabled a question about the matter. I was told that seven out of the 11 medical oncologists in Scotland last year were funded by charity. I was not being mischievous when I tabled another question last week. I simply wanted to know how much the position had changed by now. I am told that the Government think that five are funded by charity out of

[Mr. Chisholm]

12. Something strange is going on there which will have to be investigated. At least the Scottish Office had an answer. The English Department of Health does not know how many oncologists are funded by charity. We have been told by the experts who came to our group that it is a large number. That is a scandalous position, given the key nature of their work in the model of cancer treatment that is proposed.

Apart from their work in treating breast cancer and other forms of cancer, medical oncologists are essential for research. Research is the second aspect of today's debate. Once again, we are confronted by the two problems of resources and the internal market. On the resource side, the experts—I keep referring to them deliberately because all that I know has been told to me by the people who know about those matters—are unanimous in what they say. They tell me that in Britain uniquely a large proportion of cancer research is funded by charity.

We have been shown graphs, which show that in other countries research is funded mainly by Government money, with a little charity money. In Britain, it is the reverse. That is a fundamental problem, not only because it is the Government's responsibility to fund research, but because charitable funding in the nature of things is short term. The experts say that they need long-term funding. Charitable funding also fluctuates. I noticed recently that the funds of one of the cancer charities fell by £6 million last year. That creates problems for research.

I have tabled some questions on breast cancer research in particular. It appears that there was an increase in funding between 1991-92 and the following year. Some money—about £700,000—came from the Department of Health and less than £100,000 came from the Scottish Office. Proportionately, however, that was a greater contribution than that of the English Department of Health. The Medical Research Council money, being the main source of Government funding, was £1.6 million in 1991-92 and £3.1 million in 1992-93, which appears to be progress. However, I note that last March the Minister responsible for science said, in referring to the £3.1 million:

"Included in that figure was £836,000 which was directly related to basic laboratory research into cancer."—[*Official Report*, 29 March 1994; Vol. 240, c. 680.]

Of course, that is vital work, but I wonder whether the basis for the figures has been changed from year to year.

I do not want to quibble, but we need to put into perspective what £3.1 million means compared with the sort of money that is needed. A graphic illustration of that is the fact that the Royal Marsden hospital is trying to raise £15 million for just one project. Professor Baum, Marsden's professor of surgery who deals with breast cancer, told us that that research was absolutely essential. He said that it was to look at the molecular biology of normal cells and the genetic defects that result in their transformation into cancerous cells. He said that that was the most hopeful area for a research breakthrough. The context, therefore, is that £15 million is needed just for the one project, yet total Government funding for breast cancer amounts to only just over £3 million. There is obviously a funding problem.

There is also an internal market problem with research. An article in the *British Medical Journal* on 13 August 1994 by the United Kingdom Co-ordinating Committee on Cancer Research showed the results of a survey of contributors to clinical trials in breast cancer. The survey found that half had difficulties, many of which sprung from the nature of the internal market in the health service.

The article stated:

"The financial imperative from a market based NHS to avoid the 'unnecessary' expense in undertaking a trial is the basis of real conflict. If, for example, clinicians really are uncertain about which of two treatments is best, why not settle for the cheaper? But the NHS has a commitment to improve treatment. This requires a commitment to undertake and complete trials, accepting that such a strategy carries financial implications . . . A problem now being encountered"—

and this repeats something that I mentioned in a different context earlier—

"that is a direct result of the new purchaser-provider agreements is that patients are being treated in local hospitals rather than being referred to specialist centres. In recent years several studies have shown that there is a survival advantage if treatment is given at a specialist centre, and this advantage will be lost if contracts are increasingly given to local hospitals that lack specialist cancer services. Also, as it is generally the specialist centres which enter patients into trials a decrease in referrals to cancer centres means that there is a reduced pool of patients being invited to participate."

The article explains that there are also problems because of the new set-up with trusts relating to insurance, the storing of samples and increased paperwork. Leading British clinical researchers have expressed concerns about the new health service set-up as well as about the underlying funding problems.

I wish briefly to raise two aspects related to research. One area where research is required is screening. That has already been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax. There are many issues relating to screening. A *British Medical Journal* article just two weeks ago said that it is time for Britain to screen women over 50 every two years. Research has shown that, among women being screened in their third year, the number found with cancerous growths was much the same as the number among the unscreened. In other words, those women should have been screened after two, not three years.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Surely even every two years is not adequate for screening. What is really needed is a comprehensive public education programme so that women constantly screen themselves. A lump in a breast can become fatal within a few weeks of it first appearing. We need a huge public education programme to raise the profile of the issue, so that women constantly screen themselves. There is no substitute for that.

Mr. Chisholm: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has a point, but it cannot replace the screening programme. We should follow the example of other countries where a two-year interval is normal for women over 50.

The article said that better results would be obtained if two mammograms were taken—indeed, a 20 per cent. improvement in the detection rate. It said that there would be another 15 per cent. improvement if two radiologists read the results. The article also said that considerable financial and staffing implications were involved in bringing about such improvements.

Another issue is screening of the over-65s. That matter is often forgotten. Although the largest number of women who develop breast cancer are over 65, there is no routine screening for them. There is also the issue of high-risk young women. I am aware of the debate about screening young women—I will not go into that now—but something must be done to ensure that such women are looked after properly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax mentioned the effect of the Health Authorities Bill on the screening programme. I feel duty bound to read out a brief excerpt from a letter from the British Medical Association:

"We remain unclear on how the programme will operate after HA reorganisation . . . All cancer registrations and efficient data handling depend upon integrated computer systems. The complexities and financial implications of replicating this at district level are considerable. Devolving the programme down to local level will demand many more personnel in order to make medical and clinical audit meaningful. It is unlikely to be cost-effective at local level and clinical audit between health authorities and providers is bound to be compromised."

There is great concern about the environmental causes of cancer. A recent television programme featured the pesticide lindane. I and other hon. Members wrote to Ministers about that. Lord Fraser, the Scottish Minister responsible for health, said that the Advisory Committee on Pesticides was currently reviewing lindane's agricultural uses. I hope that the review will be completed speedily, because organochlorine pesticides are banned in most countries. Lindane is the only one still widely used in this country. Indeed, its use has doubled during the past seven years. I hope that the experts will speedily look at the evidence from Israel, which was presented in the television programme, and also at evidence from America, which suggests that lindane stimulates the production of a hormone that damages DNA.

I want to explain how America has dealt with the problem of breast cancer. Figures that I gave earlier show that although breast cancer occurs more frequently in America—one in eight women rather than one in 12—proportionately, 50 per cent. fewer women die. Yet America, with a so much better record than Britain, had an enormous campaign. I like to compare it with our Scottish campaign, although it was on a different scale. Proportionately, of course, the two campaigns are quite similar because the American campaign collected 2.5 million signatures, while the Scottish campaign has already collected 200,000—so in terms of population, the Scottish campaign has probably done better.

The American campaign was thrown on President Clinton's desk and he took action immediately. His Health Secretary convened a conference, which established a national action plan for breast cancer. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax may say something more about that later. Part of that action plan was a shifting of $210 million from the defence budget to breast cancer research. The British Government should look to that example. This country's problem, as I have explained, is more serious than America's, so a correspondingly greater response is required of our Government.

The Scottish campaign and its members are my inspiration and guiding light on this issue. Their petition asked for more resources for specialist units and for more Government funding for breast cancer research. They are determined to continue their campaign and to extend it throughout the United Kingdom. With the help of several hon. Members, that is what they intend to do in the months ahead.

I know that there is a great deal of activity on this front. The Select Committee is investigating the matter; my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax will introduce a Bill on this very subject. We are determined that this most distressing issue gets the response from the Government that it most assuredly deserves and requires.

12 noon

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I compliment the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) on drawing the House's attention to the serious subject of breast cancer. As he rightly said, the incidence of breast cancer in England and Wales is the highest in the world; it is in fact five times as high as in Japan, causing about 15,000 deaths a year. It is interesting to note the distinctly different impact of breast cancer on the various socio-economic groups in this country: there is 50 per cent. more breast cancer among group 1 women than among women in groups 4 and 5.

The hon. Member for Leith was right to draw attention to the need for improved breast cancer services. I entirely agree with that objective. He was also right to draw attention to the problems that there have been with treatment and care. We should not, however, underestimate the difficulties of judging the best course of action at any particular time. Many of these problems have arisen simply because of a lack of knowledge or because of faulty medical judgments—entirely understandable, but based on limited scientific knowledge of the illness.

The hon. Gentleman was right to juxtapose the issues of services and research, because the former so crucially depend on the latter. It was to be regretted that he did not draw enough attention to the real progress that has been made and to the distinct improvement in the services that are available. First and most important is the national screening programme. This country was the first in the European Community to bring in comprehensive national screening—an important international first, and a sign of the importance that the Government attach to dealing with the problems posed by breast cancer.

The hon. Gentleman also did not draw enough attention to the Calman report, published last year, which stressed the need for reorganisation and a national programme to ensure that the swiftest, most effective forms of treatment were brought to bear on women who were found to have developed breast cancer. The report distinguished between three important levels of care. First, it stressed primary care; secondly, the need for designated units; and, thirdly, the need for designated cancer centres. Speaking about the importance of specialist centres, the hon. Member for Leith did not give sufficient emphasis to the relevant part played by primary care services and by the designated units at a more local level, which are an important part of the process.

The hon. Gentleman was right to stress the need for similar standards of care throughout the country. He was right to focus on the deficiencies in that area, but I was not sure that his simple emphasis on centres of excellence was necessarily the best approach.

The Calman report's conclusions have already been acted on in many areas. I should like to draw the House's attention to the real progress that has been made in the

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

Bromley area, which includes my constituency. Bromley hospital is starting its first breast care clinic later this month. It will be a multidisciplinary clinic, and there will be one surgeon who is already there and a new one who is a specialist in breast cancer. At the same clinic there will be a breast cancer specialist oncologist, and a nurse counsellor who has been specially trained for the purpose. Finally, there will be a personal prosthetics expert on hand to help women who may need support.

All that specialist provision will be available at one local clinic. That is a big step forward. It is important to ensure that, while the regional centres of excellence are available when needed, there are also local, accessible services to provide a quick response for women who have tested positive or who have been referred on by their GPs. This saves waiting and anxiety, because it enables testing and results to be acted on locally and swiftly.

I am pleased about this step forward in my area, and I hope that it will be repeated across the country. Apart from producing a great improvement in care, it will also enable much of the later treatment to be carried out locally in a co-ordinated fashion. There will be facilities for performing chemotherapy and some surgical procedures, but when necessary patients will automatically be referred to one of the nearby regional centres of excellence.

There is no question of any patient being given second-rate treatment or being diverted to some secondary, poorer tier of service instead of to the regional centre if that centre is the right place for the patient. The clinical judgment on where a patient should be treated, however, will depend on how her form of cancer has presented. As most people involved in the field will know, that will vary considerably from one case to another.

I should like to refer briefly to the important screening programme. The Forrest committee reported in 1987 that screening was the single most important way of reducing deaths from breast cancer, and predicted that as many as 25 per cent. of deaths from it could be prevented by the year 2000, giving an average 20 years more life to the people who were afflicted. If everyone called attended screenings, 40 per cent. of deaths could be prevented. That was why breast screening was introduced nationally.

I should like to enter a few words of caution, although I do not want them misinterpreted, because I fully support breast screening and believe it to be important. It would be wrong to think that screening is a panacea and that no problems will result from it. There are four or five areas of difficulty, of which the first is false expectation. The fear is that, with the availability of universal screening, people will relax and think that the problem has been solved: because screening is available, early detection is possible, so a cure will follow. That is of course not correct. A cure does not always follow, even with very early detection. There is of course a much greater statistical chance of a cure, but it is still limited.

Secondly, there is the difficulty of unnecessary treatment. Any suspected form of cancer detected at an early stage is the subject of medical uncertainty as to whether it will develop into malignant cancer or turn out to be benign. There is thus the danger of unnecessary treatment following on from mass screening. More research needs to be done on that; it would certainly not be beneficial to put women through the trauma and pain of treatment if that treatment is later found to be entirely unnecessary. It is also a complete waste of resources when money and expertise are devoted to putting right a problem that was not there in the first place. Important research is required in that respect. There is always the problem of cancers being missed because of technical limits on screening processes. However efficient they may be, because cancer varies from individual to individual some cases will be overlooked. Serious failures can occur in the computerised administration and follow-up systems, and much attention should be paid to making them as perfect as possible. We must be realistic, however, and accept that perfection cannot be achieved in dealing with so many people, and that there will always be an element of failure.

The extent of screening, medical judgment, the age of screening, and how frequent it should be—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin)—type of screening, the radiation and other risks and other forms of care should be researched. Over the years, experts have changed considerably their assessment of appropriate treatment—whether there should be minor or major surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy and, if so, which comes first.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) was right to stress that research is the most important factor in tackling breast cancer. Research will dictate the most effective action in detection and treatment. Let us hope that it will ultimately produce answers to the causes and development of breast cancer, and that steps can then be taken to prevent it. After all, prevention is always better than a cure.

12.11 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) on securing his Adjournment debate. He is a hard-working member and secretary of the all-party group on breast cancer. I am joint chair with the hon. Members for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). Its members have been on a learning curve for 12 months, but the group is a success.

I became more interested in the subject in 1992, when I was visited by two breast care nurses who were worried about the care and service given to suffers in the Yorkshire region. I commissioned a survey of the 12 regional health authorities in England to obtain a better picture. They were asked to provide details of the number of their breast clinics, breast care nurses and support groups by district, to assess provision and the contribution that each region was making to the national screening programme.

It is important to understand the scale of the problem. The British Breast Group's latest statistics show that the incidence of breast cancer in the UK is 25,000 cases per annum, which is among the highest in the world. Mortality is also high, at 16,000 deaths a year. Apparently, the survival rate in this country is poorer than in other European countries or the United States. The cause of high incidence and poor survival is unknown, but the latter may partly be attributable to poor management of the disease, which should be seriously examined.

According to research, the death rate from breast cancer has remained virtually unchanged over the past 50 years, and women are paying the price. They are the foot soldiers of that dreadful disease. Their suffering is

matched only by that of their families after the premature death of a sufferer. As my hon. Friend said, it is important not to view breast cancer as just a woman's disease because it brings devastation and grief to families affected by a sufferer's early death.

I pay tribute to Jacqui Bokowsky and my hard-pressed staff for their work on my report, which left me convinced that the screening programme saved lives because the Government acknowledged the importance of funding it and set aside £25 million.

The other important aspect was the national nature of the programme. There is great concern about the disbanding of regional health authorities, which played a crucial role in screening. They acted as the strategic authorities and did a superb job. I do not want to seem grudging, because I congratulate the Government on implementing that programme, which was an important step forward. I should like it to be extended to provide screening every two years and for the over 65s.

Unfortunately, four regional authorities did not complete the questionnaire and so our data are not comprehensive, but it was still a worthwhile exercise. The Library also provided statistics. Our findings were shocking. Some regions provided an excellent service while others were poor. It became clear that the service was fragmented, and geographical location had a bearing on the treatment that patients received. As one might expect, public transport problems and widespread poverty in some regions prevented some women from taking full advantage of the facilities on offer. As my hon. Friend said, some treatments vary widely.

In some inner cities, the only provision was the local out-patients department. The north-west region had breast clinic provision for only 0.29 per cent. of women per 100,000 population. In the Yorkshire and north-west Thames regions, the figure was 0.85 per cent. The survey also revealed that breast care nurses—one third of whom are provided by the Macmillan fund—form the mainstay of care groups and after-treatment. Their work is vital in providing continuing care to patients in hospital, but also in the community—to patients, their husbands and families. Those nurses are highly valued by women. Members of Bosom Friends, a support group in Bradford—some of whose members are very young—told me that their breast care nurses, in particular Norma Russell, make a tremendous difference to their lives. She works hours of overtime for nothing. Should we skimp on such a valued service?

Cuts have been made in the service, even though the incidence of breast cancer is as bad as ever. The working party's report was endorsed by the British Breast Group in July. It is adamant that services could be improved by grouping them together in specialist units. It states that all patients with breast disease should have access to the highest-quality care. It emphasises the importance of accurate and timely diagnosis, appropriate treatment and follow-up, effective communication, which means breast care nurses being in place, access to other specialist facilities and the provision of high-quality services between specialists from different disciplines. They include surgery, radiology, pathology, medical, clinical oncology, nursing and palliative care. It is essential that those multidisciplinary teams are at set up together in specialist units.

There will be a problem, because purchasers might be tempted to buy from a provider who is buying in the service of an oncologist for just a few hours a week. It will be nothing like as good as a specialist team. We know that because of the experience of the specialist hospitals in London, which are funded only in the short-term and are worried about their future. For anyone with an interest in the subject, the working party's report is well worth reading and it contains excellent recommendations.

Next week, I shall introduce a ten-minute Bill. It is an attempt to persuade the Government that we need a national action plan, such as that in America, to tackle this killer disease. The all-party group has had tremendous help from specialists in the past 12 months and, above all, from the women who have suffered from this dreadful disease. They want and deserve a national action plan. I hope that, when I present my Bill next week, the Government will take note of what they are saying to us.

12.21 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Last week, I visited the Cancer Research Institute, which has a world-class reputation for research and is based in my constituency. It works in close partnership with the Royal Marsden hospital.

I was given a guided tour by Professor Peter Garland, the chief executive of the institute, who leads 600 staff, making it the largest research institute in the world dedicated to the conquest of cancer. In particular, it has done excellent work in connection with breast cancer. It has recently pioneered important genetic work allowing it more accurately to identify those women at risk from breast cancer, who would consequently need special screening and preventive measures. It has been discovered, for instance, that some women are likely to have more than one gene, inherited from the family, which predisposes them towards the development of breast cancer. Indeed, it has been found that such genes are responsible for 5 to 10 per cent. of cancers, or about 1,000 of the 15,000-plus people who die each year in the United Kingdom from that disease. Perhaps a woman who has been identified as being at risk from breast cancer could be put on a trial new drug called Tamoxifen. It is part of a large, international trial, which, I hope, will substantially prevent the disease from starting in the first place.

The institute has a very exciting programme of work in curative measures for other areas of cancer: ranging from treatment of testicular cancer, 90 per cent. of which is treatable; to tremendous advances in treating ovarian cancer; to developing a vaccination to prevent and eliminate cancer of the cervix; to treating childhood leukaemias, and much other work. One will understand why I am so enormously proud that the institute is in my constituency.

The tantalising thing about success is the intense frustration which is felt: in wanting good work to continue, work which, of necessity, is held back through the constant battle against other competition for more resources. The real question that I ask the Government is: are they really giving essential research the full support that it undoubtedly deserves? I congratulate the Government on making the United Kingdom the first country in the European Union to develop and introduce breast cancer screening, but it is no use embarking on further major cancer screening programmes if the follow-through, in terms of research and treatment, is not

[Lady Olga Maitland]

given the fullest possible back-up, otherwise one will be faced with only half a loaf—the cancer identified but not adequately treated. Successful treatments come about only by a heavy commitment to research.

The Medical Research Council works wonders, but it has a finite budget of around £210 million and must cover all diseases. The MRC is excellent for fundamental work, much of which is generic, but quite simply it does not have the resources to carry everything through to application. The university sector is mainly supported in terms of educational activities. Cancer is but one subject or specialty among many, and few universities can put together a critical mass for research.

The cancer charities raise and spend some £200 million a year, mainly on research but also to improve services. Without them, the quality and extent of research and service in the United Kingdom would be greatly weakened. I am not at all happy at the thought of cancer charities substituting for, rather than complementing, Government support. In the case of the Cancer Research Institute, £25 million is required to run 600-plus staff.

The Cancer Research Institute receives just £2.5 million from the Higher Education Funding Council for England; even it recognised, by its own calculations and procedures, a shortfall of at least £2 million, but it has refused to do anything about it, except for vague promises in the future. It is not acceptable to argue that if the council allocated more resources to the institute, it would be to the detriment of other universities, the great majority of which, by the HEFC's own assessment, rate less well, often markedly so. That shortfall is a substantial handicap to the institute's work. It makes up the shortfall with charitable moneys, which go towards heat, lighting and sundry expenses rather than the direct research for which it is intended. More than that, the HEFC is contradicting its own stated policy. It should be buying the very best research that it can. The fact is that it declines to do so in the case of the institute.

As Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer, the former chief executive of the Universities Funding Council, said:

"Within each subject, it must therefore be right to concentrate most of the research funding in those departments that are likely to provide the best value for money."

In my view, he is absolutely right. It is very short-sighted to set up a ambitious screening programme without a fully supported research programme to give the very best possible treatment to all patients, otherwise one would be putting the cart before the horse by screening without the back-up research facilities to ensure that a sick woman becomes well or that we can prevent cancers from developing in the first place.

12.27 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I shall be brief, as hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

We should all put on record our thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) for securing the debate and for speaking so well on the subject. As the report of the British Breast Group working party said:

"Breast cancer mortality in the UK is the highest in the world. The reasons for this are poorly understood, but the wide dispersal of services for breast cancer patients may be a contributing factor and certainly impedes clinical research."

If ever there were a brief description of the horrendous problem and of the need for the Government to introduce a national programme as quickly as possible, that is the summary of it. I hope that, next week, the ten-minute Bill to be introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) will get a clear run in the House, and that for once a ten-minute Bill will be successful in changing policy.

The reasons for breast cancer are poorly understood and are not evenly shared between different socio-economic groups. Indeed, if anything, it appears that the higher income groups suffer slightly more greatly from breast cancer, but they also have greater longevity anyway, so there may be a connection there. The incidence is much higher in western Europe and north America than in what we choose to call third-world countries. There may well be environmental and dietary connections. There are an awful lot of possible connections that need to be examined as rapidly as possible. In the United States, President Clinton responded quickly and magnificently to the request for a national action plan, and that is something for which he—as must all the men and women throughout the United States who campaigned for it—be applauded. President Clinton should also be congratulated on the fact that he was prepared to shift money from the defence budget to a national action programme. I would love to think that the British Government will see the error of their ways in financing yet another Trident submarine and start shifting those resources into health care; we should all be better off as a result.

The seminar held in the House in December was, I think, very valuable: I could not attend, but I have read reports of it. A recurring theme was the need for multidisciplinary teams to work together from a single specialist centre. All the evidence suggests that the dispersal of services and the lack of centres of excellence lead to inadequate care. Moreover, they lead to differing standards of care: the system that decides to whom a patient is referred is almost a lottery.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leith cited the Thames regional health authority. There is no earthly reason why the health authorities—all surrounding London—should not be able to look to one or two centres of excellence; that, surely, would be better than dispersal of services among certain hospitals. After all, one in 12 women in this country are likely to develop breast cancer, but only 40 per cent. of patients will be able to see specialist oncologists. The average number of patients seen by oncologists in the United Kingdom is 560—the highest number in Europe. The recommended number is only 350. That means that oncologists are overworked; the resources must be spread, and I hope that the Government will act.

One of the problems is that surgeons often have little experience of breast cancer. It is difficult for hon. Members who are not medically qualified to hold forth about the way in which patients are treated by individual doctors, but I feel that there is an overwhelming case for demanding specialist treatment. A surgeon who is a "generalist" is unlikely to have the time or the inclination to become a specialist. Far too many women are having mastectomies which could possibly have been avoided if treatment, or even screening, had been provided earlier.

There are also serious problems with radiotherapy. They have been highlighted by Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure—also known as RAGE—a group of women who have been given radiotherapy for breast

cancer. The organisation has heard from 1,400 women; some of the letters that it has received came from the families of women who died not from cancer but from the injuries caused by their treatment. In many instances, it appears that overdosing and serious side-effects were involved. I hope that the Minister will say that his Department is prepared to take an interventionist line, and set up a national action programme that will direct research appropriately and establish regional centres of excellence.

We have been considering the resources that should be made available to women suffering from breast cancer. As we are now in the age of the charter, let me suggest some services that should be available under such an arrangement. First, general practitioners should be able to refer patients promptly to a team specialising in the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer, including a consultant. The GP should not have to think, "Goodness, what do I do now? Where can I find a specialist?"

Secondly, the patient should be given a diagnosis within four weeks of being referred to a hospital. All too often, GPs in my community tell me that they spend hours on the telephone every day simply trying to refer patients to hospital. My main local hospital, the Whittington, can deal with no new cases—other than life-and-death emergencies in the local population—until April, because of inadequate funding. That in itself is a serious problem.

Patients also need a confirmed diagnosis before they consent to treatment, including surgery. There is still an information barrier between the patient and the medical professions. Every woman should be fully informed of all the implications of every kind of treatment that is available—or not available—before surgery. Patients should have access to specialist breast care nurses who are trained to provide information and psychological support: psychological support is vital to the person concerned, who is undergoing a very traumatic experience.

The national health service should enable patients to meet others who suffer from breast cancer. Too many people must deal with the horror of cancer in isolation. I have encountered cases of people who do not want to tell their families that they are suffering from such a disease: they are unable to share the experience with anyone. Although any promotion of such discussions between sufferers by the Department of Health would not be a medical action as such, I consider that the opportunity for sufferers to meet other patients and former patients is very important—as is the provision of information about support services for patients and their families, who can at least give them support and some understanding.

Breast cancer is a crucial issue on which this country has a dreadful record. We have had a short opportunity to raise that issue today; I hope that the Government will respond by devoting real resources and real action to it.

12.35 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak, and congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) on securing the debate. I also congratulate him and other members of the all-party breast cancer group—to which I belong—on the work that they have done. They have brought much into the open during the debate, and I endorse much of what has been said. As a result, this has been a very useful debate; perhaps we should discuss the subject more regularly.

It is difficult to imagine a disease that touches the lives of so many of our constituents. Every Member of Parliament has a direct interest in ensuring that the dreadful figures that have been given are improved. I want to enlarge on points that have already been raised—including, notably, the need for a national plan not just on screening but on research and treatment, along the lines of the model set out in the United States National Cancer Act of 1971.

It is interesting to note that the President himself has a cancer panel, such is the priority that the American Administration attach to the problem. It is, in fact, due to the still rather unfashionable President Nixon that the panel exists; President Clinton merely used legislation that was already on the statute book. We lack any legislation of that nature with which to tackle this huge disease. We probably spend less time discussing cancer than we spend discussing AIDS, which—in terms of the number of deaths that it causes—constitutes a tiny fraction of the problem created by breast cancer.

I want to concentrate in particular on the unfortunate group of women who belong to Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure. I became involved in the subject because one of my constituents suffered serious injury as a result of radiotherapy. We are fond of thinking that people who have been cured of breast cancer are fortunate, but a sizeable group of them have been afflicted by appalling and painful injuries of which they were given no warning when they were considering what treatment they should accept and what hope they had of a cure. Something must be done. The injuries occur at different rates, and at different treatment centres. That underlines what the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said about treatment being a lottery: there is a lack of consistency between different centres and different parts of the country, and the chances of injury at some hospitals are far greater than at others—I shall not name any hospitals. No one seems to know why that is.

The women concerned are suffering from very disabling effects. Some, like my constituent, are in constant pain, often so bad that they seek amputation of a limb. The radiation damage to their bodies often requires such amputation, or causes death. No Member of Parliament who has listened to the stories of those women can underestimate the pain and suffering that they experience.

I am able, however, to congratulate the Government on setting up a proper inquiry into the matter. Following meetings with the chief medical officer, the president of the Royal College of Radiologists, RAGE and Professor Karol Sikora, the Under-Secretary of State, my noble Friend Baroness Cumberlege, authorised an audit of brachialplexus neurologically related injuries, to be conducted by Dr. Thelma Bates and Dr. Richard Evans. It started on 1 September 1994 and its aim is simply to find out what has happened and why.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will continue to respond to RAGE's representations. I congratulate the Select Committee on Health on inviting RAGE to give evidence to its breast cancer inquiry. Let us hope that the Select Committee will continue to return to the subject on a regular basis.

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

We are fortunate that we are a generation that talks about the disease, which is prepared to discuss it and to raise its profile. I hope that the Government will continue to respond positively to the representations that are made to them on this subject.

12.40 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) on securing a debate on this important subject, on which a tremendous consensus appears to exist. I congratulate the all-party breast cancer group on its work. As we have heard, breast cancer is a common and, far too often, fatal disease. The statistics have been rehearsed already, but it is worth confirming that we have the highest breast cancer mortality rate in the world—its incidence is five times greater here than in countries such as Japan. One woman in 11 will develop breast cancer. Sadly, between 25,000 and 29,000 new cases arise every year.

Unfortunately, the reason for the high incidence of breast cancer in the United Kingdom is not fully understood. Obviously, further research is needed into the causes. It would appear that the disease is associated with western developed countries. There are high incidence rates in the United States of America, in Canada and in Europe, and some social and environmental factors have been stated as possible causes, including high-fat diet, hormone treatment, oral contraception, alcohol and stress, to name but a few.

Sadly, as the House has been told, each year between 13,000 and 15,000 deaths occur as a result of breast cancer. That is a grave cause for concern. It is the sixth commonest cause of death in the UK, and the commonest cause of death for women aged between 35 and 54. Clearly, we must address ourselves to prevention, to early diagnosis and, as we have heard, to better treatment. We should also, however, look towards researching the causes of breast cancer. I was interested to hear the comments of hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). The position is so bad in this country that we must deal with it. We cannot rely on charitable funding for research.

Breast cancer was recognised by the Government and included in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper. A target was set to reduce the breast cancer death rate in the population invited for screening by 25 per cent. by the year 2000. The rates have varied from 95.1 deaths per 100,000 of the population in 1990. The target is to reduce that figure to 71.3 deaths per 100,000. Problems still surround the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer, despite the setting of that target; hence the Government's expert advisory group on cancer, which reported in May last year.

Various opinions exist on the value of a screening programme. The *British Medical Journal* view of "The Health of the Nation" doubted the efficacy of screening and described the White Paper's targets as optimistic. In 1985, there were 98.3 deaths per 100,000 of the population; in 1990 the figure had reduced to only 95.1 per cent. So there could be some difficulty in achieving the target.

The journal suggested that the Government should take other steps. With an eye to this Friday's debate in the House, it stated:

"Above all else, it"—

that is, the Government—

"should make it clear that it is willing to reduce smoking through legislative means. Only then are screening, diet, information, and counselling kept in proportion."

Suggestions have been made that the screening interval is too long, and that an age limit set at 50 is too high. I accept that it has been found that the screening programme is more effective for post-menopausal women—hence the setting of the age level at between 50 and 65. Studies have been conducted, however, into what are known as "interval" cancers, which occur within the three-year screening time. According to a study in the North Western regional health authority, an increased number of interval cancers occurred between screenings.

I acknowledge that, in a circular in January this year, the Government set out guidance on screening, and required screening units to take two X-rays to try to ensure a more efficient screening programme, but perhaps we should begin to consider whether those interval cancers are "new" cancers, or existing cancers that have been misdiagnosed.

Sadly, errors of diagnosis have been made. It seems that errors occur with all screening programmes. In May 1994, all 90 screening units were required to check their clerical systems because of errors. Some 30 per cent. of the cancers highlighted in the study of interval cancers undertaken in the North Western regional health authority were subject to misdiagnosis.

It is clear that the treatment of breast cancer has not been as good as it could be. Many of the problems have been acknowledged—inequalities of treatment, geographically and economically; the low number of cancer specialists; the internal market; the purchaser-provider split and how that impacts on the purchase of cancer care; and women treated by specialists who perhaps have inadequate training or experience in particular cancers, especially breast cancer. We have heard from hon. Members about delays in referrals.

The women who are diagnosed as suffering from breast cancer deserve sympathetic and expert treatment from specialists who are experienced in the disease. The inequalities were exposed by the Thames cancer registry recently. *Health Service Journal* stated in September 1994:

"The Thames study highlighted 'variations and inequalities' in treatment and said the chances of a woman surviving the disease were 'likely to depend on where she lives and how well off she is'."

That is a disgraceful position, which must be dealt with, and which I understand the Government will deal with when they respond to the expert advisory group.

We have heard that the abolition of regional health authorities will bring about an uncertain future for many screening programmes and cancer registries. I hope that the Minister will assure the House that screening programmes will continue, and that the registries will be able to continue their work under the new regime. That information is crucial to research in this matter.

It is sad that, in this country, five-year survival rates can vary by almost 20 per cent., depending on how affluent the area is where a person resides. That was brought out by the regional health authority study. One

can only guess at the variations in affluence that might occur between various parts of the country, north and south. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) mentioned the problems that she had trying to find out what treatments were available in Yorkshire.

I have of necessity to be extremely brief, but I wish to refer quickly to the Macmillan cancer care fund, which last year issued a 10-point programme for breast cancer care. It will also announce an initiative next week which, I hope, will prove successful. As we have heard, the expert advisory group will set up primary care centres and designated cancer units and centres. I hope that the Government will respond as soon as possible to the consultation, which has now concluded. I understand that their response is due early this year.

I hope that, with the Department of Health's initiative and with the various charities involved in research, we can look forward to a comprehensive system for the treatment of breast cancer, something that the country greatly needs.

12.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) on his eloquent appeal for the highest quality of care and service for women with breast cancer and thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. I share the hon. Gentleman's regret that there is no Scottish Minister here, but I am glad to hear that he will have the opportunity to question the relevant Minister in detail. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Scottish Office Home and Health Department—like the Department of Health—is committed to reducing deaths from breast cancer as part of the aim to reduce cancer mortality overall.

The hon. Gentleman has very ably led the parliamentary all-party group on breast cancer, which has done so much to make its presence felt in lobbying on behalf of the thousands of women who contract this terrible condition. I therefore appreciate having this opportunity to set out briefly the Government's commitment to providing the highest quality of prevention and treatment.

We are, I hasten to say, neither complacent about nor ignorant of the very real threat that the disease poses to public health and to individual women. No Government could underestimate the seriousness of a condition that affects so many and results in so much suffering and so many deaths each year. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) mentioned the wider problem of the damage unwittingly done through the use of excessive radiation in treatment. I assure him that there are initiatives to minimise the risk of any further slip in quality assurance and plans are in hand to ensure that all radiation units are subject to the strictest guidelines so that the unnecessary and disastrous damage to which he referred cannot occur in the future.

It has been pointed out that we have made breast cancer a central element in "The Health of the Nation". Our goal is to cut the number of deaths among women invited for screening by 25 per cent. by the end of the decade. However, it is a tragic fact that breast cancer is still on the increase in this country and abroad. We do not know precisely why that is so, but several social, environmental and genetic factors are at play. Apart from age, factors that appear to increase the risk of breast cancer include late childbearing, the early onset of the menopause, obesity and ionising radiation. They may also include diet, the prolonged use of hormone replacement therapy and a number of other elements into which further research is needed. Given that background, let me summarise what the Government are doing.

It goes without saying that there is a wide network of cancer treatment facilities around the country although, of course, I can necessarily speak in detail only of those in England. However, 7 per cent. of all national health service expenditure goes on the treatment of cancer. Many new units and facilities are being created, and I mention in particular the soon-to-be-opened breast care clinic at Bromley hospital in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), which is typical of the new facilities coming on stream.

We have established a national population-based breast screening programme for all women aged between 50 and 64 in support of which new guidelines have been issued to ensure that screening is as effective as possible. We have provided significant funding for research which is supported by, but in no way dependent on, considerable help from major cancer charities. We have also funded the promotion of health material to increase awareness and to encourage women to come forward for screening and to report symptoms.

In the short time remaining, I shall take up the references to the steps taken in the United States. Mention has been made of the apparent switch in spending from defence to health in America. There is no doubt that the defence budget, like many budgets, is stable or dropping while the health budget in this country continues to increase considerably. There has been a 4.4 per cent. increase to all the regions this year, which is well ahead of inflation. I have no doubt that there will continue to be an increase in the share of public spending going on health. A substantial proportion of that will be spent on new cancer facilities because, as has been mentioned, there is too much inequality in provision around the country for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

It is well known that too many cancer sufferers, especially women with breast cancer, are not diagnosed swiftly enough. They are not seen sufficiently quickly by people with the appropriate level of expertise, which means that treatment can be delayed. Whatever the clinical effect of waiting for diagnosis and then waiting for treatment may be—it can be serious—the emotional effect is clearly considerable and we need to take action.

Hon. Members have mentioned the chief medical officer's expert advisory group's report. It is a very important document that will change the way in which we examine cancer and its treatment. The fundamental idea is that we must be clear about the different levels of expertise needed in diagnosing cancer. General practitioners need to be absolutely certain how and where to refer patients. If patients are or might be suffering from rare cancers, it may not be appropriate to make a final diagnosis or offer treatment in district hospitals, so there need to be three levels of involvement: the GP, the district hospital and a cancer centre—at least one in each region but perhaps more than one in some—where the most difficult and rare cancers can be treated. There is no point in sending cancer patients to see consultants or doctors who seldom see rare cancers. The expert advisory group's report will ensure the proper referral of cancer patients

[Mr. Tom Sackville]

and that the proper resources are invested to ensure that the appropriate specialty is available for every cancer patient.

Again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Leith on his eloquent speech on what I regard as the most serious problem that faces the health service.

Army Base Repair Organisation, Ashford

12.59 pm

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise an important subject which affects the future of more than 200 families in my constituency and an important workshop which has served the British Army well for a number of years. Last year, the director of the Army Base Repair Organisation referred to it as the "jewel in the crown". ABRO took over the workshops of various support units which serve the Army and its vehicles, renovating various vehicles coming from Europe or wherever.

The Ashford workshops, in common with many other ABRO workshops, have been examined as part of a Ministry of Defence and ABRO study of workshop overcapacity in Britain. Given the cuts in the Army, Navy and Air Force, we know that support services must also be cut back. Indeed, announcements were made today for cuts in some Navy store support services in the west country.

An additional complication has arisen in this case, as one of the main workshop sheds is directly in the line of the channel tunnel rail route announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in April last year.

The study of overcapacity has been going on for a considerable time. Last October, when I was in Moscow on parliamentary business, my right hon. Friend the Minister took considerable steps to explain to me by telephone that it was proposed, as part of the study on overcapacity, that the Ashford workshops should be closed. He agreed over the telephone that the rail link through the site was not a key factor in the decision to close the workshops. He further agreed to meet a delegation from the work force in my constituency.

Accordingly, on 12 December I met my right hon. Friend with such a delegation. My right hon. Friend was extremely courteous and heard what we had to say. One of our main complaints was the lack of market testing of the workshops in Ashford so that it was difficult to see precisely how good or bad they were, although I and the work force believe that they are very good and have served the Army well. A few days later, my right hon. Friend went to Ashford and saw the workshops for himself. As a result, he wrote me a letter just before Christmas saying that he had asked for a further investigation into the various proposals that had been made, not least the investment options. He said that there would be an extended period for consultation and that he would be in touch with me again in due course. So there was a short temporary reprieve.

At the end of December, however, both the work force and I were concerned and felt some consternation when Brigadier Drew, chief executive of ABRO, replied to a number of my constituents who had written to him. In a letter dated 20 December 1994 he said:

"The decision to recommend the closure of ABRO Ashford results from a number of factors. A rationalisation study commissioned by the organisation identified significant overcapacity within our workshops. For those workshops, such as Ashford, providing a service to Army units within their geographical area, the study team recommended that the overcapacity should be addressed via the market testing process (that is in the preparation of a bid in competition with industry to provide the service to the

Army). The team was also asked to consider the impact of external factors on rationalisation and the intended use of the Ashford site for the high speed rail link was taken into account. In order for the closure of the Ashford workshop to be effected in time to meet Union Rail requirements, the existing workshop site must be excluded from the market testing options."

That letter went down like a lead balloon with all concerned, as it seemed totally to foreclose any conclusions that my right hon. Friend the Minister might make. It appeared to say that the considerations for Union Rail, which is currently responsible for the channel tunnel rail link, were more important than considerations for my constituents, ABRO or the British Army.

Consequently, I wrote to my right hon. Friend what I hope was a courteous though terse letter expressing my concern about those matters. That resulted in a meeting between us and others of the ABRO team at headquarters last week. Indeed, it has resulted in today's debate. So far, no final decision has been taken.

Over the past month or so, the workshop has provided headquarters with information, as a result of which it has been proposed that there should be either 70,000 man hours work district load, plus an additional 35,000 hours special project work from the workshop or, alternatively, just a 70,000 man hours district load, which would reduce by 2,000 or 3,000 hours with the closure of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital in Woolwich in a few months' time. Currently, the workshop does some 200,000 man hours and the work force believes that market testing would show that it could more than meet that job. For example, as the Minister and I have seen, the workshops do a good job on Land Rovers for the Army. I have been told privately that they are probably the best Land Rover service and refurbishment centre in the world, not just the United Kingdom. Be that as it may, if the workshops were able to market-test against Rover, we could find out whether they were as good as they and I think they are. The 200,000 hours may not be pie in the sky.

Proper consultation has not been carried out between the management teams in Ashford and ABRO headquarters. If everyone's heart was in the right place, efficiencies could have been found just by sitting round the table and discussing the matter. It is a pity that some of the information technology that Ashford requires to make itself more efficient has been withdrawn for other parts of the system in recent months.

If the national market tests are as important as the brigadier said, why was the decision taken even before the workshops were given a chance to market-test? Why was the investigation appraisal not carried out as part of the market study? That would have made a lot of sense. My constituents sent in information on how they could cope with the various loads and make further efficiencies.

ABRO considered that on some of those matters, such as staff costs, contracted-out services, costs of utilities, property management, equipment costs, vehicle maintenance and petrol-oil lubricants, my constituents had been over-optimistic. It therefore scaled them down in the investment appraisal to the tune of some £100,000 a year, which is significant in view of the possible savings that may be made. I do not know whether such scaling down is right, but it would have been helpful if the management team in Ashford could have discussed the matter with the management team at ABRO headquarters. We would then all have had a clearer idea of what was going on.

There is no question that the existing "A" workshop will have to be demolished. That leads on to the question of replacement. My right hon. Friend has confirmed in writing and verbally—there is no dispute about it—that the cost of replacement of the workshops will be borne by Union Rail or the company who build the high-speed rail link in precisely the same way as they will provide compensation or cost of replacement to various other companies within my constituency that will be similarly affected.

As a result of investigations, two excellent possible replacement sites are available at Sevington. They have been produced by Eurotunnel developments and would offer brand new, energy and utility efficient sites, properly laid out with excellent access. They are being built at the moment and will be ready soon. The total cost, which will be borne, once again, by Union Rail and not by the Ministry of Defence, would be about £5 million.

Another alternative site, which is even nearer home—just across the road from the current workshops—is the former East Kent Bus depot. With a little refurbishment and modernisation, that would provide an energy efficient replacement workshop at a total cost of about £1.5 million.

Alternative sites for the workshops are therefore readily available at costs within the terms of the compensation that Union Rail would be prepared to pay. Those sites would be available for the market testing that my constituents are keen should be conducted. They would provide an excellent relocation site for the workshops if, as I hope, they are reprieved by my right hon. Friend.

The crunch behind the country-wide exercise is what money will be saved. There is no point in embarking upon such an exercise, the result of which may mean that many people will lose their jobs and commerce in the area will be badly affected, if the savings achieved are minimal or even non-existent.

Other workshops have been closed at Donnington and Old Dalby and the savings achieved, if not huge, have not been insignificant. In cash terms, the savings over the long-term costing period, which I understand is 10 years, range from £18 million to £35 million. In net present value terms over the LTC, long-term costing, the savings range from £14 million to £27 million. Those are considerable sums of money and were no doubt taken into account when considering the future of the organisations at Donnington and Old Dalby.

According to ABRO's own figures from headquarters, given to me by my right hon. Friend, the likely savings to be achieved at Ashford work out at a different level. If one takes the first option of the 70,000 man hour load plus the 35,000 hours special project work, one finds that the cash saving over the 10-year period is about £300,000 a year and the NPV, net present value, saving is about £250,000. Those sums are arrived at either by comparing the cost of transferring all the current work to a new-build workshop provided by Union Rail or by closing the ABRO workshop and transferring the work to other ABRO facilities, for example, to Aldershot and to contract repair.

If one takes the largest option, covering the 35,000 hour special project work and the 70,000 man hour load, one is talking about savings of between £200,000 and £300,000 whether that is worked out in cash or NPV terms. If one considers the 70,000 man hours option and none of the

[Sir Keith Speed]

special work, the figure saved is even lower at about £210,000 in NPV or about £260,000 in cash a year over the 10-year period.

That is not the end of the story, because on top of that one must add the redundancy and replacement costs of all those affected—some 200 people gross or perhaps 150 net given the mobility of some of the work force and the redeployment of others. According to my sums we must be talking in terms of £3 million for the first cash redundancy payments alone. That is more or less equivalent to the projected entire savings over the 10-year period. That £3 million, however, is up front and is not spread over 10 years. I am aware that that cost does not fall upon the budget of the MOD, but I am a Member of Parliament and a taxpayer and my right hon. Friend is a member of the Government, so we must be interested in the taxpayer and public expenditure as a whole.

We must also accept that some people will not be able to rush out and get a similar job, so we must remember the on-going costs of unemployment, income support, the loss of income tax paid and national insurance and other contributions. We soon find that huge sums are run up. Are we really to deny the Army of a facility that has worked extremely well and efficiently—the nearest facility to continental Europe and to the channel tunnel—in exchange for an overburden on and increased cost to the taxpayer?

I speak as a former Defence Minister and, in terms of MOD figures, when we talk of savings of between £200,000 and £300,000, that is the equivalent to washers. Such sums are within the calculating errors that may occur. If my right hon. Friend wants to save that sort of money I can point him in various directions where I am sure he knows that more than that money could be saved.

The proposed closures are not worth the candle at the end of the day. Alternative premises could be made available at no cost to the MOD, which would be more efficient than the current premises. If that happened we would retain a workshop for the Army that does extremely well and which could then be market-tested against anyone else. My constituents are more than confident that they would emerge triumphant from that test. In any event, the financial argument in favour of closure does not stand up.

I know that my right hon. Friend goes carefully into such matters. I hope that, with all those facts in mind, he will be able to tell me and my constituents, if not necessarily today, certainly within a few days, that he has examined the figures and looked carefully again at the possible alternative sites that I have mentioned. I hope that he will say that it will be possible for the jewel in the crown to remain the jewel in the crown of ABRO.

1.16 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) not only on his robust defence of his constituents, in the best interests of the town of Ashford, but on succeeding in raising the matter on the Floor of the House. A formal Adjournment debate can serve many purposes and at least one of them is to ensure that the facts are properly available to everyone.

I shall certainly study the record of what has been said, although my hon. Friend will not expect me to answer all his questions today. I do not intend to take a decision today or next week, because the issue needs to be subject to proper analysis. The Ministry of Defence is considering several dozen proposals for rationalisation, all of which affect jobs. Approximately, in the decade 1985 to 1995 the defence budget has fallen by 25 per cent. in real terms, with a much sharper fall in recent years for the support services. We are wrestling with the need to reduce support costs by up to £750 million per annum by 1996-97, which presents difficult choices.

One thing is clear: every decision must be taken in a proper, rational fashion which in turn can be justified in a robust fashion to the House. We are certainly not in that position yet regarding Ashford. It might help if I sketch in some of the background and answer some of the points that have been raised.

We are talking about the district workshops and not the base repair workshops, such as those at Bovingdon, which were market-tested. The in-house team won that contract for the repair of tanks. On 31 January, I announced the decision to withdraw work, sadly, from Old Dalby and to concentrate it, for planning purposes, on Donnington. In due course that site will be subject to exposure to competing for quality, which may include market testing. I hope that the private sector and other parts of the MOD will take the opportunity to present proposals for tackling some of the work packages at Old Dalby rather than letting them go to Donnington. That must be a more efficient option than that work going to Donnington.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): On Old Dalby, is the Minister absolutely convinced that the figures on which he is working are accurate? According to the figures that I have seen—I accept that they have been produced by people who have a direct interest in and would suffer the consequences of any changes at Old Dalby—the rationalisation plans, far from achieving any significant savings, may result in insignificant savings, have a deleterious effect on Old Dalby and cost the MOD in the long run. Can the Minister say anything about those figures?

Mr. Freeman: I should be glad to go through the figures for Old Darlby, either in writing or in a briefing to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that the margin of savings there, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford said, is of a different order of magnitude from the margin of savings for Ashford. I am cautious about Ashford at this stage for the reason that my hon. Friend outlined—the fact that some of the figures bear thorough analysis, and I do not think that we have reached that position. There was an extensive survey for Old Dalby. Even making assumptions—perhaps taking into account more pessimistic assumptions about transport costs of moving equipment—I am satisfied that the decision on Old Dalby was robust and sensible. However, if the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) wishes me to pursue that another time, I shall be glad to do so.

Why have we proceeded to consider Ashford prior to, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford describes it, a market test for the district workshops? We need to rationalise now before the market test for all the district workshops, which will be done nationally. We are market-testing the service of the district workshops—not

the sites—and therefore we are testing the alternatives for providing immediate support to the Army in terms of repairing vehicles.

Why do we seek some rationalisation now? The Army needs some savings in its votes, and it is easier to market-test if one is able to offer the private sector a clear and sensible range of services and, indeed, current workshop sites. It is more difficult to market-test if there is any serious doubt about where the locations will or will not be.

We have overcapacity of about 40 per cent. in our district workshops. That is a function not only of the run-down in the size of the armed forces but of the fact that rationalisation has not occurred in the past. Prior closures have included York, Bridgend and Liverpool, all in 1993. Therefore I believe that it was sensible for ABRO to consider Ashford now, to discover whether there was a case for closure of that workshop.

Why select Ashford when there are other workshops? There are three reasons, all of which are sensible. First, Ashford is not a garrison town and, compared with Catterick, Colchester, Aldershot and Warminster—other district workshop locations—there are relatively few Army units in the area. The location of the channel tunnel is not so relevant as might at first have been thought, because heavy equipment will enter the military port of Marchwood and then be sent for onward transmission to the appropriate district or base workshop. The existence of the tunnel and the rail link, projected and present, is not so relevant to the issue as some people might initially have thought.

The second reason for selecting Ashford is that the site is obviously affected by the route of the channel tunnel rail link. Indeed, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford for not drawing attention to the obvious fact, which I want to put on the record, that I was the Minister who announced the route through Ashford. However, I assure him that I now discharge a different function and approach my job on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. I am not trying to justify the implications of that original decision.

The routing of the channel rail link is not a compelling reason for closure in itself. It is relevant only for the reason cited in Brigadier Drew's letter, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford quoted: the existence of the site right in the middle of the proposed channel tunnel rail link means that one cannot market-test that specific workshop on that specific site. He did not mean to say—I am happy to correct the position—that that would preclude considering the reprovision of the workshop, either within the specific army property where it is located in Ashford, which contains several other units, or elsewhere in Ashford.

The third reason for selecting Ashford was the declining workload. It is an efficient operation and we pay tribute to the work force. However, efficient labour productivity should not be confused with an inefficient work site, which may be a function of the excessive size of the premises and the overheads that go with guarding, maintaining, heating and lighting a very large workshop. The men are obviously efficient; the site may not be, even without the impact of the rail link, and even without the impact of the need to rationalise the district workshops.

Those were the reasons for selecting Ashford. Incidentally, I should put on record that it is proposed to enter into a direct exchange scheme for Land Rover engines. That has not happened, but I am advised that that is proposed, and that it should provide greater efficiency. I say, "should"; it needs to be tested, and argued rationally in ABRO, before ABRO decides to proceed, but it intends to proceed with that scheme to improve the efficiency of engine repair.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford was right; consultation papers went out on 27 October 1994, a delegation visited me on December 12 and I visited the workshops on December 15. I then asked for a fresh appraisal to be done because it had not been assumed that the workshops—indeed, smaller workshops—would be reprovided by Union Railways, either in the premises owned by the Army or elsewhere in Ashford, and I am happy to confirm that the new investment appraisal assumes that. There is, at worst, a nil effect on the appraisal because of the assumed reprovision. As we have assumed reprovision at someone else's expense, the running costs of the new workshop will fall. It will be smaller and will be more efficiently heated and lit. I understand that it will be cheaper to run by about £6 million, expressed in net present value terms, over 10 years. That saving is not taken into account in the investment appraisal.

No decision has been taken, but I will repeat the facts for the record. The appraisal assumes 70,000 man hours per annum of what is called district load—regular repair work to vehicles, and so on. In addition, it assumes 35,000 hours of special project work. That is work which can be directed by the ABRO organisation from anywhere in the United Kingdom specifically to Ashford—for example, the demountable rack offloading and pickup system vehicles used in Bosnia to move ammunition and other supplies.

The net present value cost, a standard way of conducting an appraisal, discounts the stream of cash costs of running the operation into present-day pounds. If one stays in Ashford, in a new building, the net present value cost to us will be £13.9 million. If one closes Ashford and moves 50 per cent. of the work to Aldershot—at marginal cost, simply because Aldershot has the capacity to do the extra work—and 50 per cent. of the 70,000 man hours of district load are contracted out into the local community, to local engineering and shops and garages, at local rates, the net present value cost will be £11.4 million. That is a saving of £2.5 million in net present value terms.

However, there are redundancy payments. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford was right to mention those. We have assumed that 192 staff would be affected. Twenty-one mobile grades would be redeployed, leaving 171 staff who might be eligible for redundancy payments.

Some redundancy will happen anyway as, irrespective of whether one moves work from Ashford, one needs to slim down the activity. I have assumed that that would cost about £500,000. If one moves the special project work elsewhere, the total redundancy bill could be about £1 million in any case; that would affect about 60 jobs. If one closes the whole of Ashford, the full bill would be about £2.7 million for those 171 people. That is a very

[Mr. Freeman]

significant sum, and it is up front, as my hon. Friend fairly said. So the saving of £2.5 million that I referred to earlier—

Dr. Reid *rose—*

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I must finish and I have only two minutes. The saving of £2.5 million in net present value terms is substantially reduced, perhaps by as much as £1.7 million, which is the additional incremental redundancy payments that would be involved in closure in addition to that which might happen anyway. One is left with a margin of perhaps £750,000, as the net present value—that is a lump sum, not expressed on an annual basis—of the closure. Obviously, it is finely balanced, which is why no decision has been reached at present.

I conclude by putting on the record two factors that would support closure. I would welcome further comments, not only from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford, but from representatives of the work force at Ashford. If we look over 20 years, for example, the savings will grow even larger because of running cost savings, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. Even if we discount that stream of saving, the total value of savings will grow over 20 or 30 years.

Some local employment will be created by withdrawing from Ashford, although is difficult to estimate how much. However, I estimate that 35,000 man hours of work will be created through contracting out, as well as a couple of dozen jobs which either will not be lost or will be created in the engineering works in Ashford.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford not only for his courtesy but for his thoroughness in raising the issue. I assure him that the Minister of Defence will reflect on what has been said today and it will continue its appraisal of the proposal to close Ashford and concentrate work within the district workshops in order to reach a sensible conclusion.

Religious Education

1.30 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): In 1988, Parliament strengthened the law on a daily act of worship in maintained schools by an overwhelming majority of 264 on a free vote. It followed widespread concern that worship was becoming a secular ceremony in too many schools. Broadly Christian worship was made the norm in the Education Reform Act 1988, but non-Christian faith communities were given extensive rights to worship according to their own faith. In the other place, the reforms were welcomed by the then Chief Rabbi Lord Jacobovits. At the time of the debates, the present Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, said that

"if Christianity suffers, so, in a curious way, does every other faith as well . . . Might not teaching children their own traditions"—

that is, Christianity—

"do more for tolerance, and for faith than teaching them everyone else's?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 May 1988; Vol. 496, c. 420.]

Why is education in worship so important? The reason is that education is not really complete without consideration of the spiritual and moral dimension. That dimension is now statutorily enshrined as an essential feature of school life.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given his strong support to the present law. He put the case very well in his letter to me of 13 December last in response to an approach from a Selby constituent. He said:

"Schools are required by law to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. This should provide the opportunity for them to worship God and explore their own beliefs. It will also contribute to the development of community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes. Collective worship in non-denominational schools is required to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian nature . . . Schools should make every effort to secure the support of parents and the wider community for the values which they espouse."

A circular from the Department for Education matches the Prime Minister's admirable reflections and it rightly emphasises that Jesus Christ is to be given a special status in Christian worship.

We should remember that experience of worship can provide a life-long spiritual resource. My friend Baroness Cox recently said, rather pertinently:

"Anyone who has contact with the people who are in extremis, as I have as a nurse, knows how often they find comfort in the scriptures and in the prayers and hymns learnt in childhood. To deny our young people this experience and this knowledge is an ultimate betrayal."

Christianity, like leaven in the lump in Christ's famous parable, has worked its way deeply into the British character and attitude to life. The publication *British Social Attitudes*—probably one of the most academically respected surveys of public opinion—found in its 1994-95 report that 87.6 per cent. of our population claim to have been brought up in the Christian faith, with more than 57 per cent. still seeing themselves as belonging to a specific Christian denomination. Just under 20 per cent. of the population say that they go to church at least once a month, but 27 per cent. of the population say that they pray every week. Only 3.7 per cent. claim to have been brought up in a non-Christian faith.

That last statistic should help us to keep a sense of proportion about schools. It is commonly accepted that fewer than 300 schools, out of a total of 25,000, have significant numbers of pupils from a non-Christian background of faith.

British Social Attitudes found that the overwhelming majority of the population—some 70 per cent.—want schools to offer a daily act of collective worship, with fewer than 10 per cent. strongly opposed. Against that background, it is certain that neither Parliament nor the nation's parents are seeking to abandon daily Christian worship in schools. However, the same cannot be said of some union leaders and teacher trainers.

The secular eduction system in France and the United States has recently been praised by a number of union leaders, including Nigel de Gruchy of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers. He has called for the scrapping of the present legislative arrangements. The leadership of the National Association of Head Teachers has also made clear its opposition to the 1988 reforms.

Last May, that union carried out a survey of all of its members. On 28 May, *The Times* reported that the survey showed that 87 per cent. of secondary and 65 per cent. of primary heads believed that they could not meet the law's requirements. I am convinced that that was a bogus survey and it is worth putting some facts about it on the record.

Of the 32,412 survey forms sent out by the NAHT, only 1,747 were returned from members in county schools—that represented fewer than 6 per cent. of all United Kingdom schools. That is a tiny, wholly unrepresentative sample. In its desire to yield a favourable outcome to the secularist cause, the NAHT appears to have sent questionnaires as far afield as Gibraltar, Hong Kong and Cyprus. Head teachers in those far-flung parts of the globe and in Scotland and Northern Ireland were asked their views about legislation that affects only England and Wales.

There are factual errors throughout the survey. For example, one question attempts to gauge whether the Education Act 1993 has had an impact on the number of teachers who are unwilling to lead worship, but that Act made no changes to the law on school worship. Professor Kevin Glazebrook of Newcastle university has said that

"it is not possible to draw any conclusions"

from the NAHT survey. I note that the Christian Institute, which has helped me in the preparation of my speech, will soon publish a shocking report citing serious arithmetical and other errors in the NAHT survey.

Far from 65 per cent. of all primary schools breaking the law on worship, as the NAHT would have us believe, the chief inspector of schools commented in his latest report to Parliament that "virtually all" the nation's 20,000 primary schools comply with the law. In a whole year of inspections, Ofsted could not find a single English primary school which broke the law.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Alison: I am afraid that I have very little speaking time left so I must ask my hon. Friend to forgive me. I will give way to her later if there is any time left.

The situation with the 5,000 schools in the secondary sector is very different. Ofsted has reported that there is basic compliance with the law in 60 per cent. of secondary schools but that even those schools are not perfect.

On that point, I wish to raise one particular issue with my hon. Friend the Minister. Inspection reports tend bluntly to state whether a school complies with the law. That information is far too limited. Some schools may be almost complying, others might be nowhere near it. One school might be holding assembly on four days a week, another on only one day.

Some schools are being criticised by inspectors for holding Christian assemblies. One school was told that its assemblies should be more multicultural. In another large urban secondary school, staff are determined to meet the law's requirements. Assemblies are held in the assembly hall for three days a week and in form classes for two days a week, yet the school was told that it had failed to comply with the law on a technicality. That inner-city school should be commended rather slated on a minor technicality.

Let us be clear about the issue. Do we want a secular education system? We should take careful note of what happened in the United States. The Supreme Court banned school prayers and religious teaching in 1963. Since then, teachers have been dismissed for allowing prayer in school and parents have had to resort to legal action so that bible clubs or Christian Union groups can meet on school premises.

There have been 25 bleak years of secular dominance, but in the past few years things have been changing. One recent Gallup poll found that the Supreme Court ruling banning prayer is being flagrantly broken in 75 per cent. of high school graduation ceremonies. Three states have passed laws guaranteeing the right to have religious teaching and worship in schools. In the recent congressional elections, the Republicans stood firmly on the school prayer ticket and everybody knows with what results. Even President Clinton has now declared his support.

The Christian Action Research and Education organisation, representing 100,000 church members, recently concluded that in the matter of school worship:

"We judge that the alternative to the present position, with all its imperfections and ambiguities, would lead inevitably to a thoroughly secularised system.".

If we should ignore the secular voices, we should also ignore those teacher trainers who call for cultural anarchy. In his recent lecture at the Royal Society of Arts on 12 December 1994, Professor John Hull of Birmingham university called for the complete repeal of section 7 of the Education Reform Act and for the term "collective worship" to be abolished in favour of "collective spirituality". That new term is reminiscent of 1960s new-age hippy culture and has distinctly left-wing overtones. The suggestion that all religions are to be harmonised into "collective spirituality" is nothing less than a call for the restoration of the full-blown, multi-faith mish-mash that was so vigorously criticised when the 1988 Act was put on the statute book.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will resist the call for collectivisation, as he so ably resists all other calls of such character. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for making it clear that the Government stand firmly behind the present arrangements for school worship.

[Mr. Alison]

I am also grateful to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his public comments in support of daily Christian worship and to my distinguished constituent the Archbishop of York for the admirable letter to *The Times* on 9 January outlining some clear, realistic and perfectly attainable aims for school worship in non-church schools. Other bishops and officials in the Church of England should take heart from the lead given by the two archbishops and march confidently behind them.

In respect of teaching or leadership resources, my friend, Mr. Clive Calver, general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, in a letter published in *The Times* on the same day as Archbishop John Hapgood's, referred to the resources lying potentially available from 5,000 evangelical churches and 700 member societies that are affiliated to the Evangelical Alliance.

Secondary schools need to be encouraged to establish closer links with local churches. In far too many cases, schools are refusing offers of help from the community.

Secondary schools would do well to learn from our primary schools, which have a superb track record in keeping the law on school worship and in securing the support of the local community. Undoubtedly, there should be more research on the issue. How is it that some secondary schools keep the law while others do not? It cannot be just a matter of accommodation, as some allege.

Dr. Carey recently said:

"There is a danger in giving the impression that secularism is all dominant in our society. Most people still have some links to the Church, however tenuous those may be."

The Archbishop pointed out that one quarter of the population went to church last Christmas. He went on to say that the

"establishment does not equate with privilege but with responsibility."

Churches need to be mobilised to offer support to schools. A major effort is needed here, particularly by the Church of England. Strenuous efforts should be made to make the law work in secondary schools as it already does in primary schools. Let us see the Church once again, in the words of the Anglican prayer book, as the Church militant rather than the Church hesitant. I have 30 seconds to give way to my hon. Friend.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I wish simply to confirm that the standard of religious education in my local primary schools is excellent. It is also very good in my local secondary schools. Not long ago, I visited a school in my constituency where the headmistress gave the best exposition of the trinity I have ever heard from anyone, even from a church minister. Fortunately, we are not lacking in either of those sectors.

Mr. Alison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reinforcing the evident scope and capacity for building on what is already good and solid ground.

1.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) on obtaining this Adjournment debate and very much welcome his choice of subject. It is a matter in which the House knows he has sustained a great interest over a long period. We know that he plays a very distinguished part in Church matters and the important relationship between the Church and the House.

I immediately welcome my right hon. Friend's support for collective worship in schools. As he reminded the House, the Education Reform Act 1988 requires the curriculum to address the

"spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development"

of pupils and, as such, in the Government's view collective worship has a vital role to play.

Her Majesty's chief inspector's report for 1993-94 confirms that collective worship and religious education make a powerful contribution to a pupil's spiritual development and the sharing of moral values. Surely all that must be central to a school's efforts to establish its own distinctive ethos that will underpin all its activities and, most important, will be seen in the relationships and expectations within the school community.

The wording of the 1988 Act and the words of HMCI reflect closely the basis and thrust of my right hon. Friend's argument in this short debate. I should also confirm that the Government have no plans to change the legal requirements for collective worship, which give schools considerable flexibility in their arrangements for worship, not least because I agree with my right hon. Friend in his estimation of parental expectations in that regard. It would be a foolish person indeed who, given the strength of evidence that my right hon. Friend has brought before the House today, would seek to make some case for a radical change in the legal requirements and arrangements that are in place. In my view, we can continue to build on them.

As my right hon. Friend pointed out, the legislation rightly has Christianity at its heart, but it recognises that worship in schools will necessarily be different from worship in a community with beliefs in common. It does that by referring to collective rather than corporate worship.

The overall aim of the legislation is to offer pupils from a variety of backgrounds the opportunity to worship together wherever possible. It then gives flexibility—rightly, in my view—in the organisation of worship. Acts of worship need not be first thing in the morning but can be organised at any time during the day. Nor is there a requirement that the school should worship as a single group. It is open to a school to provide worship in separate age or class groups. The content of the worship in county schools and the equivalent grant-maintained schools can reflect faiths other than Christianity as long as the majority of the acts of worship over a term are wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. That gives the right balance and sufficient flexibility to those in different communities.

My right hon. Friend mentioned 300 schools of an overwhelmingly non-Christian nature. I will not argue with that figure, but flexibility in the arrangements is necessary to give cognisance of such schools and allow them to arrange their collective worship in the most appropriate way, bearing in mind the fundamental requirements of the legislation.

The detailed requirements for collective worship are spelt out in the Department's circular 1/94, which was—logically—published in January 1994. It does not contain proposals for change, as some have suggested, but offers guidance on the existing requirements of the Education

Reform Act and the Education Act 1993 for religious education and collective worship. It contains no new requirements beyond those of the Acts. The basic requirement for daily collective worship flows from the Education Act 1944, as does so much of our education system.

I am gratified that my right hon. Friend chose to quote from the evidence in Her Majesty's chief inspector's report. That showed that the picture on compliance with legal requirements is not as bleak as is sometimes suggested. The evidence is worth repeating. As my right hon. Friend said, nearly all primary schools were found to provide a daily assembly and about 80 per cent. were judged to be complying with the detail of the law.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) confirmed that in her constituency—to no one's surprise—her excellent schools are doing even better. Her view is that her primary schools and secondary schools are complying with the requirements. Regrettably, that is not necessarily so everywhere, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby said. The chief inspector's report stated that the majority of secondary schools did not provide daily collective worship for all pupils, but it said that worship, where it took place, was frequently of good quality and made a good contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

It is right that Ofsted should monitor the provision of collective worship at school level. The new inspection regime ensures that arrangements in every school are inspected. Ofsted then comments on whether the statutory requirements are being met. That information is made available to parents and the public, as is the action plan, which schools are required to publish, showing how they intend to remedy any shortcomings. The schools are primarily answerable to parents on that matter and many parents, rightly and understandably, attach considerable importance to that sphere of school life.

My right hon. Friend has quoted some highly relevant statistics from the British social attitude survey to bear that out. A poll conducted by *The Independent* in 1993 found that about 70 per cent. of parents wanted their children to say prayers at school. As in so many other sectors of education today, if parents are not satisfied with the arrangements made by the school their children attend, they have access to the local curriculum complaints machinery established by the 1988 Act or they can take up the matter through the school governors. Parents with pupils at county schools can take up the issue with county councillors. If parents cannot satisfy themselves in those ways, the matter can ultimately be referred to the Secretary of State. However, it should be possible to resolve problems well before that. I urge all parents who are not satisfied with that important part of the provision in their child's school to take up the matter vigorously with the head teacher, parent-governors or other governors to ensure that the opinions quoted by my right hon. Friend and borne out by *The Independent* survey are properly reflected in the arrangements made by primary and secondary schools.

I note my right hon. Friend's remarks about the need for Ofsted reports to go beyond a simple statement of whether a school is complying with the law. Ofsted is aware of the importance of commenting, too, on the positive contribution that a school's collective worship provision makes to pupils' spiritual and moral development, even if it is not meeting the letter of the law. Her Majesty's chief inspector's latest annual report does just that.

Many schools are doing valuable work in that sector and we should recognise and acknowledge their achievements. Ofsted's draft revised framework for inspection, published yesterday for consultation, proposes that, where inspectors find that a school is not meeting the law on collective worship, the report should give the head teacher's stated reasons for failing to do so.

I support what my right hon. Friend said about the importance of establishing links with churches and other places of worship in the local community—an important element of the argument. Although teachers, including head teachers, have the right to elect not to participate in collective worship for reasons of conscience, it remains the responsibility of the head to ensure that the statutory requirements are met. It is open to head teachers to invite members of the community, including religious leaders, to help to conduct collective worship, if they are able and willing to do so. Many schools have built up worthwhile relationships of that sort—with local clergy regularly making stimulating contributions to the schools' programme of collective worship.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster said that that was the case in her constituency. If it can be demonstrated that it is possible in Lancaster, one is forced to ask why it cannot be done more readily and systematically in other parts of the country. We must urge not only the schools but local churches to see what can be done—in co-operation with each other—to try to ensure that, where heads and teachers have a genuine difficulty in meeting the requirements of the law, they can call on the support of local religious communities and leaders to help schools to comply with the law.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): My hon. Friend the Minister has made a point that is worth emphasising. It should not be just up to the school and those responsible for religious education and worship to take the initiative and contact churches. Churches must take the initiative and contact schools to offer them help and show interest in what they are doing. Does my hon. Friend agree that, as we have just passed education Sunday, February might be a good time for each church and parish to contact all their schools—secular as well as denominational—to ask what more they can do to help them in their important work?

Mr. Forth: That was a typically positive and helpful suggestion from my hon. Friend. There must be more scope in local communities for that sort of co-operation between schools and local churches. I hope that we shall see much more of that so that assistance can be given to those heads and teachers who, for a variety of reasons, have difficulty in meeting the requirements of the law. I am sure that that would be widely welcomed. Schools that experience difficulty in meeting the legal requirements can turn to their local standing advisory council on religious education for advice. That is a local permanent body with responsibility for supporting the provision of both religious education and collective worship in the area.

There is no doubt that the subject is of the greatest importance. My right hon. Friend has expressed consistent views in the House over many years and has highlighted the importance of the subject. He has allowed us briefly

[Mr. Forth]

today to demonstrate not only the importance of the subject but the ways in which schools can be helped to comply with the law, which is not going to be changed. We want greater compliance—happier compliance—with the law so that we can ensure that the great religious tradition of this country can benefit pupils up and down the land, regardless of their personal, parental or family religion. Pupils must benefit from the core beliefs of the Christian religion, which is, and continues to be, so important to our society and our education system. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and hope that the few words that I have been able to say today have given him the reassurance that he sought in bringing the subject before the House.

Prescribed Disease D4 Claimants

1.58 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): Like many other Opposition Members, before the Christmas recess I voted against what were loosely called the Jopling proposals for the so-called modernisation of Parliament. However, I am pleased to take part in today's debate, because I regard these debates as perhaps the only positive thing that came out of the decision taken before Christmas.

I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) is present. I am pleased about that, because the subject about which I intend to speak affects many of his constituents as well as constituents in the whole of the former Tyne and Wear metropolitan authority area.

It does not give me any joy to have to raise this subject today. There are many disturbing aspects on which I hope the Minister can reassure me. Although the prescribed industrial disease, mucous membrane disease, has been with us for a long time, only in relatively recent years—from about 1990—has it become better known, as medical knowledge of it has improved.

There are various welfare rights agencies throughout Britain. I am sure that they do a good job in advising people on how to claim benefits and find their way through the maze of legislation. I imagine that there is none better than Sunderland centre for the unemployed, run by Dave Towler. I have the utmost admiration for him. He has done a tremendous job for the people whom he represents. He will always have my support whenever he requires it, because I am aware of the quality of his work.

There is a close relationship between the Liverpool centre for the unemployed and the one in Sunderland. In many ways, there is an interrelationship between the industrial backgrounds and heritages of Merseyside and Wearside and Tyneside. In April 1992, it was agreed that there would be a mass campaign to make claims in respect of prescribed disease D4, or mucous membrane disease.

After a few months, a total of 18,000 claims had been made, of which 5,000 were from Merseyside and 13,000 from the Tyne and Wear area. Early in the campaign, it became obvious that there was a tremendous disparity between the decisions made in Liverpool and those made in Sunderland. For example, we found that at the level of the adjudicating medical authority—which sounded much better when we called it a medical board—85 per cent. of those who claimed in Liverpool received satisfaction while in Tyne and Wear fewer than 1 per cent. did so. We are not talking about some inconsequential difference. There is a tremendous disparity. It begs a question that until now certainly has not been answered.

Many of those who underwent medicals for the adjudicating medical authority had received reports from ear, nose and throat consultants that they were suffering from the disease; yet the general practitioners employed by the DSS largely disregarded those reports. We found that somewhat unusual. I have always understood that a consultant's report should take precedence over what a GP might think on a subject of which he probably does not have so much knowledge.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and I wrote joint letters to Mr. Tinnion, regional chairman of the independent tribunal service, Judge

Thorpe, who was in charge of the national tribunal system, the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Lord Chancellor. We drew attention to the disparity. The replies that we received suggested that there was nothing to worry about; indeed, they appeared to deplore any parliamentary interference in their jealously guarded system of justice.

Following that response, Sunderland centre for the unemployed commissioned a statistical survey by Dr. Peter Kelly who lectures in statistics at Newcastle university medical school. The aim was to find some pattern between what happened in Liverpool and in Tyne and Wear. We have all the information, which I shall be only too pleased to make available to the Minister should he require it in order to take some action.

The survey highlighted the fact that, following the refusal of either the industrial tribunal service or the Department of Social Security to take action on the matter, some of the medical appeal tribunal consultants in the Tyne and Wear area began to be more favourable to appellants, even though we were told that there was nothing wrong and nothing needed to be changed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South and I wrote again to the various authorities that I mentioned. We received much the same sort of response. The fact that things seemed to have improved was ignored. Eventually, the various advice centres and Sunderland centre for the unemployed decided that the only way ahead, in view of the response that we had had—to say that it was tardy would be to suggest that it was rather better than it was—was to make use of the proper procedures of the full majesty of the law.

Between 150 and 180 appeals made from various offices were sent to the social security commissioner. The commissioner considered two cases. They are known as the Greer decision and the Blackwell decision. The decision was almost unprecedented for the commission. I shall read it out in full. It said:

> "The medical appeal tribunals who re-hear the cases should be composed of a different Chairman and different members all of whom have never sat on a medical appeal tribunal in Tyne and Wear in relation to the prescribed disease D4."

It is fair to say that, despite all the reassurances that my hon. Friend and I received from the various bodies, the commissioner most certainly thought that there was something wrong which needed to be put right.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the odd things about the case is the way in which the decisions made by medical people, who are presumably there as scientists rather than politicians, appear to reflect the political needs of the hour rather than the actual condition of the people whom they are supposed to examine?

Mr. Etherington: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. I am afraid that I am too cynical an individual to give him the answer that he requires. It should be surprising. Unfortunately, I do not find it surprising. The point that he makes is one of which the Minister should certainly take note.

The commissioner was saying that there was something sadly wrong with the system in the north-east. The decision dealt with both adjudicating medical authorities and the medical appeal tribunals—two bodies which are supposed to be completely independent in every way—yet it would appear that the commissioner was not prepared to accept that they were independent.

I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I must use so many terms in the debate. It must be perplexing for people who are trying to follow the debate. It is easy enough for the likes of me, the Minister or other hon. Members who know the system well. There are so many sets of initials. It is sometimes difficult to keep up. It had been stated consistently in writing by the Benefits Agency medical service that no research had been done into mucous membrane disease, except the research that involved chromate-related damage to the mucous membrane. That is not true. A great deal seems to have been overlooked by the Benefits Agency medical service, certainly in the north-east of England.

Consultants acting on behalf of appellants throughout the sorry saga were so worried about the matter that a symposium was held on 20 June 1994 in York. It was attended by many ear, nose and throat consultants from Britain. They were addressed by eminent colleagues from Scandinavia and the United States who had carried out in-depth research into mucous membrane disease.

The symposium concluded that there was a condition called industrial rhinitis. I was pleased to have the privilege of attending that symposium. I do not pretend that it is a subject about which I know very much. I found the symposium enlightening but disturbing in some ways in view of what had happened before it took place. In attendance at the symposium was a representative from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council who later advised the Secretary of State on the list of prescribed diseases. Following the symposium and as a result of information that had been sent to the council by consultants, trade unions, and so on, in September 1994 the IIAC recommended to the Secretary of State that mucous membrane disease, prescribed disease D4, should be broadened to include industrial rhinitis. Out of this whole sorry saga, that is the one consolation.

I should be pleased to give the Minister all the information that I have in my possession—much of which came from his Department. A number of questions need to be answered. Those with the disease in the north-east have suffered an injustice and we want that to be put right along the lines set out by the commissioner. That has not yet happened and it shows no sign of happening.

My first point is how do the Government explain the difference between Liverpool and Tyne and Wear when the industrial backgrounds are the same? Secondly, we have proof that the full-time medical adviser gave misleading information to the Wearside adjudicating officer's department. I am pleased that one of my constituents, Brenda Jackson, has given me permission to use her name. Obviously, I will not name the doctor concerned. That is not for me to do; it is for the Department to find out and do something about him. I would never say anything in this place that I was not prepared to say outside it. However, the information is available if the Minister wants it. There has been a similar occurrence with a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), with which I have no doubt he will deal in due course. I have appraised him of the situation. It is believed that my hon. Friend's constituent lost his case because of misleading information.

[Mr. Etherington]

Thirdly, the adjudicating medical authority is still not complying with the commission's written directions. When can we expect some progress on that? Fourthly, how can an organisation such as the DSS, with all its resources, not fund research, yet advice centres and independent consultants—sometimes even charitable bodies—seem able to do some research and produce tangible, worldwide evidence on the disease?

Fifthly, in some agreed minutes between the DSS and the advice centre in Sunderland about a meeting held on 3 August 1994, it was recognised that there was a need for uniformity in decision making. It was said that training was required, through the Benefits Agency, of the Department's general practitioners—the majority of whom are either part time or retired. Why has that not been done?

Sixthly, why are consultants' reports treated with such disregard—I might almost call it disdain—by those general practitioners? If they were in the mainstream of medicine and referring their patients to consultants, they would abide by the consultants' opinions. Why are there different standards?

Seventhly, because of fresh evidence supplied to the DSS and because of the threat of advice centres pursuing the matter to judicial review, has the DSS now agreed to review all prescribed disease D4 cases?

Eighthly, after the re-boarding of medicals there is documented evidence that appellants were deemed by the adjudicating medical authority to be suffering from various forms of rhinitis at their original medicals two years ago. As those decisions would now be brought within the commissioner's interpretation of prescribed disease D4, the review medicals by the same general practitioners show that those people are suddenly not suffering from any form of rhinitis.

Ninthly, boarding doctors are refusing to abide by even DSS policy division directives on how they are to proceed at review medicals. Doctors are refusing to examine appellants on review.

The impression that I get—I say this with some sadness—is that there is a force of opinion within the medical section of the Benefits Agency medical service in Tyne and Wear that has taken it upon itself to ensure that, come what may, appellants suffering from distressing conditions do not get their rightful entitlement. We can reach no other conclusion.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Is there a case for sending the evidence to the ombudsman? It appears that there is some malpractice which should be investigated.

Mr. Etherington: I have to give my hon. Friend a somewhat cautious reply. So many things are wrong that I can honestly say that I do not know what is the best way forward. I hope that today's debate is the best way. I am just sorry that it has had to come to this.

I want to refer to the proceedings of a social security appeal tribunal held on 31 January, which involved my constituent to whom I referred earlier. I shall read out the relevant passage about misinformation from a doctor employed by the Benefits Agency. It states:

"Mr. Towler invited clarification about document 28"—

which is the misleading document. It continues:

"He submits that Mrs. Jackson has clearly not been examined by Department of Social Security consultants, only doctors of GP status. To this extent the document carries a wholly false (not just misleading) impression."

Miss Guthrie, the adjudication officer, conceded that point. It is a sorry state of affairs when I have to come to the House and report something that is basically the equivalent of perjury.

I know that the Minister is a sympathetic person, because of his involvement with bronchitis and emphysema. I hope that he will ensure that my constituent and the other 13,000 people in the north-east who are claiming in respect of the disease will have their claims reheard and that they will receive the same sort of justice as that received by the people on Merseyside.

2.16 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) on securing the Adjournment debate. From the presence of several of his hon. Friends, I recognise that there is widespread concern that goes beyond his constituency alone. I appreciate his concerns and I am aware of his active interest in this matter over a considerable time.

The prescribed disease in question, known as prescribed disease D4, has a long history and raises some difficult issues. I should like briefly to explain the background. The origins of the present prescription are to be found in the Workmen's Compensation Act 1906. It provided, from 1907 onwards, for compensation for ulceration of the mucous membranes of the nose and mouth. The original occurrence which led to the condition being added to the list of diseases at that time was the adverse effect—bleeding from the gums—found to be experienced by men unloading a certain type of iron ore.

It was recognised even then that because the condition prescribed was common among the general population, a clear link with a particular job could not be assumed in the individual case. The burden of proof that the disease arose as a result of work was, therefore, always left with the worker.

When the industrial injuries scheme was introduced in 1948, the present PD D4 was included as part of the adoption of the prescribed list of occupational diseases used by the Workmen's Compensation Acts, which the new scheme replaced. The disease is presently defined as:

"inflammation or ulceration of the mucous membrane of the upper respiratory passages or mouth produced by dust, liquid or vapour".

The occupational requirements are:

"any occupation involving exposure to dust, liquid or vapour".

It can be readily appreciated from what I have just said that both the disease and the occupational cover are in very general and wide terms.

One of the major problems with the present prescription of PD D4 is that the signs of the disease, such as running nose, feeling of nasal obstruction, occasional bleeding and loss of smell, are extremely common among the general population and have a multitude of possible causes. The disease is usually short-lived and generally causes very little disability of any serious or lasting nature. Furthermore, it can be extremely difficult to identify the specific cause of the condition. There are many different causes and other general factors, such as smoking or the

drying effects of central heating, which can worsen it. It is not surprising, therefore, that consistent diagnosis of the condition is very difficult; making a clear link with an occupational cause is even more difficult.

Until fairly recently, as the hon. Gentleman said, there were in fact very few claims made each year for PD D4. Then, in the spring of 1992, local trade unions and unemployment centres in the north-east of England mounted a campaign to encourage people to claim for the prescribed disease. The campaign subsequently spread to the north-west.

It was the increased number of claims received as a result of the campaign which highlighted the very general nature of the prescription and the difficulty that it presents in deciding claims. This, in turn, raised questions about the precise nature, causes and effects of the disease, since, if they could be laid down more precisely, much of the confusion to which the hon. Gentleman referred could perhaps be avoided.

My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), looked into the problem in 1993 and rightly decided in September 1993 to ask the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council to consider and advise on the question of whether the present prescription of PD D4 should be changed and, if the council concluded that it should, to ask it for recommendations on revised terms of prescription. The council is the independent, expert body which has the statutory role to provide such advice; Ministers rely on it for advice. It has examined all the relevant scientific evidence that was available—the hon. Gentleman referred to members of the council taking an interest in these matters. The council completed its report towards the end of last year.

My officials are considering the implications of the council's findings. I expect to receive the report shortly and will respond in due course. However, any changes proposed by the council will not have retrospective effect and current claims must be decided on the basis of current legislation.

I should like at this point to explain the decision-making process for industrial injuries claims, because the hon. Gentleman asked several questions about that matter. The first question, which is decided by an independent lay adjudication officer, is whether the claimant satisfies the prescribed occupational requirements. Because the present prescription covers any occupation involving exposure to dust, liquid or vapour, few claims for PD D4 fail at this stage. Claims which satisfy the occupational requirements are then referred for medical examination. In the north-east, these examinations have been carried out by medical practitioners with higher qualifications in the specialty of ear, nose and throat surgery.

If the examining medical practitioner considers that the claimant is suffering from PD D4, he then acts as an independent adjudicating medical authority and assesses the degree and likely duration of any resulting disability. Where a prescribed disease has been diagnosed, adjudicating medical authorities also give advice to the lay adjudication officer on whether they consider the prescribed disease is due to the nature of the claimant's occupation. For most prescribed diseases, if the claimant satisfies the occupational test and is diagnosed as suffering from the disease, it is presumed that the disease was caused by the relevant occupation, if the claimant worked in it shortly before developing the disease. But as I explained earlier, there is no such presumption for PD D4, because of its very common nature, and the link between the occupation and disease needs to be proved on the balance of probability in each case.

The claimant has a right of appeal to a medical appeal tribunal against the decision of an adjudicating medical authority, and to the social security commissioner—but only on a point of law. The adjudicating medical authority may review the decision if it is satisfied by fresh evidence that the original decision was given in ignorance of a material fact or was based on a mistake as to a material fact. I shall say a little more about that later.

I should make it absolutely clear to the House, especially in view of the intervention by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), that the adjudicating authorities, both lay and medical, are entirely independent. Neither Ministers nor officials can intervene in their decisions.

As I have already said, the characteristic features of PD D4 are very common indeed among the general population. Sometimes, it is not an easy task to determine whether these symptoms are due to a specific agent when they occur so commonly and widely. In these circumstances, diagnosis and clinical assessment are not an exact science; it is a matter of clinical judgment by the experienced independent doctors dealing with the cases who take account of the facts in each individual case.

Comprehensive training and continuing medical education programmes are pursued by Benefits Agency medical services to ensure that their doctors are expert both in the legal aspects and in the disablement assessment issues of all prescribed diseases. The training received for assessing PD D4 is part of that.

Doctors who serve as members of the adjudicating medical authorities are also trained by senior Benefits Agency doctors according to a well-established programme. Senior managers in Benefits Agency medical services regularly undertake quality assurance of the work of adjudicating medical authorities and set standards of performance.

Since 1992, as far as I know, there have been more than 8,000 claims for PD D4 in the north-east. In the vast majority of cases, the adjudicating medical authority has not found the claimant to be suffering from PD D4. Even where the disease has been diagnosed, in most cases the degree of disablement assessed has been below the 14 per cent. threshold which qualifies for payment of disablement benefit. On the latest figures available, less than 0.5 per cent. of the north-east claims have attracted an assessment of 14 per cent. or more.

The hon. Gentleman asked about differences between the north-east and the north-west, mentioning Liverpool in particular. Even in the north-west, fewer than 1.5 per cent. have had an assessment of 14 per cent. or more. In both cases, the proportions are very small. This low success rate reflects the fact that the disease is not generally very disabling. It is true that there is some difference between the level of diagnosis of PD D4 in the north-east and that in the north-west. This is a sign of the difficulty that medical authorities have had in deciding claims, for all the reasons that I described. That is why we asked the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council to review the present prescription.

I mentioned earlier that reviews of medical authorities' decisions may be sought on the basis of fresh evidence. Last April, the Sunderland branch of the Trades Union

[Mr. William Hague]

Congress, acting on behalf of claimants, sought fresh evidence reviews of a number of such decisions on the basis of a series of research papers from abroad. As from May, instructions were issued to all Benefits Agency medical service doctors on the interpretation of what constitutes fresh evidence. This information has been imparted to all authorities. I understand that the authorities have accepted that there is fresh evidence, enabling a review of earlier decisions. On review, however, in most cases they have not found that the earlier unfavourable decision should be revised.

The hon. Gentleman explained the principles laid down by the social security commissioner in two cases, and referred to the ruling given last November. The commissioner set out how, in his view, the medical adjudicating authorities should proceed when considering the diagnosis of PD D4. The Benefits Agency medical service issued guidance to adjudicating medical authorities on 19 January, four weeks ago, in the light of the commissioner's decisions.

Review cases still held at the medical board centre in Newcastle or at district offices in Wearside awaiting action will be scrutinised by the BAMS and any decisions that do not appear to comply with the principles laid down by the commissioner will be referred to a fresh adjudicating medical authority for consideration of review on the ground of error of law. Where the fresh evidence review decision has already been communicated to the claimant, it is open to him, if he is unhappy with that decision, to apply for an error of law review or to appeal to the tribunal. Redress is available if people feel aggrieved, but I do not want to raise undue hopes that, as a consequence of further reviews, significantly more cases will result in payment of benefit, because—for all the reasons that I gave—occupational cause of the disease is difficult to demonstrate.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the BAMS will continue to monitor the situation. I particularly welcome the good local liaison arrangements that are in place, particularly with Sunderland TUC. I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are brought to the attention of the appropriate people in the Benefits Agency, and I shall bear in mind his remarks when I consider the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council report in the near future.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman asked nine questions, I shall read the debate in *Hansard*, to make sure that I answered them all. If I have not, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with the answers.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government, East Sussex

1. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about local government reorganisation in East Sussex.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): We received some 800 written representations, and Ministers also received four deputations.

Mr. Waterson: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and for giving a sympathetic hearing to the delegation from my constituency, which I led. Although I am aware that he is still considering those complicated matters, will he give every weight to the strong support expressed by members of the delegation, who represented all shades of opinion in the town, for a unitary authority, so that the town can revert to running its own affairs as it did before 1974?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend brought an effective delegation to meet me. It was led by business people, with the council taking a relative back seat, which was sensible. I will examine the intrinsic merits of my hon. Friend's objective together with the position of the residual county, in the context of the powers available to us.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: My hon. Friend will be aware of the results of the household survey by Hove borough council, which had a remarkable 33 per cent. response rate. It revealed that 77 per cent. of respondents opposed the joining of Hove with Brighton. I have received almost 600 individually written letters, all but six of which also opposed union with Brighton. Will my hon. Friend take into account evidence of public opinion on that important issue?

Mr. Curry: We take into account all representations concerning reorganisation projects.

Sustainable Development

2. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of how planning policies can be used more effectively to meet the objectives of sustainable development.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): We have revised our planning policy guidance so that sustainable development is at its centre.

Miss Nicholson: In my constituency planners are under external pressure to develop green-field sites, which is unpopular with local people. Will Government guidelines be applied fiercely to ensure that infill and derelict sites are used first, and that guidelines are strictly enforced in green-field areas?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to point out that it is often easier to develop a green-field site than to reuse previously developed land. Every effort is made to ensure that the balance is firmly in favour of the reuse of old sites and the redevelopment and regeneration of city and town centres. There will be occasions when a green-field site is most appropriate, but the case for that would have to be extremely well made out.

Mr. Bennett: The Government's revision of planning policy guidelines 6 and 16 is welcome, but will the right hon. Gentleman consider regional guidance? Is he aware that there is still pressure on local authorities in north-west England in particular to identify green-field sites for the development of business parks and similar projects? Is not it high time that all the emphasis was placed on regenerating inner-city derelict land and that local authorities were discouraged from making planning proposals for green-field developments?

Mr. Gummer: I am a little worried when I am asked to put all the emphasis on particular areas. Planning should not be about insisting on a prescriptive answer in every circumstance, irrespective of the position. The hon. Gentleman may agree that there are many instances in which business parks have brought jobs to the north-west and elsewhere in the UK. A proper decision should be made in each case, but we should be clear that the bias is towards the redevelopment of old land and the regeneration of city and town centres. The hon. Gentleman has my support in putting pressure on local authorities which sometimes do not exhibit as much urgent concern as we do.

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend accept that those of us who represent city constituencies are very concerned that their centre should retain their vitality, and that we very much welcome the change of emphasis to restore them? Will he ensure that the policy that he has proposed is carried through to effective action?

Mr. Gummer: There is no doubt that there is a very good example of partnership in the city of Lincoln between the private and the public sector. That is the way forward for regeneration generally. We are putting into place the planning environment to help that. I wish that some local authorities, which still prefer to provide car parking as a means of raising money rather than invigorating the town centre, would take up the challenge, because car parking is much better provided by private enterprise—it tends to be rather less smelly apart from anything else.

Water Leakage

3. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his latest estimates of water leakage.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. Robert Atkins): There is a level below which it is uneconomical to make efforts to reduce water leakage. That said, the latest estimate, based on information from the water companies, is around 29 per cent. We expect leakage to be reduced by around 20 per cent. over the next 20 years.

Mrs. Jackson: Is the Minister aware that 29 per cent. leakage is quite unacceptable? Is he aware of the view of the National Rivers Authority, which says that action by the water companies to halve that figure would make it quite unnecessary for them to go in for the unhealthy and

dangerous practice of compulsory water metering, which puts the pressure on the customer rather than the company? Will he take steps to ban that practice, so that pressure for investment is put on the companies to deal with that leakage?

Mr. Atkins: I would like the House to know the facts. First, most of that water leakage comes from domestic pipes, not company pipes. Secondly, there is a level below which it is uneconomical to go—that figure is of the average of 15 per cent. Thirdly, water companies have already spent some £3.7 billion on infrastructure support over the past few years, designed to cope with some of the problems. Fourthly—ironically, in view of the hon. Lady's obsessive campaign against water metering—the increased incidence of water metering will help to solve the problems of leakage.

Mr. Rowe: Is not it self-evident that if individual households have a clear desire and interest in reducing the leakage from their own premises, that they will do? There is no substitute for individual responsibility. Does my hon. Friend agree that that principle of individual responsibility about leakage could equally well be applied to the Cabinet?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend's point is apposite in relation to what Opposition Members are saying. They, supposedly, sign up to the principle of sustainable development, but when faced with a situation in which individuals, as well as others, are encouraged to take notice of leakage and the problems of maintaining water—a resource that we must watch carefully—they seem to avoid the practical realities of it. My hon. Friend is quite right to point out that problem.

Ms Glenda Jackson: What does the Minister think about the announcement by Thames Water only this week to renege on a commitment of £2.1 billion over five years in capital investment, which was reflected in an agreed price rise, and of its announcement that that capital investment programme will be reduced by £350 million, but that there will be no concomitant reduction in charges to householders? On average, domestic bills could be reduced by £10. Thames Water also announces with some pride that it will take a very tough line on non-payers in relation to disconnections. Surely that is not a state of affairs that the Government should allow to happen now or ever again in the future.

Mr. Atkins: I cannot comment on the detail of the case, which is a matter for the Director General of Water Services. In general terms, Thames Water provides the cheapest water anywhere in the nation, and does so extremely well. I am delighted to hear that it is putting pressure on bad payers. The number of disconnections has decreased year on year, and to have that power in reserve is popular with the users of water throughout the country. All the indications are that that power in reserve is necessary and is supported by those who normally pay—the vast majority of the users of the commodity.

Housing Transfers

4. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many large-scale voluntary transfers of local authority housing stock have been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Thirty-six local authorities have transferred almost 162,000 dwellings. We are working with metropolitan authorities to identify ways of taking the policy forward there as well as in the shires.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my hon. Friend congratulate the tenants of Maldon district council, 80 per cent. of whom voted in favour of transfer to the Plume housing association? Is he aware that that transfer will raise some £22 million, which can be used for the benefit of residents of the district? Will he, or one of his colleagues, consider accepting the council's invitation to attend the transfer ceremony?

Mr. Curry: Maldon has done very well. There was a high turnout, and 82 per cent. voted for the transfer. Tenant consent is at the heart of our policy.

We expect the local authority to complete its negotiation with the housing association shortly. That will clear the way for my right hon. Friend to make the final decision. My colleagues and I are always anxious to visit our hon. Friends' constituencies; indeed, I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, plans to visit the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) shortly.

Revenue Support Grant, Essex

5. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on Essex county council's revenue support grant settlement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): We received no representations from Essex county council during the period of consultation on the proposed revenue support grant settlement. The council did query data on pupil numbers with the Department for Education during the consultation period, and wrote to my officials on 31 January on the same matter.

Mr. Amess: Does my hon. Friend share my disgust at the fact that, despite substantial reserves and one of the best-ever settlements last year, socialist-controlled Essex county council's social services department ran out of money in October, blocking 79 beds at Basildon hospital, increasing waiting times at the accident and emergency unit and lengthening hospital waiting lists? Does he agree that, in the light of such incompetence, those socialist county councillors should resign or we should impeach them?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend rightly stresses the difference between socialist-controlled councils and others, but there is a wide variation in the effectiveness and efficiency even of councils not controlled by the Conservative party. For instance, Hertfordshire county council—whose area I represent—did not run out of money for that purpose, because it managed its money properly.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister accept that, as a result of a local government grant settlement that does not meet the cost of pay increases, a number of services in Essex will be reduced—including police and schools provision—and the council tax will generally rise? Does that not confirm that in the coming year, in terms of council tax, Essex man and Essex woman will be paying more and getting less?

Mr. Jones: What happens in any local authority depends very much on the effectiveness and efficiency of that authority. What my right hon. and hon. Friends have been asking local authorities to do is precisely what businesses have to do year in, year out: become more efficient.

Dr. Spink: Is my hon. Friend aware that, as a result of its profligate and wasteful policies, Liberal and Labour-controlled Essex county council has lost £8.5 million? The cuts that it has made to recover from those losses have affected the most vulnerable members of society—the old, the disabled and the young. Will my hon. Friend call on the council to use some of its £28 million reserves to restore the amount lost through those cruel cuts?

Mr. Jones: The management of the county council's finances is a matter for it, but I certainly urge all local authorities to examine ways in which they can become more efficient and to consider how they can use their reserves most profitably.

Rent-to-Mortgage Scheme

6. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the likely take-up of the rent-to-mortgage scheme in 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Mr. Curry: Returns so far received from local authorities for the period to 31 December 1994 report that five sales have already been completed, and that almost 100 more applications have been accepted under the scheme.

Mr. Michie: This is yet another case of the Government getting themselves into a fine mess. Why do not they accept that the scheme is not working and that it has been expensive—the cost is estimated to be about £400,000 of taxpayers' money, which is not helping the cause? Why do not the Government admit that Labour predicted that? Instead of messing about with half-cocked schemes, the Government should start investing in new and refurbished homes to get our people off the streets and into decent housing.

Mr. Curry: As the scheme is part of the right to buy policy, I am sure that people will be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman refer to it as a half-cocked scheme. Giving people the opportunity to buy their own homes, whether through the right to buy or rent-to-mortgage schemes, gives people what many of them want. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not believe that that is a valid objective.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that the relatively low take-up is not the point? The Government give people choice. The Labour party would take it away.

Mr. Curry: The relatively low take-up is due to two things: first, the scheme has been in existence for 18 months only; and, secondly, the relationship between house prices and rents. The economic circumstances have meant that, for many people, it has made more sense to take advantage of the right-to-buy scheme, which is still yielding some 46,000 sales a year. That is what most people want. We should ensure that they have the opportunity. I am surprised that the Opposition do not believe that that should be the case.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Minister recognise that this is an issue not of choice, but of integrity and a sense of probity in public life? The Government have wasted £414,000 promoting a scheme that the Opposition warned in Committee would be a costly flop. Does the Minister now recognise that, with a rate of one taker every three months, and with a cost, as I estimate it, of £83,000 for every person taking up the scheme, it is high time that the matter was referred to the Public Accounts Committee?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman appears to be enunciating the somewhat curious doctrine that we should introduce a scheme and then ensure that no one knows about it. If one introduces a scheme, one publicises it. This scheme is in its early stages. It is intended to be an adjunct of the right-to-buy policy. No one expected that major volumes would arise from the scheme, but it is a useful way for people in particular circumstances to have access to buying their own homes which they might not otherwise have. It is, therefore, a sensible part of a policy that is highly successful, and which the Opposition parties have opposed during the past few Parliaments. People will remember that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend accept that another acceptable method of choice would be introduced if his Department accepted the proposal of Wyre borough council to transfer its stock to a housing association, and to consult, and ballot, the tenants?

Mr. Curry: That is a sensible way of diversifying tenure because it rests on tenants' consent. It liberates resources for the refurbishment of houses that are transferred to the housing association, and it liberates resources for the local authority to use to maintain properties that remain in its possession. Everyone gains, therefore, from a sensible policy, and I commend it to the House.

Housing Renovation Grant

7. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now expects to announce his Department's changes in the housing renovation grant system.

11. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the provision of disabled facilities grants.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: An announcement about any changes arising from the review of the house renovation grant system, including disabled facilities grants, will be made in due course.

Mr. Pike: Ministers have been saying for nearly a year now that the answer on the consultation will be given "shortly". Can we take it that the Minister now recognises that the biggest problem is not the scheme, but that councils have insufficient money to meet their legal

obligation to make a mandatory grant? Instead of changing the scheme, will the Government make more money available to local authorities?

Mr. Jones: We have had a number of representations, some of which have been in favour of changing the scheme—the most recent came from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) during an Adjournment debate—and some of which have been on the subject of resources. Some authorities clearly needed more money to fulfil their obligations, but others have underspent the money that we have allocated to them. That matter must also be dealt with.

Mr. Hinchliffe: During the review of disabled facilities grants, will the Minister consider in detail the operation of the means test? Is he aware that, in many instances, local authorities are having to lend individuals and families money to pay their contribution under the means test, and that there is no way in which people can repay those loans? Is he aware that, in some circumstances, people have given up the ghost because they simply could not afford to make their contribution under the means test? Will he deal with that matter as the matter of urgency?

Mr. Jones: We shall certainly examine the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I know that he has taken an interest in the subject for a long time. I must point out that 80 per cent. of these grants now involve no contribution from the applicant and that in other cases topping-up money is sometimes made available from local authorities' social services departments. However, I shall examine the matter carefully.

Sir Anthony Durant: I thank my hon. Friend for the extra tranche of money given to Reading borough council for the renovation grants. When considering future grants, will he bear in mind the state of the housing stock in a town such as Reading, which contains a great deal of pre-war property that is deteriorating badly?

Mr. Jones: That is one of the points that we take into account in the allocations each year, in addition to the effectiveness of the local authorities' renewal strategy. However, it is not only my hon. Friend's constituency that benefited from the extra tranche. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) will know that we were able to give an extra £400,000 to his local authority in the second tranche and will increase the allocation for next year still further.

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is a very valuable scheme? Will he allow local authorities to cap the amount of grant that they give so that they can be made to fit local needs, prices and priorities?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend makes a valid point about the need for flexibility, which has been stressed to me many times by the members of local authorities whom I have met during the housing investment programme round and on other occasions. We shall be taking that idea into account before we announce our final decision on the system.

Mr. Wigley: May I press the Minister further on the position of disabled people who need grants for certain facilities but who are means tested? I draw his attention to the case of a father with a severely disabled son. He has an income of only £200 a week and faces enormous costs because of the son's disability, but is required to pay a contribution of £10,000 towards downstairs facilities, a sum that he and his family cannot afford. Will the Minister reconsider the way in which the formulae are worked out so that such difficulties can be avoided?

Mr. Jones: I promise the hon. Gentleman that I shall examine the case. It would be sensible for him to send me details of the case so that I can give it particular attention.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that a recent survey in Ealing showed that 70 per cent. of disabled and able-bodied people are highly dissatisfied with the speed and quality of the repair service offered by Ealing council? That is a very high figure and it is still rising. Will he do something to put a bomb under Ealing's Labour council to make it improve this most important service to its people?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend has proved time and again that he is one of the most effective bombs that one can put under an inefficient local authority.

Job Creation

8. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new jobs have been created through regeneration policies since April 1992.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Since April 1992, my Department's policies have created or safeguarded 340,000 jobs.

Mr. Burden: Is the Minister aware that one way in which regeneration policies could create jobs and meet a major social need at the same time is through investment in housing? Is not it therefore pretty scandalous that the amount of money available under regeneration policies for housing has been cut with the single regeneration budget and that in Birmingham not one penny has been made available for the major housing project proposed by the council? There are 17,000 people on Birmingham's housing list, so is it not time that the Government adopted regeneration policies that are worthy of the name, created jobs and gave people the homes that they need?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman will reflect that the single regeneration budget operates on a partnership basis, and the make-up of the bid was Birmingham's choice. In respect of housing, I remind him that in 1995-96 Birmingham will receive more than £22 million from the estate action programme, £12 million for Castle Vale housing action trust, £8.5 million for Heartlands urban development corporation, which includes some housing, £7.7 million for city challenge, which also includes housing and, as we ought to reflect unemployment, £1.25 million for the task force.

Mr. Key: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although regeneration policies are normally associated with the large industrial conurbations of the north, which receive most taxpayers' money, there is not a market town in the south of England or, for that matter, anywhere else in the country, that would not benefit from concentrating on urban regeneration schemes that would shift the centre of gravity of our towns back to the centre?

Sir Paul Beresford: I agree with my hon. Friend, but we should reflect on the converse of that. Many of the

areas that need urban regeneration are under Labour or Liberal control, with poor quality services and high taxes imposing a burden on local businesses and the local community.

Out-of-town Shopping Developments

9. **Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new out-of-town shopping developments await planning approval subject to appeals to his Department.

Mr. Gummer: Eighteen, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Hill: Will the Secretary of State reaffirm his policy of halting the spread of out-of-town supermarket developments, which have wreaked havoc on many local shopping centres such as Streatham high road in my constituency, where one in five shops now stands idle? To show that he is earnest in his intent, will he ensure that all appeals against such developments are now upheld?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman will know that I cannot possibly prejudge any appeal now before me. The case of a site adjacent to Streatham is in that position, and I must therefore look at it carefully. I cannot say that all appeals will be turned down, as that would be wholly improper. I must look at each case, and sometimes the circumstances will be such that it is right to allow something which, in general, I seek to discourage. That is bound to happen. I can think of a number of cases on which the hon. Gentleman would probably agree with me, but I look at each case separately. I have made it clear to those who make such proposals that the priority is regeneration in our city and town centres and the liveliness of those centres, and I shall need extremely good proof that such a proposition does not detract from important city centre priorities before I grant permission for such developments to go ahead.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend remember, when listening to the siren voice of the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), that the consumer likes choice and parking facilities, and she is more likely to get those out of town than in Streatham high road?

Mr. Gummer: I shall not be drawn on Streatham high road. It is essential for the regeneration of our city centres that provision for parking is made, that parking is properly run and that people are given the opportunities that they expect in out-of-town centres. I agree that people like choice and they must therefore have the choice not to use their cars if they do not want to or cannot, and they must have an opportunity to choose between shops, which is what city centres offer. Choice is not enhanced by destroying town centres where comparative choice and shopping is much easier.

Mr. Vaz: We welcome the Secretary of State's recent conversion to supporting town and city centres. Why is he so afraid to be clear about whether the Government support or oppose out-of-town shopping centres? How does he propose to deal with the hundreds of outstanding planning permissions granted for those monstrous sheds which, if implemented with his approval, would destroy his planning policy?

Mr. Gummer: Given the long list of Labour-controlled local authorities that have destroyed their city centres by damaging businesses within them, having taxed them out of existence and ensured that, whenever business men wanted a new scheme, they turned them down, the whole country is littered with the results of bad local planning by Labour councils. The Labour party has done more to damage Britain's city centres than any other single force since the war. That is the problem that we face. The hon. Gentleman, who has not yet been converted to any planning policy and is in no position to say whether I have, should contain himself. Our policy supports city and town centres and the growth of the kind of life that we want there. Those who have already gained planning permission for a site will be able to retain it, because, unlike the Opposition, the Government do not go back on their promises.

Revenue Support Grant, Bedfordshire

10. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is planning to make any further statement on the revenue support grant for Bedfordshire for 1995-96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: On 1 February, the House approved the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1995-96, which specified the basis of the revenue support grant for each authority. We have no plans to make any further statement on that grant for the coming year.

Sir David Madel: My hon. Friend will be aware of the representations that I have made to the Government about the spending limit of Bedfordshire for 1995-96. Will he confirm that Bedfordshire county council still has time to make a case for raising its spending limit for 1995-96, but that it is also within its power, and it is perfectly capable of doing so, to protect school budgets next year?

Mr. Jones: What my hon. Friend says about the proposals is perfectly true. I find it difficult to understand how the Labour and Liberal majority on Bedfordshire county council can possibly translate what is an allowance to increase its spending into an attempt to impose cuts on schools. That simply shows how antagonistic it is towards education.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister accept that the local government grant settlement, for which most Bedfordshire Tory Members voted a couple of weeks ago, will mean cuts in expenditure by Bedfordshire county council and Bedfordshire districts, such as Luton? The settlement threatens £9 million cuts in Bedfordshire's schools, while at the same time forces up the council tax. Does that not mean that people in Bedfordshire, like people in Essex, will be forced to pay more and get less?

Mr. Jones: I must repeat what I said to the hon. Gentleman earlier, because he obviously did not listen the first time. Businesses in this country, whether small or large, have dedicated themselves to becoming more and more efficient year in, year out. I expect Bedfordshire county council, like other county councils and borough councils, to do the same.

Sir Graham Bright: Does my hon. Friend agree that before Bedfordshire county council, led by the Liberals and the Labour party, starts criticising and cutting, it

should look at its own efficiency—in particular, at the fact that it is carrying about 16,000 surplus places within its schools?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend makes a valid point about the need for local authorities to re-examine continually their spending priorities and their efficiency. I am struck by the fact that Bedfordshire county council, almost alone among county councils, has failed to supply its manpower figures to the Department for the past two years.

Job Creation

13. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of new jobs which have been created through regeneration policies since April 1992.

Sir Paul Beresford: In view of the close similarity to Question 8, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Milburn: Is the Minister aware that competition between areas for single regeneration budget funding has produced a dog eat dog scenario, where there are many more losers than there are winners? What assurances can he give the House that areas such as Darlington, which have so far not qualified for funding for regeneration schemes, will do so in the future?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the fact that the competition has generated better partnerships and better services. As for Darlington, we must ask the hon. Gentleman to stop whingeing and to get back there to help it put a decent case together, so that it can win next time.

Dr. Twinn: Is my hon. Friend surprised to hear the whingeing about Birmingham and Darlington today? Is he aware that the help that the Government have given towards job creation in north London, the Lea valley, Tottenham, Enfield and Edmonton is greatly appreciated and is already creating new jobs?

Sir Paul Beresford: Yes, I am aware of that. It is also important to stress that urban regeneration means just that. Job creation represents just one part of that regeneration, the rest relates to housing, education and infrastructure. That is the point of offering a urban regeneration package.

Social and Economic Inequality

14. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of his Department's policies are designed specifically to relieve (a) social and (b) economic inequality in urban areas; and how successful they have been.

Mr. Curry: My Department's aim is to promote sustainable communities through economic, social and environmental policies.

Mr. Hughes: I am delighted to hear from the Minister about the Department's aim. Given that the Rowntree report produced last week—I know that its findings are contested—shows that the gap between the bottom 20 per cent. and the top 20 per cent. has more than doubled in the past 15 years, does he accept that the reality of Government policy, including those of his Department, is a nation of two cities—the haves and the have nots? Will he undertake to review all his Department's policies to create something like the policy in which the Prime Minister says the Government believe, but which is not being delivered on the ground?

Mr. Curry: As the hon. Gentleman says, the Rowntree report obviously asks questions, and one can interpret those questions in different ways and give different answers to them; that is part of normal political debate. The number one recommendation of the Rowntree report is that priority should lie in education and training. It is interesting to note, from the first round of our single regeneration budget bids, that that is precisely where the local partnerships have put their priorities. That demonstrates that local partnerships are identifying education and training as the seedcorn for regeneration policies. The hon. Gentleman and I can agree with that.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: If the policies of the Government are as the Minister has said, what will the Department of the Environment do about Westminster city council, which has systematically engaged in a policy of gentrification, social cleansing and homes for votes? The Department has sat and done nothing while those policies have continued, month on month, year after year.

Mr. Curry: In so far as there are any proceedings taking place about any actions in Westminster city council, it is for those proceedings to continue. In so far as Westminster city council runs a very efficient council in London, I commend it to many of those inner-city councils which have a great deal to learn from it.

Government Regional Offices

15. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make the Government offices of the regions more accountable to the people living in those regions.

Mr. Gummer: Government offices are already directly accountable to Parliament through me and the other Ministers to whom they report.

Mr. Denham: Is the Secretary of State aware that the decision last year to refuse a partnership bid to bring improved heating and insulation to the 1,000 people on the Holyrood estate in my constituency was taken, to all intents and purposes, by unelected and unaccountable officials working in the Government office of the south-east? Is it not the case that those officials are only part of a pattern of regional English government that spends and allocates nearly £6 billion a year and influences far more? As we have English regional government, is it not high time that English regional government was made accountable to the people that it serves?

Mr. Gummer: First of all, all decisions are advised by civil servants but agreed by Ministers, including the decision relating to Southampton. Secondly, as I understand it, the hon. Gentleman is asking for a bit more clarity from the Labour party. He has fought for a unitary authority for Southampton; now he wants to take that unitary authority away and have a regional government.

I understand also that the difficulty for Conservative Members is that the Opposition spokesman has one policy on regional government, the previous spokesman had another policy, and it is difficult to discuss English

regional government in the House when the person who makes the decisions is not here, but speaks to the television and radio, saying that the Opposition have now put off regional government, because they have suddenly discovered that it would mean five tiers of government for large numbers of people, which people do not want and do not want to pay for.

Mrs. Lait: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the south-east there are already improved communications between local bodies and central Government? Is he further aware that the regional office now has a much clearer picture of local needs than it did, and is hence much more likely to match the needs with grants? Does he agree that a regional assembly or, even worse, control by local councillors, would be the last thing to generate the growth that is needed in the south-east of England?

Mr. Gummer: First, I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that the Labour party supported the idea of bringing together the various local offices of Government, so that we had a common view throughout a range of things, and there was a holistic answer and not individual sectional answers.

Secondly, it is a very odd world, is it not, where the Labour party is now telling its supporters in the counties that, if Labour returned to power, it would cancel, ban and stop all county councils. The Labour party has decided on the abolition of the county councils, irrespective of the fact that all the county councils controlled by the Labour party are fighting for their continuance.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister agree that the Government cannot have their cake and eat it? A few questions ago, the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), gave a favourable and sympathetic answer to the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson), who called for local accountability—in effect, devolution. The Secretary of State then poured scorn on those of us who believe that a much more efficient and just administration can be provided with a much greater level of devolution than that which the Government are prepared to consider.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is suggesting to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) that, far from getting the local accountability which comes from unitary authorities, Southampton should turn it down in favour of a new tier of local government which is called regional government. People in England do not want regional government, and people in Scotland and Wales do not want regional or national government.

Area Cost Adjustment

16. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to review the area cost adjustment.

Mr. Curry: We will carry out research to improve the geographical basis of area cost adjustment. One possibility is to use travel-to-work areas as the basis for the adjustment.

Mrs. Knight: Is my hon. Friend aware that, whereas there is real understanding that some parts of the country face higher costs than others, there is also real concern about the method of distribution of the area cost adjustment? For example, it allocates more than £200 per child to the education SSA in Hertfordshire, yet it allocates nothing to Derbyshire. Will my hon. Friend address those disparities in his most welcome review?

Mr. Curry: As my hon. Friend knows, the area cost adjustment recognises the additional total labour costs in the south-east. The problem is that, as it is constructed at the moment, the south-east alone is eligible for it, and there are very good reasons for that.

However, I wish to examine whether we can change the basis of distributing the area cost adjustment by looking at travel-to-work areas, so that the whole country can be eligible for it. If that proves to be a more robust method, we will adopt it. If it does not, I am not prepared to make a change unless I am sure that it will be an improvement which I can defend as being totally impartial.

Mr. William O'Brien: When considering any changes to the system, will the Minister have regard to the authorities in the Webber Craig group, including Wakefield, which are at a disadvantage because of pupil-cost ratios? A few weeks ago I also raised with the Prime Minister the matter of cuts to the fire service in that area and the costs involved. Will the Minister take seriously the representations from Wakefield and West Yorkshire about those issues?

Mr. Curry: The Webber Craig group of local authorities has been very effective in bringing forward ideas—for example, its idea of compensation for employment and health problems—which are now part of the distribution method.

Central to the question is the fact that, if local authorities believe that there are issues which must be addressed, we shall examine them, together with my own agenda of matters that I intend to review in the course of the year. The procedure is conducted with the co-operation of local authority associations, which enables us to arrive at a method which everyone subscribes to as being as fair and objective as possible.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I recognise the need for the area cost adjustment, because some areas face higher costs than others, but can the Minister not find a better system of tapering out those areas of high cost? For example, Oxfordshire receives area cost adjustments whereas Gloucestershire does not receive anything. Would it not be fairer to taper it off gradually to nothing throughout the country?

Mr. Curry: It would be quite difficult to measure additional costs in the south-east if we went as far as Berwickshire to judge them. We have clearly improved the taper in the south-east and I am now satisfied that it works within the confines of that method. If we are to try to move to a nation-wide system we shall have to look for an alternative method, and in that context we are now considering travel-to-work areas. I hope that that will work, as it will enable me to use a system which I believe that all people will perceive as being fair, objective and universally applicable.

County Hall, London

17. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an official tour of County hall, London SE1.

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend has recently visited County hall.

Mr. Banks: I urge the Minister and his colleagues to take a very close interest in what is occurring at County hall. It is becoming clear that neither the London residuary body nor the Secretary of State's predecessor, the present Home Secretary, studied the bid from the cowboy organisation, Shirayama. There is a scandal in the making at County hall. Ministers may not feel that they owe it to themselves to examine it closely and take direct action, but do they not owe it to the people of London to do so?

Sir Paul Beresford: I have considerable respect for the hon. Gentleman's interest in County hall because it was his political nursery. The preparatory work that is going on there is being watched and inspected carefully—particularly by English Heritage, which was there some two weeks ago.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: If the plans for County hall, involving a hotel complex and other such proposals, were not to go ahead, would my hon. Friend consider proposals to place the London School of Economics there? That would be far better than a bloated and expensive bureaucracy at the expense of people of Greater London, as proposed by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Sir Paul Beresford: There is no evidence of any need for that. I understand that the most recent comment by Mr. Shirayama, while viewing his earthquake-destroyed property, was that he was working on a property in London—County hall.

Waste Strategy

18. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the Government's waste strategy programme.

Mr. Atkins: Last week we issued for public consultation a draft waste strategy for England and Wales. It aims to use the principles of sustainable development to provide a coherent framework for waste management policy and practice. Copies of the document are available in the Library.

Mr. Bennett: I thank the Minister for that reply. Could he clear up a question about green taxes? He will appreciate that many people are campaigning that Britain should follow that line. Does he accept that there is a dilemma with the green tax? Although it discourages environmentally unfriendly activity, Governments can be hooked on the income that it raises. Are the Government introducing the landfill levy primarily to increase funds for the Government, or to discourage the use of landfill sites for waste disposal?

Mr. Atkins: The levy will not increase funds directly to the Government. The whole idea of it as an economic instrument is to make people think through their waste strategy in companies or local corporations. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would also like to address his concerns to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who ultimately is responsible for these matters.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend will know that the Government have been under great pressure to stop waste dumping and the burial of waste. Is he aware that in many cases, such as Dorset, the supposedly greener option of waste to energy has been wholly unacceptable, as it has to my constituents? Are we going in the wrong direction in trying to press those solutions when the green lobbies themselves are saying they are worse than waste dumping? Perhaps we should go back to the old technology.

Mr. Atkins: As it happens, yesterday I was at the Henry Doubleday Research Association, which does much work in composting and the recycling of organic waste. I was taken to Leicestershire to see a particular site that the county is operating. Many other waste authorities are also recycling and composting green waste. In the future that is likely to happen more often than not. If my hon. Friend has problems in Dorset that he feels that I can address, I shall be more than happy to help him and my other hon. Friends.

Mr. Beggs: Has the Minister considered giving any incentive to encourage waste burning to create energy as opposed to supporting landfill?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend will be aware that some councils in Northern Ireland have done some really remarkable work on waste to energy. Down is the case in point, but I know from my former incarnation as a Northern Ireland Minister how much work was being done on alternative sources of energy. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman directs his question to the Minister responsible for such matters in the Province. I am trying to do my best over here on the basis of the good knowledge and experience that I gained in Northern Ireland.

Ms Ruddock: Further to that answer, what is the Minister's response to the report in *The Observer* last weekend that some municipal incinerators were emitting dioxins at a rate of more than 300 times the Government's safety limits and that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution believes that they should be reduced by 90 per cent? What are his plans on the landfill levy in respect of local authorities? It appears to us that it would be a diversion of money from council tax payers straight to the Treasury.

Mr. Atkins: I never make the mistake of reading *The Observer*, so I cannot comment on that particular report; however, I understand that the serious issue underlying the hon. Lady's question is worth pursuing. I shall certainly ask HMIP exactly what the hon. Lady is referring to and ask for a report on it as soon as possible. Question Time is perhaps not the time to discuss the detail of the landfill levy, but I can assure the hon. Lady that we have many more policies relating to waste disposal than ever she does.

Mr. Garnier: I thank my hon. Friend for visiting the constituency factory to which he referred. Do not his

interest in that factory and his visit to Leicestershire demonstrate the Government's attitude towards private and Government partnership in that sector?

Mr. Atkins: I am only sorry that the Whips did not allow my hon. Friend to be with me yesterday when I visited his constituency. He is right—the issue is all about partnership between the private sector and local authorities, as well as making companies recognise what can be done. Above all, the message that I would ask my hon. Friend to take back to his attractive part of Leicestershire is that domestic users of green waste from the garden can have it recycled and use it again for compost to benefit their gardens—it is a good system.

Local Authority Services

19. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he proposes to allow local authorities to extend and improve their services.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Since 1979 we have taken, and are continuing to take, a range of measures and quality initiatives for improving the value for money in local authority services, including establishing the Audit Commission, compulsory competitive tendering and introducing the citizens charter and performance indicators.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does the Minister understand that Essex county council's ability to improve and extend services is substantially hindered by the unfair rate support grant settlement? Will he consider the accuracy of his earlier reply, when he told the House that there had been no representations from Essex about rate support grant? There have been representations, and on 1 February a letter was sent to the Secretary of State complaining about the alteration without consultation of the demographic data relating to education services. Has not my county been disadvantaged by the inefficiency and bureaucracy of the Department? When will the leader of the council receive a reply to his letter of 1 February addressed to the Secretary of State?

Mr. Jones: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me say that there had been no representations in the period up to the laying of the order before the House. Of course, representations after the order has been laid are too late—the point that has been made to Essex county council.

Mr. Thomason: Does my hon. Friend agree that compulsory competitive tendering has contributed considerably to the improvement of local government services? Will he consider possible ways of extending that system? The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) seems to want to terminate it, much to the horror of many Labour council leaders.

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is right. Compulsory competitive tendering has resulted in substantial savings for council tax payers and a substantial improvement in quality in many cases. It is fascinating for Ministers talking to Labour-controlled councils about CCT for housing management—they find that those councils are, for the first time, discussing with their tenants what should be provided and at what quality.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Does the Minister not understand that, in places like Shropshire and Oxfordshire, parents, governors and even Tory county councillors are up in arms about the Government and are clearly saying that they want better services and are prepared to pay for them? They do not want a Government who tell them to pay more and get less.

Mr. Jones: As the hon. Gentleman raises the issue of Shropshire, it may be relevant to remind the House that Shropshire local authority employs 32.7 staff per 1,000 of the population, whereas Gloucestershire employs 21 staff per thousand of the population—the local authorities are not that dissimilar. Shropshire and other councils should consider their manpower levels and start saving.

Council House Repairs

20. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to ensure that council tenants can get repairs carried out quickly.

Mr. Curry: We introduced the new right-to-repair scheme on 1 April 1994. That gives tenants the right to have certain urgent repairs done quickly and at no cost to themselves.

Mr. Carrington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer, but will he consider the other problems with council repairs: their cost and their quality? My hon. Friend should look seriously at the need to give council tenants and council leaseholders a vetting power over the cost of council repairs and the standard to which they are done. Council tenants and council leaseholders pay for the repairs.

Mr. Curry: The law gives leaseholders protection against unreasonable service charges. Landlords can recover the charges only if they are reasonably incurred and the work is of a reasonable standard. Leaseholders have the right to be consulted, to inspect accounts on which charges are based and to challenge unreasonable charges in the courts. I should be pleased to receive information from my hon. Friend about the specific problems brought to him by his constituents.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

21. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of prospects for the development of compulsory competitive tendering on housing management.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have put in place the legislative framework extending compulsory competitive tendering to housing management. The first contracts are due to be in operation from April 1996. I am pleased to say that local authorities are making good progress with their preparations.

Mr. Fishburn: As competitive tendering always produces cheaper, more efficient and more humane management of the public housing stock, can my hon. Friend tell me why so many people on the Opposition Benches remain opposed to it?

Mr. Jones: I think that they approach the matter with political dogma rather than adopting a flexible approach such as that taken by the Government. No local authority in history has done everything by direct labour. No local authority in history has done everything by private contractor. The proper thing is to draw a boundary—not

on the basis of political whim and dogma—and to use a process of competitive tendering against a specification, invite tenders, judge their quality and award the contract.

Mr. Skinner: Now that it is known that more than £50 billion is spent by the quangos that have been set up by the Tories, what steps have the Government taken to ensure that quangos use compulsory competitive tendering?

Mr. Jones: Non-departmental public bodies are encouraged to go through a process of tendering as much as any other body. Competitive tendering has brought a great deal of benefit, for example, in the health service. It has been possible to feed those benefits through into patient care.

Out-of-town Shopping Developments

22. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new out-of-town shopping developments await planning approval subject to appeal to his Department.

Mr. Gummer: Eighteen.

Mr. Sutcliffe: How does the Minister intend to stop abuses by property speculators such as Spring Ram Corporation in my constituency, which blackmailed the local authority into providing planning permission in green-belt areas by promising jobs and then set up a retail development? How will that assist local authorities such as Bradford, which suffer blight in their city centres?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman will know that I have made it clear that there can be no movement from a non-retail operation to a retail operation. There have been many occasions on which people have pretended that they were doing something different. I have insisted that the decision be made on the proper planning grounds. If the hon. Gentleman would like to bring that case to me, I will examine it carefully.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman supports me in putting pressure on local authorities to recognise that if we are not to have out-of-town shopping centres which will mar the countryside, they must make the inner cities and the towns much more attractive to business and to shoppers. Therefore, the next stage must be a real reaction of support from local authorities. I am getting such support from some local authorities of all political parties.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the outstanding contribution that out-of-town shopping centres have made in enhancing facilities for disabled people, in making it more pleasurable to go shopping and in making local authorities question carefully how they develop town centres, so as to attract shoppers rather than, as has happened so often in the past, discourage them?

Mr. Gummer: I agree that much of the improvement in city centres and town centres, particularly those run by Labour authorities, has been the result of the development of out-of-town shopping centres and the fear that unless standards are raised it will be impossible to stop people moving to the out-of-town centres. I hope that we shall see an increasing willingness to provide the same quality and choice in our city centres as is available outside.

Water Leakage

23. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his latest estimates of water leakage.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave earlier.

Mr. Howarth: I did not have the benefit of hearing the Minister's answer on that occasion, but having heard similar answers on many other occasions, I am sure that it was up to his usual inadequate standard. Is not the important point that a great deal of water could be conserved if the Government, in conjunction with the water companies, embarked on an active campaign to stop the leaks and conserve water?

Mr. Atkins: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman could not be here earlier; I am sure that he had a good reason for that. What I said to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), which I reiterate, is that much of the wastage is from the domestic, rather than the company, source. Companies are already spending a large sum dealing with the problem.

However, generally speaking, the hon. Gentleman's point is right. That is why I was associated with the Water Services Association launch of a detailed technical document dealing with the problems of leakage. I shall be delighted to ask the association to send the hon. Gentleman a copy, which will make good reading for him.

Mr. Fabricant: I want to take up the point about water wastage at domestic level. My hon. Friend will be aware that Armitage Shanks is based in my constituency. Will he resist the growing pressure in Europe for the European method of flushing toilets, which causes a great deal of water leakage, to be adopted in Britain? Our system uses a vacuum siphon method, which prevents water leakage.

Mr. Atkins: I shall do my best to prevent a chain reaction.

Madam Speaker: Order. On that note we shall move to the private notice question.

Regional Electricity Companies

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland) (*by private notice*) asked the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about Government policy on the future ownership of regional electricity companies in the light of his decision not to refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the bid by Trafalgar House to take over Northern Electric.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): It is Government policy that the ownership of the regional electricity companies should be decided by the market and should be subject to normal merger control procedures. Yesterday's decision by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was fully consistent with that policy and with the Government's long-standing policy that mergers should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission primarily on competition grounds.

The Director General of Fair Trading, in his statutory advice, said that the merger did not raise any competition concerns and that the wider public interest issues raised by Northern Electric and third parties did not warrant reference to the MMC. The President agreed with that advice. In addition, however, the President noted the regulatory concerns of the Director General of Electricity Supply and obtained assurances from Trafalgar House to address them. The DGES is currently discussing with Trafalgar appropriate amendments to Northern Electric's licence. They will ensure that he can continue to regulate effectively to protect customer interests in the event of the takeover proceeding.

Until 31 March 1995, the Government retain a special share in all the regional electricity companies, which effectively prevents a takeover. Trafalgar must therefore wait until after that date to obtain control of Northern Electric—assuming, of course, that the shareholders agree the bid. The same is true for bids for any of the other regional electricity companies.

The Government made it clear in 1990, at the time of electricity privatisation, that the special shares would be redeemed and that from that date the regional electricity companies should be exposed to the normal disciplines of the market.

As I made clear, it will now be for Northern Electric shareholders to decide whether to accept Trafalgar's bid.

Dr. Cunningham: Is not it clear from the nature and the length of the Minister's reply that this is a major policy decision, which should have been the subject of a statement in the House by the President of the Board of Trade in the first place? Is not the President taking a rather curious view of his responsibilities when he says that he cannot answer questions before making his decision, yet apparently does not want to answer questions after he has made his decision either? The right hon. Gentleman is not usually reticent about his role in Government policy.

Does the Minister recognise that when he talks about decisions being taken by the market, regulated, private enterprise, monopoly regional electricity companies are not normal market companies, but something very different?

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that we believed—as did many other people—that there were strong grounds for a reference of this issue to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Has not the public interest been ignored by the President in not making such a reference?

Can the Minister confirm that it is true that the Securities and Futures Authority and the Securities and Investments Board are both raising important questions about insider dealing and dubious City practices connected with the role of the Swiss Bank Corporation in this affair? Can the Minister assure the House, if the Trafalgar House bid is successful—or if other bids for other RECs are successful—that properly transparent accounting practices will prevail in the future management of the regional electricity companies; and that they will not simply be used as cash generators for their new owners?

Is not it clear that the regulator has serious doubts about the proposed takeover in respect of his own powers and of the effectiveness of regulation under potential new ownership? Can the Minister say whether the so-called behavioural undertakings imposed on Trafalgar House will be legally binding? As the industry regulator apparently pressed for a referral to the MMC, why was his advice rejected?

Is it at all likely that the free-for-all that is about to ensue in the ownership and control of private monopoly regional electricity companies will ever produce the best solution or the best way of providing a rational structure for the electricity supply industry, to the benefit of its consumers and its employees?

Mr. Evans: Yesterday's statement by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade followed the usual practice of the Department of Trade and Industry when considering referrals to the MMC. In this instance, there has been no departure from the usual practice.

It has been suggested that the President should have waited to make the announcement until his return from India where, as the House will know, he is leading a trade delegation in the interests of developing the economic prospects of this country. He is due to return tomorrow. It was of course the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) who insisted on a response to his question in the House today, in full knowledge of the whereabouts of the President of the Board of Trade. His remarks in that regard should be seen in that light.

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman's statement that the privatised electricity companies are not normal companies offers us some understanding of his outlook. We have consistently argued that, subject to the regulatory concerns that all in this House share, they are indeed normal companies, operating in the private sector. It was the very regulatory concerns outlined by the right hon. Gentleman when he asked me questions about the matter on Wednesday last week which were dealt with in the assurances given by Trafalgar House to the President of the Board of Trade, and which are referred to in his statement.

The right hon. Gentleman ignores what both I in my statement and the President in his have clearly stated, in two material particulars. The Director General of Fair Trading advised the President of the Board of Trade, first, that there were no competition concerns that would, in the

[Mr. Evans]

circumstances, merit a reference; secondly, he also advised the President against a reference on public interest grounds.

The right hon. Gentleman carted into his remarks the accusation of, as he put it, "insider dealing". He should reflect on the clear statement already made by the President of the Board of Trade to the effect that the appropriate authorities are already looking into that. Yesterday's decision by the President was entirely unconnected with any matter to do with that continuing inquiry.

The right hon. Gentleman asked for transparent accounting practices. Clear reference was made to that matter in the statement of my right hon. Friend the President, in relation to assurances that he received from Trafalgar House. As to the concerns outlined by the Director General of Electricity Supply, the regulator's representatives were present when those assurances were received. There is continuing dialogue between Trafalgar House and the regulator.

The concerns expressed by the right hon. Gentleman clearly demonstrate his lack of understanding of the marketplace. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade reached his decision entirely in accordance with the interests of the electricity industry.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is not it perfectly sensible that the management of newly privatised companies should be kept on its toes by the threat of takeovers by companies and owners who will bring improved management? Is not efficient management in the direct interest of consumers?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Many Opposition Members fail to understand the operation and discipline of the marketplace. It is surprising that so many Opposition Members spend time complaining about the remuneration of senior managers and directors in privatised utilities, and then present the argument that they should be insulated from the pressures of the marketplace.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): What was the purpose of the golden share, if the Government treat like any other takeover the first hostile bid for a public utility? The golden share may expire at the end of March, but public interest will not. What advice have the Government received from the regulator? Have not they pulled the rug from under the regulator's feet? What is the Government's assessment of the extent to which the bid is driven by the tax advantages that the bidder thinks will result?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman should know that Parliament decided that the golden share would expire in March this year, not continue indefinitely. The purpose was to allow electricity companies time to establish a track record in the marketplace. The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong to assume that the golden share was to continue indefinitely and that the companies would always be insulated from the prospect of takeovers.

I have little to add to my comments about the regulator. The regulatory concerns outlined by the Director General of Electricity Supply were, in the Government's opinion, addressed by the assurances received. We are confident that current discussions between the DGES and Trafalgar House will ensure that regulatory concerns are addressed.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will my hon. Friend confirm that all licence holders, whoever owns them, must abide by their licence obligations?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The requirements placed on licence holders remain entirely unaltered by my right hon. Friend's announcement yesterday.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): If anybody in the House shows marked ignorance, it is the Minister. I do not know of any private company that legally has total control over the domestic market, as regional electricity companies have, until 1998. Will the Minister comment on suggestions in the press today that takeovers would change the industry's structure, and that it might revert to the pre-privatisation vertical stream structure—which could be totally in the private sector and foreign owned? Is the Minister saying, on behalf of the President, that the criteria used in the present takeover bid will apply even in the case of money invested from abroad?

Mr. Evans: I am saying that it is the policy of the Government to decide each issue on its merits as it comes to the Department of Trade and Industry to be judged. There is no circumstance in which this is any sort of precedent. Each case must be judged on its merits. The hon. Gentleman, as Chairman of the Trade and Industry Select Committee, well understands that it is not the case that there is no competition in the market. There is already competition; from 1998 there will be a whole lot more.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): How will the assurances from Trafalgar House to the Secretary of State be enforced by the regulator, if they are not kept?

Mr. Evans: The position is that the assurances will be monitored by the regulator himself. The regulator has already indicated, in a statement that he issued yesterday, that he was beginning discussions with Trafalgar House to bring about amendments of the licence to that effect. I am sure, as my hon. Friend knows, that there is power within the Electricity Act 1989, if the regulator so considers, to have a matter referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): If insider dealing is found and difficulties arise over prosecution—as happened in the case to which I am unable to refer today—can we then be assured that the law on insider dealing will be reviewed, so that we can have some successful prosecutions?

Mr. Evans: I think that the hon. Gentleman will already be aware of a statement that was made by the Securities and Investments Board in relation to the issue of derivatives lately. I can tell him that, within the sphere of my own responsibilities on the operation of companies law, the issue of derivatives in that area is a matter of on-going examination.

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): Further to my hon. Friend's earlier answer, can he confirm that, in the event of Trafalgar House breaching its assurances, the Director

General of Electricity Supply can refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission under the Electricity Act?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is very important, in the context of some of the remarks that have been made, to underline the fact that that power resides with the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Will the Minister tell me where I and my constituents can buy our electricity other than from Northern Electric? If he cannot, will he admit that it is a monopoly and see it as being different?

Mr. Evans: As the hon. Gentleman should know, for commercial customers there is currently a degree of competition in the market, and from 1998 the Government will ensure that that competition is more widely available, so that the domestic customer is able to take advantage of competition as well.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): If Trafalgar House succeeds in its takeover bid for Northern Electric, will my hon. Friend ensure that the company's capital programme on upgrading and renewing the overhead power lines continues? Reliability of supply is very important, particularly in rural areas, where the cables are subjected to the vagaries of the weather. Will my hon. Friend make sure that the agreement between the regulator and Trafalgar House ensures that Northern Electric will continue to spend that money and upgrade its programme?

Mr. Evans: For my hon. Friend's benefit, that is one of the specific areas covered by the assurances given by Trafalgar House, and is subject to the discussions to which I referred.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Would the Minister like to reconsider his rather foolish comment that these are just normal companies? How on earth is it not a precedent? Will it not effectively be open season on the other regional electricity companies? What talks has he had with the Secretary of State for Scotland about the implications of the non-decision not to intervene for the two Scottish electricity companies? Does he not understand the anger that would be felt in Scotland if the independence of Scottish Hydro-Electric or Scottish Power were compromised by that foolishness?

Mr. Evans: In the circumstances, the hon. Gentleman misses the point concerning the advice given by the Director General of Fair Trading. This is a case in which the Office of Fair Trading, through the director general, is in a position to offer advice to the President of the Board of Trade. Both in the statement that was made yesterday and in the statement that I have made to the House today, it is absolutely clear that the decision that has been reached by the Government is in accordance with that advice: in terms of competition and of the public interest, there were no grounds for the matter to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Moreover, as I have already made clear, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has secured the assurances to which he referred in his statement and to which I have referred today. We have also made it clear that any other bids will be considered by the Department in the usual way.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Does my hon. Friend find it odd that, having spent the past few weeks condemning the pay and conditions and professionalism of the boards and management of the regional electricity companies, the Labour party should condemn a proposal to subject them to the professional direction and management of a well-tested international British company? Does not that suggest double standards?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We do not believe that management or directors should be insulated from the pressures of the market. We believe that the customer's interest needs to be protected, and will be protected, by the terms of the announcement that has been made; but we believe that there should be no insulation beyond that. I am rather surprised—well, perhaps in the circumstances I am not so surprised—that Opposition Members seem to believe in such insulation.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Is the Minister aware that, at a special meeting in Newcastle this morning, the votes of private and individual shareholders were heavily outnumbered by the proxy votes of the big institutions? Does not that demonstrate that, despite what the Government have said about wider share ownership, the City is still in the driving seat? Given that the Conservative party is very much in the City's pocket and has demonstrated its dislike of regulation, what guarantee have we that the long-term security and interests of the consumer will be considered?

Mr. Evans: As I made clear in my statement, it is now for the shareholders of Northern Electric to decide the issue. The Government do not take a view as between one bidder and another; the shareholders must exercise their judgment in the circumstances. All that is meant by my right hon. Friend's statement is that he has decided in the circumstances—on the basis of advice received from the Director General of Fair Trading relating to both competition and public interest—that there are no grounds for a reference to the MMC.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I welcome yesterday's announcement by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, and recognise the consistency of the advice that he takes from the Director General of Fair Trading. Will my hon. Friend confirm, however, that those who own the companies will be subject to the same regulatory regime? Will he also give us an idea of the views of consumers? How will they benefit from the takeover?

Mr. Evans: As I said earlier, the issue of whether the bid proceeds successfully will be a matter for the shareholders. It is not for me, or for the Government, to advise shareholders on whether to accept a bid. I can say, however, that under the Electricity Act individual companies with licences are subject to regulation in the terms of those licences, which are unaffected by today's statement.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Surely the Minister is aware—the question has arisen before—that the taxpayer will lose £223 million because of the bid. The loss of tax revenue could be compounded by takeovers of other companies such as the Yorkshire Electricity Group, Midlands Electricity and perhaps even

[Mr. Ronnie Campbell]

London Electricity. It has been one big rip-off. Can it not also be said that Tory party funds will benefit from the Trafalgar House bid?

Mr. Evans: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures, but if he is concerned about a rip-off, let me remind him that since the privatisation of the electricity companies, there has been a steady reduction in the price of electricity. That has been the effect of introducing the disciplines of the market.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): As a number of Opposition Members are clearly concerned about the effect on the consumer, will my hon. Friend confirm that, should the merger go ahead, Northern Electric's customers will enjoy a substantial bonus?

Mr. Evans: I understand, because I read about these things along with everyone else, that Northern Electric customers have been offered a certain financial bonus by Trafalgar House. As I said, however, that is entirely a matter for the shareholders to judge, and not a matter on which the Government take a view.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Does the Minister recognise that other responsibilities exist in relation to the northern region? There are 18,000 shareholders living there who are also consumers. I assume that they have been to the meeting this morning and that they have been outvoted. Those are the people who have an interest in the northern region. Does not he recognise that a social involvement exists in exercises such as this, and that my hon. Friends who live outside the northern region also have an interest in what is happening, because it will happen in their regions?

Mr. Evans: I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that the decision that has been made is entirely consistent with the advice offered to the Government by the Director General of Fair Trading. The hon. Gentleman is saying that there should be a preferential voting system, in which one shareholder is entitled to more of the vote than another. I cannot go down that route.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend on accepting the advice that I gave him at Department of Trade and Industry questions last Wednesday. Will he confirm that consumers in the north will receive a bonus of £30 as a result of the takeover, if it goes ahead? Will he also confirm that the institutional investors disliked by the Labour party are the pension funds that guarantee occupational pensions, and the life insurance companies that give decent bonuses to people with with-profits policies? They include the majority of our constituents.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend will recall that, when I responded to him last week, I said that I did not think it wise in the circumstances to comment on his specific advice. I adopt a similar stance in relation to his comment about the bonus to be offered to Northern Electric customers. This is entirely a matter for the shareholders to judge. The role of the Government is to consider whether competition or public interest grounds exist for interfering in the situation. On the basis of the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, we have judged that, in this instance, no such grounds exist.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I do not suppose that the decision has anything to do with the fact that, since 1979, Trafalgar House has contributed £600,000 to Conservative party funds, does it—or am I being naive?

Mr. Evans: I am not sure that anyone, in the circumstances, would accuse the hon. Gentleman of naivety, but he is incorrect.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does my hon. Friend believe, as I do, that consumers throughout the country will be better off if electricity companies get the message that, if they want to defend themselves against unwanted takeovers, they should reduce the price of electricity to their consumers, and the wages being paid to chief executives?

Mr. Evans: It is especially interesting that the first correlation to be drawn in that way comes from the Conservative Benches rather than the Opposition Benches. It sets in context many of the remarks that we have heard from the Opposition Benches in the past few weeks. It is clear that the regional electricity companies cannot be insulated from the disciplines of the marketplace. In this instance, having judged those factors, and having taken into account the advice received, the Government have decided that this particular electricity company cannot be put into an insulated position.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): What legal force will the assurances that were given to the President of the Board of Trade have? If those assurances are breached in any particular, will that mean that he will reconsider referring the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

Mr. Evans: Perhaps I can assist the hon. Gentleman. I presume that he heard the beginning of my statement, so he will recall that I said that the Director General of Electricity Supply has the power to refer the matter in any event—*[Interruption.]* Will the hon. Gentleman please hear me out? The Director General of Electricity Supply has the power to refer the matter under the Electricity Act 1989 should he so wish. In this particular case, he is at this moment engaged in a dialogue with Trafalgar House. If the bid proceeds and if there is subsequently a takeover, the Director General of Electricity Supply will bear those factors in mind if there should be any breach of the assurances. The position adopted by the Government is that to have a statutorily enforceable undertaking beyond the assurances that we have received, would have required a situation in which the Director General of Fair Trading considered that such assurances were necessary. We received no such advice in this case.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the shareholders of Northern Electric have already benefited to a considerable extent, that customers will benefit to a considerable extent from the £30 bonus and that employees will benefit from increased investment by Trafalgar House? Does he agree that as this is the takeover of an electricity company by an engineering company,

there are no competition or public interest issues involved, so my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has made absolutely the right decision?

Mr. Evans: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's comments about competition and public interest. I do not think that he would wish me to comment on whether the bid should be successful as that is a matter for the shareholders to decide.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Does the Minister accept that Northern Electric's customers do not share his colleagues' enthusiasm for the takeover, but regard it with great concern? Does he realise that, having heard him today, they will be even more afraid that the rumour about the propensity of Trafalgar House to asset-strip any firm that it takes over is really what this is all about?

Mr. Evans: I hope that the hon. Lady has seen the statement issued yesterday by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and the precise terms of the assurances received because they deal precisely with the issue that she raised.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Will the Minister tell me to whom the regulator will be accountable if at some future date he decides to refer, or not to refer, the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

Mr. Evans: The regulator is, of course, independent. It is a matter for him to decide in the circumstances whether he wishes to refer the bid. I find it odd to hear concerns raised about the position of the regulator because, as I said, when the assurances were given by Trafalgar House, representatives of the regulator were present.

Personal Statement

4.2 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): With your permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a short statement. Following the successful defence by *The Guardian* of a libel action relating to malice in reporting a story about Conservative party funding, I am happy to be able to put the record straight in respect of an intervention that I made on the Floor of the House on 22 June 1993.

On that occasion, I read from a letter sent to me by an Arab whom I had known for many years and who related in his letter an alleged conversation between the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Prince Bandar. On the same day, *The Guardian* had reported that allegation as it tended to confirm other reports that had emanated from an entirely different source. Like *The Guardian*, I felt that this was an important matter that deserved examination. As far as I am aware, no dishonesty was involved by any party, including none by myself. I was reading from a letter written by someone whom I believed to be acting in good faith, and I was not lying.

I was, however, wrong to name the Secretary of State for two reasons. First, he had just suffered a serious heart attack. Secondly, he could not speak for himself. At that time, I believed that it was the responsibility of the Tory party to respond as the allegation was that money was being paid to the Tory party.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to apologise to the Secretary of State and his family for my insensitivity in relation to his illness at that time and to put it on record that, although I know the allegations to have been made in good faith, I am now satisfied that neither the Secretary of State nor Prince Bandar was involved in such a conversation. I am also happy to extend my apologies to Prince Bandar.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Obviously, it would be wrong to seek to ask questions on a personal statement— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind the right hon. Gentleman and the House that we make no comments following a personal statement. It is received by the House in silence and we then move on to the next business. That has been the custom and practice of the House for many years and I intend to uphold that custom and practice.

Land Registers (Scotland)

4.4 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make prepayment of the appropriate statutory fees a condition of acceptance of writs for recording in the Register of Sasines and of applications for registration in the Land Register of Scotland.

The Bill is neither controversial nor topical. To those not involved in conveyancing in Scotland, it would not be unfair to describe it as rather dull. However, the minor changes to existing legislation which I wish to introduce in the Bill are important to the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland, supported by the Law Society of Scotland, and enjoy all-party support from Scottish parties in the House.

The Bill would enable the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland to move from post-payment to pre-payment of fees for the recording of writs in the register of sasines and for the registration of applications in the land register. It would also provide for the keeper to reject applications for registration in the land register and writs for recording in the register of sasines if those were not accompanied by the appropriate fee. That would be achieved by a short and uncontroversial two-clause Bill.

I do not wish to detain the House by going into great detail about the proposed change. However, it might assist fellow hon. Members, particularly those from south of the border, if I say a few words about Registers of Scotland, the land registration system in place there and the reasons for the proposed change.

In many ways, Registers of Scotland mirrors Her Majesty's Land Registry in England and Wales in being responsible for land registration matters. In Scotland, however, there are two main registers that cover rights and land. The register of sasines dates from the 17th century and records deeds affecting property in Scotland. For more than three centuries, the register of sasines has provided the chief security for title to land in Scotland. It is now being replaced by the land register, which is a state-guaranteed, map-based register of title to land.

The land register became operational in 1981, and Registers of Scotland, in a recent response to the 46th report of the Committee of Public Accounts, has committed itself to completing the extension of the land register to cover the whole of Scotland by no later than 2003. To achieve that challenging extension programme, Registers of Scotland is pursuing a number of initiatives to improve the efficiency of the Department and the service that it provides to its customers. Those initiatives include a move to trading fund status from April 1996, which would bring it into line with HM Land Registry, which has operated as a trading fund since April 1993. Trading fund status will greatly assist Registers of Scotland in planning the necessary finances for extending the land register by giving it additional financial flexibility. Although that will undoubtedly help the Keeper of the Registers of Scotland, the keeper is currently faced with another financial difficulty, which is what my Bill seeks to resolve.

The current system of invoicing customers, who are mainly solicitors, after the work on registration or recording has been completed, is both time consuming and expensive in pursuing outstanding fees. That has been particularly so in recent years when the level of outstanding fees has risen significantly. Despite a number of attempts to chase up outstanding debts by Registers of Scotland with assistance from the Law Society of Scotland, some £4.7 million in fees was owed at the end of 1994 to Registers of Scotland, of which some £1.9 million or 40 per cent. was outstanding by at least four months. On a turnover of £30 million a year, that level of outstanding debt is considered to be no longer acceptable by the keeper. He is supported in his view by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Law Society of Scotland.

A move to pre-payment of fees is seen as the solution by all parties. Not only would that deal with the outstanding debt problem, but it would assist the cash flow of Registers of Scotland, enabling it to make savings of about £500,000 per annum on the collection of fees. It would also bring Scotland into line with England and Wales. I emphasise that that would not the effect the level of fees charged by Registers of Scotland. There are, therefore, no adverse cost implications for solicitors or purchasers of property, including house buyers. As a result, the proposed change should not be in any way controversial. The Law Society of Scotland has already confirmed that solicitors are content for the change to be made.

The problem is that the keeper cannot affect that change without existing legislation being amended. Section 6 of the Land Writs Registration (Scotland) Act 1868 provides inter alia that payment of fees for recording writs in the register of sasines should take place after recording. There is no similar restriction in the Land Registration (Scotland) Act 1979, but the keeper would not have the power to reject an application for registration on the land register without an amendment to section 4 of that Act. My Bill therefore provides for the necessary amendments to be made to those two Acts to enable pre-payment and to allow the keeper to reject writs for recording in the register of sasines or applications for registration in the land register when not accompanied by the appropriate fee.

The Bill will also make a minor consequential change by removing the process of notifying that a recorded writ was for ready for delivery in exchange for the fee, which would flow from the change to post-payment to pre-payment.

The Bill is short, non-controversial and narrowly focused, but it important to those concerned. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Bill Walker, Mr. Allan Stewart, Mr. Norman Hogg, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Phil Gallie and Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.

LAND REGISTERS (SCOTLAND)

Mr. Bill Walker accordingly presented a Bill to make prepayment of the appropriate statutory fees a condition of acceptance of writs for recording in the Register of Sasines and of applications for registration in the Land Register of Scotland: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 February 1995, and to be printed. [Bill 51.]

Orders of the Day

Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have not accepted any of the instructions on the Order Paper.

4.12 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of the Bill is straightforward; it is to rationalise the Sunday licensing hours for off-licences, pubs and clubs.

The Bill contains sensible measures which I believe will be welcomed by both consumers and the licensed trade. It provides for necessary protection against nuisance and disorder while removing the current unnecessary rules and regulations governing the sale of alcohol on Sundays.

Clause 1 will enable small shops and off-licences to sell alcohol from 10 in the morning until 10.30 at night. This will bring the law governing Sunday off-licence hours into line with the Sunday Trading Act 1994.

Since August last year, large stores and supermarkets have been able to open for up to six hours between 10 in the morning and 6 o'clock in the afternoon; yet they have been able to sell alcohol between midday and 3 o'clock only. That has created the absurd situation in which people shopping in supermarkets on Sunday morning for their lunch can buy as much food as they want but no drink to go with it. The Bill will sweep away that pointless restriction.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Can the hon. Gentleman make it clear that the Bill will have no effect on the Easter Sunday and Christmas day position—that supermarkets are not allowed to open on Christmas day when it falls on a Sunday? Will supermarkets be empowered by the Bill to open solely for the sale of alcohol on those days?

Mr. Forsyth: The Bill does not mention the opening of supermarkets. That matter has already been before the House. The Bill provides for removal of the anomaly that related to the sale of alcohol in supermarkets, as I have explained. As a result of the Bill, people will be able to buy alcohol in supermarkets on Sunday in the same way and at the same time as they can buy any other goods.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is right that, in licensing legislation, Easter Sunday and Christmas day have been treated in the same way as normal Sundays.

Mr. Beith: The Minister has not made it clear; he has made two conflicting statements. Does the Bill allow a supermarket to sell alcohol on Easter Sunday when that supermarket is not allowed to sell anything else on Easter Sunday?

Mr. Forsyth: If the supermarket is not open, it is not able to sell anything—either alcohol or goods. I thought that I had made that pretty clear to the right hon. Gentleman.

I now move to on-licensed premises. Pubs and hotels with bars are allowed to open only from noon until 3 pm and from 7 pm until 10.30 pm at the moment. Clause 1 will remove the afternoon break, so that pubs will be able to serve drinks in the bar throughout the period from noon until 10.30 pm.

The Government regard that as a sensible and responsible step. It is more than six years since the Licensing Act 1988 permitted pubs and clubs to open during weekday afternoons. At the time, serious worries were expressed about the adverse consequences that all-day opening might have in terms of increased drunkenness, crime and disorder. However, there has been little increase in drunkenness, nuisance or disorder as a result of the changes, and there seems no reason why things should be different on a Sunday.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Minister clarify for the House the position in an area such as Dwyfor in my constituency, where licensed premises do not open on Sundays as a result of the local referendum?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is tempting me into matters that are outwith my immediate area of responsibility, but I understand the position in respect of Welsh polls to be that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has said that, after 1996, that system will disappear and legislation would be required for that purpose.

The Bill creates an opportunity, where opening does take place on Sundays, for it to be extended. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the scope of the Bill is narrowly drawn to deal with Sunday opening. Although the issue of polls might well be in the scope of the Bill, I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has said that he will seek a future legislative opportunity to tackle that matter.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Minister said in terms that there has been "little" increase in alcoholism or drunkenness because of the operation of the 1988 Act. Will he confirm that, immediately after the 1988 Act, there was such an increase, and that research shows that there has been an increase in heavy drinking following the Act? How little is "little"?

Mr. Forsyth: I should be very interested to see the evidence on which the hon. Gentleman bases his remarks. The advice that is available to me shows that there has been little evidence of the type that he suggests, but I should be happy to consider it. I was making a specific argument in respect of the consequences of all-day opening, but I should be happy to examine that evidence. I am not aware of any strong evidence to support what the hon. Gentleman says. In considering those matters, we need to balance the rights of the majority of people to go about their business exercising responsible choices, and I believe that there should not be legislative barriers in the way of those people unless there is substantial justification for legislation of that type.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): It may be helpful for my right hon. Friend to know that my experience as a licensee when the Licensing Act 1988 came into force

[Mr. James Couchman]

was that the heavier drinking which followed the abolition of the afternoon break on weekdays lasted for approximately a fortnight.

Mr. Forsyth: There we have it from the sharp end. It is predictable that people would perhaps take advantage of the longer opening hours for their novelty value. Speaking as a Member who represents a Scottish constituency, I believe that when liberalisation took place in Scotland it was said that the binge drinking which went on at 10 pm when people tried to "get one more in" before closing time was lessened as a result of the longer opening hours. Those who take a different view cite anecdotal evidence to support their position. However, I am not aware of any general research which shows that giving people more freedom of choice results in their being less responsible.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. As a result of supermarkets opening on Sunday, churchgoers have been prevented from parking outside their church by the local council from 9.30 on a Sunday morning for the rest of the day because it is inconvenient for Sainsbury. That is a very odd thing to do. As a result of pubs opening all day on Sunday, parishioners of St. Gerard's in Featherstone, for example, may now be prevented from parking outside their church because it will inconvenience the pub next door.

Mr. Forsyth: Parking arrangements are matters for local authorities to decide. The proposals in the Bill are not related to parking arrangements for motor cars. I start from the position that our legislation should allow people to go about their business freely. It is up to them whether they wish to go to church or to the pub with their families. Unless there are very strong reasons for imposing legislative barriers to their doing so, those barriers should not be put in place. I am afraid that I am not able to help the hon. Gentleman directly with regard to parking arrangements, but I shall happily give way to him again.

Mr. Enright: The Home Secretary, who is sitting next to the Minister, assured us that the Sunday Trading Act 1994 would not have a deleterious effect on churchgoers. I agree that the problems have not resulted directly from any action by the Home Secretary, but will the Minister give an undertaking that he will examine the matter to ensure that churchgoers are not disadvantaged by being unable to park outside their churches as they do now?

Mr. Forsyth: The Bill deals with the opening hours of pubs and other licensed premises. I do not know what the hon. Gentleman's churchgoing habits are—I appreciate that there are differences between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England—but most church services begin before 12 o'clock when the pubs will open under the provisions of the Bill; so churchgoers will get there first for the parking spaces. I think that the hon. Gentleman can rest easy on that matter.

Mr. Enright: Not for midday masses.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not know about day masses—the hon. Gentleman is stretching my knowledge. As for his point about supermarkets, as I have already pointed out to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, the Bill does not deal directly with the opening hours of supermarkets, as we have already dealt with that matter. We are concerned about whether it is possible to buy alcohol in supermarkets when they are open. Presumably, parking arrangements will reflect public demand for the other goods that are on sale in supermarkets as well as the availability of alcohol. I hope that that point is clear.

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): I am sure that the Minister will agree that a radical and significant measure such as this warrants full consultation with the licensed trade and club associations. The largest all-party group in Westminster is the clubs association, whose offices and membership are shared by all political parties. It has direct responsibility for looking to the interests—not protecting the interests—of consumers. There are 8 million members of the Committee of Registered Clubs Associations. They are extremely concerned that no consultation took place. The matter was first announced by the Prime Minister outside the House, rather cavalierly, if I may say so. I do not expect the Minister to comment on that, but, if we mean what we say about consultation, particularly about involving people in such a great industry, it is imperative that consultation should take place. I hope that it is not too late to invite the associations to respond, especially CORCA.

Mr. Forsyth: The Prime Minister made the announcement as part of the Government's general determination to remove unnecessary regulation which inhibits people's choices and opportunities. Most people will welcome that and will welcome the measure. The hon. Gentleman used the description "cavalier". Perhaps Cavalier as opposed to Roundhead might be more appropriate. It may be more a Cavalier measure than a Roundhead measure, and puritans may be concerned about it.

This is a permissive piece of legislation, but nothing in it will compel people in clubs or other organisations to take advantage of it. It is about removing barriers, not imposing requirements, and if clubs feel that it is not appropriate for them to take advantage of the new freedoms that the legislation will provide, they are free not to do so. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's protests about consultation are entirely fair.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend will know that in 1993 his Department issued a White Paper on possible changes to the Licensing Act 1988. There was extensive consultation at that time and the bodies to which reference has just been made certainly had an opportunity to respond to the White Paper.

Mr. Forsyth: I was not in the Home Office at the time, but I shall take a risk. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. It is certainly true that we issued a consultation document, but I am not sure whether the present proposals in respect of Sundays were included.

Mr. Cunliffe: They were not.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman, who follows these matters carefully, tells me that they were not, but I can tell the House that we have had representations on the matter. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has responded to those representations and I am sure that the

silent majority up and down the country will welcome the measures. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will rally to support them.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Who are those large groups of people who have supposedly made a demand to change the law? In all the correspondence and representations that I receive, no one has ever suggested to me that it would be a great idea. Could it be that the Tory party has responded to the fact that the brewers give large sums of money to the Tory party funds, and that the brewers put forward the idea and the Minister is carrying out their wishes?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to notice any demand for anything, unless it is written on placards borne by militants marching towards Hyde park. That is the nature of his politics, but I suggest that he goes back to his constituency and asks people whether they wish to have the opportunity on a Sunday afternoon to take advantage of the new licensing arrangements to allow people to take their children into pubs. If he asks people whether they think it is a sensible measure, he will find that it has considerable support. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should seek to make such a low party political point on a measure that will command support from people of all political persuasions.

Sunday afternoon opening fits in naturally with the other steps which we have taken to relax licensing legislation. Until January, children under 14 were not allowed into public bars. The children's certificates which I have just mentioned will change that. Children under 14 accompanied by an adult will be allowed into those bars that serve meals and that licensing justices consider provide a suitable environment for young children. That should help to encourage family pubs, where parents can enjoy a quiet pint in the company of their children. As Sunday is the day when families often go out together, it makes no sense for pubs offering those facilities to have to close on a Sunday afternoon.

Allowing pubs to open on Sunday afternoons cannot fail to boost tourism. The change will, I am sure, be particularly welcomed by visitors from abroad, to whom the present requirement for pubs to close on Sunday afternoons is simply incomprehensible. I very much hope that the Bill will make rapid progress, so that its benefits can be felt during the summer holiday season.

The relaxation in Sunday hours will also apply to clubs. A club may sell alcohol to its members or their guests in accordance with the club rules if it is registered for that purpose with a magistrates court. Under the present arrangements, the hours during which alcohol may be sold in clubs on Sundays are the same in total as for pubs, and there must be an afternoon break. However, clubs have more flexibility than pubs over the length of the break and the time that they reopen on Sunday afternoons. Clause 2 will remove those somewhat complicated rules for clubs opening on Sundays. In future, they will be able to open from midday until 10.30 pm. Sunday licensing hours for pubs and clubs will be the same, which is already the case on weekdays.

I have outlined what the Bill will permit. I know that people of who live near pubs or clubs may be concerned that Sunday afternoon opening will bring problems of noise, nuisance or even disorder. As I have said, there has been virtually no evidence of such problems since pubs and clubs have been allowed to open during weekday afternoons. Nevertheless, there must be some remedy available if such problems arise following Sunday afternoon opening. Clause 3 provides that important safeguard.

Licensing justices or magistrates courts will be able to impose restriction orders on pubs or clubs where problems of nuisance or disorder have arisen or are likely to arise. A power to make a restriction order was introduced in the Licensing Act 1988 when the weekday afternoon break was abolished. Its effect is to reimpose all or part of the old afternoon break when afternoon opening had or was likely to give rise to annoyance, disturbance or disorder, and the power will be extended to Sundays.

Mr. Enright: Does that mean that, if the church next to the supermarket that is suffering—and has suffered—disturbance, objects to the sale of alcohol during those periods because it brings more customers, it will be able to appeal under that clause?

Mr. Forsyth: It certainly means that the church will be able to appeal if, as a result of the afternoon opening, there is annoyance, disturbance or disorder. It will permit the police and people who live or work in the vicinity of a pub or club to apply for a restriction order—a church is included in that category. If granted, the order will require the pub or club to close for all or part of the period from 3 pm until 7 pm on Sunday afternoons.

Clause 4 is concerned only with consequential amendments as a result of the changes in clauses 1 to 3 relating to Sunday hours and restriction orders. Clause 5 provides that, following enactment, the Bill will come into force on a date specified by the Secretary of State. That flexibility is needed to allow the Home Office to inform the police, licensing justices and magistrates courts about the changes that the Bill will make. We do not expect there to be any significant interval between Royal Assent and the Act—given that Parliament chooses to support the Bill to that stage—coming into effect.

I believe that Sunday is a special day. For many, it is a family day. Some people choose to go to church, some to play sport and others to have a drink in the pub. It is for individuals—not Government—to make those decisions. The Bill will increase individuals' freedom to choose how they spend their Sundays. It will call time on closing our pubs and clubs on Sunday afternoons. It will allow families to spend time together—eating and drinking at the time of their choosing, not the state's. It will ensure that the necessary safeguards exist to protect people from nuisance and disorder. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I regret having to raise with you so soon after I raised a similar point of order with you last Thursday the failure of the Government to make a statement on public sector pay, the failure of the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House about changes that I understand he will announce in a press release shortly on the introduction of new restrictive measures that will affect all categories of people seeking permission to remain in Britain, including asylum seekers. It is disgraceful, given the controversy that arose last weekend and this week, that the Home Secretary should not have seen fit to come to the House to make an important statement about matters which are of life and

[Mr. Max Madden]

death importance to many people. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman might find it possible to make a statement at 7 o'clock.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The hon. Gentleman has made his point. He knows full well that it is not a matter for the Chair to judge. It is up to Ministers whether they make statements. Those on the Treasury Bench will be aware of what the hon. Gentleman has said.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think the hon. Gentleman will find that a written question has indeed been answered.

Mr. Madden: That is not good enough: make a statement.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is interfering with the legitimate business now under discussion.

4.35 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): As has been the custom on such issues, if there is a Division it will be a free vote for the Opposition. Although in the past I have not voted in favour of any measure that encroached on Sunday, I will vote to give the Bill a Second Reading if there is a Division. We have some reservations, however, with which I shall deal later in my speech.

In the mid-1990s, there does not appear to be a great deal of moral heat left in the arguments about Sundays. As recently as 1988, when the Sunday hours were extended by one hour by an amendment in the House of Lords, Lord Ferrers, who was then a Minister in the Home Office, declined to support the amendment. He said that he could not

"support even this modest extension of the licensing hours for the simple reason that the Government have made plain their intention to leave Sunday hours unchanged in this Bill."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 March 1988; Vol. 494, c. 1052.]

The heat had gone out of the argument by then, but even at that stage it was clear that the Government were not entirely comfortable with exactly how those changes were proceeding.

Mr. Donald Anderson: As a veteran of the 1988 Licensing Bill, I can tell my hon. Friend that the facts were that throughout the Second Reading debate and proceedings in the Standing Committee, the then Minister of State at the Home Office, the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), gave repeated assurances that there would be no change to the Sunday hours. The gloss on what the Minister now says is that the Government did not support the change when it was made in another place and nor did they oppose it. They did not oppose it, notwithstanding the many assurances that had been given during the passage of the Bill through the House.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the gloss that he has added to what I was saying.

The arrangements for Sunday licensing have in the past been far more hotly contested and controversial. For example, in Wales in the recent past—the Minister referred briefly to it in his speech—the issue was not always so straightforward because there were various referenda, or referendums as we are now told they are to be called.

Mr. Enright: Referenda—my hon. Friend is right.

Mr. Howarth: There is controversy even on the name of that subject, never mind the execution of it.

I have an extract from a House of Lords debate on alcoholic drink as long ago as 1968. I noted an exchange between Lord Maelor and Baroness Phillips. Lord Maelor had asked about the conduct of the referendum that had been held. His response to the answer was:

"I thank my noble friend for her reply. I am not quite satisfied with the answer because I can give her facts and figures . . . Is my noble friend aware that in Denbigh there were 470 spoiled votes, and that in fact 1,500 were technically spoiled, except that the presiding officer could presume to know what was the intention of the voter. I must say that I am not surprised. I have here a copy of the ballot paper."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 November 1968; Vol. 297, c. 846.]

The whole debate then proceeded into chaos. Even at that stage, the question of holding referendums on the subject generated a great deal of heat.

The position in Wales created a series of anomalies. I have an extract from *The Times* of 6 November 1989. The article is headed:

"Forecasts of a wetter Wales".

In my experience, it is often just that. On the question of some counties being wet and some dry, the article stated:

"To see the consequences this produced you need to stand on a humped bridge over the River Teifi. Behind you is Nellie Griffith's Red Cow. It is shut because it stands on the Cardigan side of the border. By noon a steady stream of young men—many of them the Red Cow's mid-week regulars—has crossed the bridge to drink in the dozen public houses strung through the streets of Newcastle Emlyn, which is in liberal Carmarthen. Nellie Red Cow (locals will call her nothing else) is 75 and has lived in the house since infancy. 'It is not the little bit of lost business that makes me so angry,' she explains, 'it is injustice. The good Lord knows that we are not bad people over here. Peaceful on Sunday? I don't have swearing or fighting any day."

That sums up the problems and the anomalies.

Serious issues remain that should be discussed in the debate. In view of those anomalies, it was necessary to have some change. Broadly speaking, there is widespread support for a further relaxation of Sunday hours. I am sure that other right hon. and hon. Members have also received representations from the Consumers Association. It states:

"From surveys of CA members and the public at large, it is clear that present restrictions are inconvenient and that greater flexibility in opening hours will meet with widespread approval."

It then states some reservations, which could be appropriately raised at a later stage of the Bill.

I have also received representations from the Campaign for Real Ale, which also supports the Bill. I suppose that it represents the serious drinking end of the market. Nevertheless, its support should be taken into account.

As patterns of social life and working life have changed over the years, Sunday has become a day of leisure for most people rather than specifically a day of worship, as some might have maintained 30 or even 20 years ago. Many people—me included—are able to combine both. It is quite possible, as the Minister hinted, to go to church in the morning and to a pub, club or restaurant in the afternoon, and many families do just that.

Yesterday, I spoke to the Bishop of Liverpool, David Sheppard, who is also chairman of the board for social responsibility of the Church of England. He said that although he personally regretted the cultural changes associated with what is permissible on a Sunday, he still did not feel it necessary to take a strong line in opposition to the Bill.

Despite the fact that I shall support the Bill, I should record some of the reservations that people have about it—in addition to those already expressed by some of my hon. Friends. I agree, for instance, with my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe). Even before the Bill goes into Committee, there is a case for further consultation with some of the organisations—*[Interruption.]* It would be nice if the Minister bothered to listen to what I am saying. If sensible changes to the Bill can be made later, I am sure that my hon. Friends will be willing to propose them.

Mr. Donald Anderson: There has apparently already been some consultation with the brewers, even if the Government did not think it worth while discussing the matter with club representatives or licensed trade representatives.

Mr. Howarth: Indeed. I urge the Minister to hold meaningful consultation on all these points.

To continue my list of reservations: I have with me a Home Office press release published on 3 January and entitled

"Pubs to Offer a Family Welcome".

It states:

"Landlords will be able to welcome families with children into their bars early in the New Year, Home Secretary Michael Howard announced today. Licensees will be able to apply for children's certificates from January 3rd, in time for the major licensing session round in February. The certificates will, for the first time, allow accompanied children under 14 into suitable pub bars where food and soft drinks are served."

I welcome that announcement, but I fear that all too often pub and club facilities are not family friendly. They are frequently gloomy places that make no concession to families and have no facilities for children. Speaking as the parent of three young children, I am well aware of the changes that need to be made.

I trust that the certificate procedure will not stop there, and that licensees, breweries and club organisations will be encouraged to carry on the process of making licensed premises more family friendly. If we are serious about Sunday being a day of leisure, such facilities are very necessary ingredients.

I should like also to put the point of view of those who work in the licensed trade, referring, if I may, to points made by the Transport and General Workers union, the major trade union active in this area. It has five points to make:

"(i) For any worker not currently working on a Sunday, the decision to do so should be entirely voluntary. Workers should be protected from any disciplinary action or discrimination for refusing to do so."

The same points were made in respect of Sunday trading; with slight modification, they hold good in this case.

"(ii) Where a worker already works on a Sunday, any extension of their working hours should also be entirely voluntary and, again, workers should be protected from any disciplinary action or intimidation for refusing to work extended hours. (iii) Any workers who volunteer to work on Sunday, or to work extended hours, should be entitled to enhanced pay based on a minimum of double time. (iv) (iii) above should apply to all workers, whether they be employed for the sole purpose of working on Sunday or in a peripheral activity relating to the business.

(v) Any legislation in this matter should have universal application and be incorporated into the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act."

We may not be given full answers to those points, but they should be taken into account.

It may surprise one or two of my hon. Friends, but I have been lobbied by the British Casino Association, and I promised to put one of its points on record without any commitment by us. It wrote:

"Whilst the British Casino Association welcomes the further de-regulation of licensing hours under this Bill, this is in stark contrast with the current situation for casinos. Unlike other types of club, some casinos licensed for gaming may supply liquor after 10.30 pm and none may do so after midnight, even though gaming can continue until 4 am in the morning. This is an unforseen side effect of the ban on live entertainment in casinos by regulation under the 1968 Gaming Act, which means that no casino can apply for an 'extended hours order' or for a 'special hours certificate' under Sections 70 and 76 respectively of the Licensing Act 1964."

The Minister mentioned tourism. The association argues that the restriction affects the tourist industry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Casinos are outside the scope of the Bill, but, as part of the deregulation exercise that produced this child, we are considering casinos and proposals will be forthcoming. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's views on that and other areas where there may be scope for deregulation. I have some sympathy with the association's point on the inability of casinos to sell alcohol after a particular time in the evening. That anomaly is under consideration.

Mr. Howarth: I hasten to add that I was not pressing that case but merely flagging it. We do not take a particular position on that aspect.

Mr. Enright: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Howarth: Certainly.

Mr. Enright: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend because it is most irritating to be interrupted from behind. This seems to be the thin end of the wedge. Will deregulation be extended to racing? Will Pontefract be flooded with race meetings, charming though they are? Will there be further gambling in our pubs, with more gaming machines being installed? That seems the direction in which the Government are moving. I hope that my hon. Friend will impress on the Minister the need to put some stop to these damned proposals.

Mr. Howarth: It is never irritating to be interrupted by my hon. Friend, whose useful points are always well made. Horse racing is already permitted six Sundays a year. I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I understand that further proposals relating to gaming machines are on their way. Mammon is already at the door.

On balance, and subject to the reservations that I expressed, I will support the Bill's Second Reading. I hope that the issues raised by my hon. Friends and me will be addressed in detail as the Bill progresses. We have serious reservations and want them addressed before the measure reaches the statute book.

4.53 pm

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak early in the debate. I will not detain the House long. I declare an interest, as the Register shows, as joint licensee with my wife of Eoderton hall, which is a hotel and restaurant near Welshpool in Wales. We hold a full licence, so I have experience of the operation of licensing laws. I am also honorary president of the catering industry's liaison council, a trade body in which the industry tries to put forward its views.

I welcome the Bill wholeheartedly. I believe that it has come out of the Government's Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, and for that we should be grateful. I hope that there will be much more deregulation. My hon. Friend the Minister was right to agree that the Bill is one of the early benefits to come from that legislation.

When all-day drinking was introduced, we were led to believe that it would be a disaster. We heard, when the Minister was introducing the subject, that it would be a two-week wonder in certain establishments. It probably lasted that long in my part of the world. There were not the disasters that were forecast. The public were responsible and they could be trusted. In many areas, that piece of legislation was not used. The pubs and hotels had a choice whether to open all day, if they wished. The same is true of the proposed legislation. It does not force people to open.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend might like to know that a number of establishments did indeed try all-day opening on weekdays, as a result of the Licensing Act 1988, found that it was not to their benefit or that of their customers and exercised their choice not to open. I am sure that the same will happen with the Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill.

Mr. Hawksley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend about the wisdom of giving the licensees and the public the opportunity to show that there is a demand for the services that are offered.

I look at the Bill as a correction to an anomaly in many ways, because if one thinks of an hotel in a tourist area, or even an off-licence—I think of my part of the country, where the hotel is, and of the many campers and caravaners who visit the area—one will realise how stupid the present law is. Think of the scene in our local supermarket, which is small and is open on a Sunday—it has been for some time—and which has an off-licence. Imagine a member of the staff trying to explain to a foreign tourist why, at five past three, he or she cannot buy a bottle of wine to take back to the caravan, whereas 10 minutes earlier they were allowed to buy a bottle or a can of beer. It is absolute folly. Even if the tourist understood what was being said—with all due respect, somebody speaking in a Welsh accent to a foreign visitor who hardly speaks any English may have some problems—he or she looks at us as though we are mad. I believe that it highlights the folly of the present situation.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Does the hon. Gentleman, when he and his wife go on holiday to Spain, look at a Spaniard as though he were mad when the Spaniard tries to explain to him about a siesta, saints' days or the traditions of that country?

Mr. Hawksley: I have never been to Spain and nor has my wife, so that creates a slight problem. I will, perhaps, put it in the context of visits that I have made to France. I never seem to have any problems getting myself a drink in a French establishment whenever I have wanted one, whether or not it was on a Sunday.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I have seen in my local supermarket on a Sunday, where many retired people and students work, customers abusing and being extremely rude to supermarket staff who are trying to close the section where alcoholic drinks are sold. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill is sensible, because it will free up and remove that aggression from society which is absolutely unnecessary?

Mr. Hawksley: I have never witnessed that problem, but I can understand it happening and have been told many times that people who serve drinks up until the 3 o'clock deadline have problems when they have closed and people come in and expect to be served. They just do not understand and cannot believe that, in this country and in this day and age, when we have legislated for Sunday trading, we are pursuing that particular policy.

Mr. Beith: Before the hon. Gentleman gets too carried away talking about foreign tourists, he might reflect that if those tourists come from Norway and Sweden—as many visitors to my constituency do—they will be quite surprised to discover that they can buy alcohol from an off-licence rather than from a Government monopoly, and indeed that they can buy it at weekends at all.

Mr. Hawksley: I am glad that plenty of tourists visit the right hon. Gentleman's part of the country. The tourist industry is important, and the Bill goes a long way to help it by offering the facilities that are expected by many tourists, if not those from Norway.

I want to deal with two aspects of the Bill in detail. First, why do we go only halfway? Why do we not bring Sunday hours into line with weekday hours? The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) about supermarkets could also cause a slight problem in pubs and off-licences: local residents may be surprised to find that they shut at 10.30 pm rather than 11 pm on Sundays. I hope that the Committee will seriously consider extending opening time by, at any rate, that half hour at the end of the day, because if the same hours do not operate throughout the week people may be confused. I question the advantage of the hours specified in the Bill; indeed, I suggest that there are no advantages.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Did my hon. Friend's suggestion that pub opening hours should be brought into line with weekday hours apply both to the extra half hour at the end of the day and to morning opening?

Mr. Hawksley: I would prefer to alter the hours at both ends. I appreciate that the Church might object on the grounds that services are still going on at that time of the morning, so I deliberately avoided making the suggestion, but I support the principle. I suspect that, in any event,

pubs in areas where many people go to church would not want to open until the service was over, as few people would visit the pub at that time.

My second point concerns clause 3, which deals with restriction orders. I understand the reasons for the orders, which are similar to those in the legislation allowing all-day drinking. I gather that they are intended to deal with possible problems of nuisance, but I question—with some trepidation, as my own licence comes up for renewal at this time of year—whether we should give magistrates any discretion. I am concerned about the way in which they use that discretion in many cases.

Let me give three examples to show that giving magistrates the power to respond as they wish may result in distortions across the country. Their interpretation of legislation often varies from one area to another, and often does not correspond with what we intended when we introduced the legislation. I hope that the Minister will not suggest that the safeguard lies in the Crown court. Few licensees will be willing to employ lawyers and challenge a magistrate's decision in the Crown court: the process is very expensive for individual licensees.

I know of a court which—under the present system, which enables courts to allow extensions on Sunday afternoons—automatically refuses to allow such extensions, on "special occasion" grounds, to christenings. The court has put its reason in writing: it says that children attend christenings. It is indeed quite likely that there will be children at a christening, but surely a christening is a special occasion. If magistrates say no in one part of the country and yes in another, the discretion that they are given will cause a problem.

My second example relates, I admit, to an application that I made on behalf of a local football club. It was rejected. It was the first time that the Montgomery football club had won the cup—a local cup, I add hurriedly, before anyone forms too high an opinion of what was won. It was by far the greatest day of the club's life, and its members decided to hold a celebratory dinner at the hotel that I own.

When we applied to the magistrates, they said, "That is not a special occasion. You must finish at 11 pm." In fact, as a meal was served, we were able to give members of the club slightly more time in which to drink; but if we had been in the west midlands nearly every magistrates' bench would have allowed a much longer extension.

I hope that the Minister will respond in detail to my third example, as I consider it the most serious. If he cannot do so today, perhaps he will do so in writing. We have talked a good deal about the children's certificates that have already been granted under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, which have been welcomed by most people as a step forward. I am worried, however. The intention of Parliament and the Minister when the legislation was introduced, as paragraph 12 of the guidelines states, was that the certificates

"should be introduced with the least alteration to the normal operation of pubs concerned".

That is fair enough. We did not want too much of an upheaval, and if someone wanted to apply for a children's certificate that was fine. Now, however, we are noticing inconsistencies. In Devon and Cambridge, for instance, licensees are being told that no smoking should be allowed. Parliament did not ask for, or insist on, such a condition. I suppose that on Friday, when we debate the Tobacco Smoking (Public Places) Bill, Parliament will decide whether to legislate in that important regard; but magistrates are currently taking it on themselves to make it a condition of a pub's certificate that there be no smoking in that pub or in the area to which its certificate relates. I accept that that decision could be challenged in the courts, but that would be expensive.

I am even more concerned by my discovery that the Health Education Authority, a publicly funded body, is writing to magistrates and persuading others to do so. It writes:

"Magistrates can attach such conditions to these certificates as they consider fit."

It asks magistrates to make the no-smoking rule a condition of children's certificates.

We can argue about whether that is right, but I feel that such important decisions should depend on what happens in the House on Friday rather than being left to magistrates. I am particularly worried about the possibility of inconsistency throughout the country: some magistrates will think that the law should be applied as the House intended, while others will go further and try to apply it as they wish it to be applied.

Mr. Couchman: Hon. Members on both sides of the House said at the time of that change in the law last year that they hoped that magistrates would not attach unreasonable conditions to children's certificates. Examples of unreasonable conditions have occurred in Scotland, where children's certificates have been the order of the day for longer than in England and Wales. It was suggested, for example, that high chairs and children's special toilets should be provided. Such conditions are unreasonable. My hon. Friend's comment about pubs that have smoke-free areas and that seek children's certificates are in the same sort of league.

Mr. Hawksley: I agree with my hon. Friend. Some magistrates are imposing the condition that nappy-changing facilities must be provided in both male and female toilets. Parliament never intended that such conditions should be put in place. I am concerned, therefore, that we should not allow magistrates to have discretion, unless we are sure that they will use it wisely.

My hon. Friend's point about Scotland is fair. I gather that, in many parts of Scotland, because of the conditions that are being laid down, quite a few people are not applying for children's certificates. Few applications are being made in some of the larger cities. The reason is not that the licensee does not want children in his premises, or that the public do not want that. It is that licensees know that magistrates will impose conditions that are totally unacceptable to them.

In his winding-up speech, the Minister should deal with the question of magistrates' discretion, which is being abused in the case of children's certificates. Magistrates should trade in their prejudices. I hope that, if the Bill receives a Second Reading tonight, as I believe it will, the Committee will consider in detail the question of magistrates' discretion as outlined in clause 3. It is wrong that the personal prejudices of magistrates should, in any way, be reflected in the discretion that Parliament gives them. In supporting the Bill, I hope that the Committee will consider that important point. I look forward to supporting the Bill in the Division Lobby if necessary.

5.11 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Magistrates are not exercising personal prejudice if, in taking into account the appropriate conditions for a children's certificate, they have regard to whether conditions in a room pose a danger to children's health. Now that we know the consequences of passive smoking, that would be the case.

I insist that the Liberal Democrat party regards this matter as a free-vote issue, as do the other parties. Hon. Members will no doubt have different views about it. High politics is involved in the issue. After all, the Prime Minister chose to make it the subject of a key announcement in a major speech on 24 January at the Inter-Continental hotel.

I remember the degree of press interest during the early part of the evening, and the number of requests that I had to comment, because Downing street was guiding the press into thinking that a major announcement was to be made. Sure enough, what was that important announcement about? It was about Sunday afternoon licensing. Clearly, therefore, either the Government regard that as a matter of the highest political import, or the Prime Minister was stuck for something favourable to say in one of his many difficult weeks recently.

The Government had a desire to rush the Bill through, possibly taking all its stages in one day. I am glad that they thought better of that idea, and that they are making arrangements to ensure that the Bill is considered properly and in detail. For the Government, the Bill completes an agenda of making Sunday like any other day of the week, but we have not yet assessed the impact of last year's changes in Sunday trading.

We have not seen the effect of those changes, or tested the various propositions that were made about the Sunday Trading Act 1994, partly because, before Christmas, we went through a period that was not unlike the previous Christmas, when so many large retail chains broke the law. Since Christmas, the recession has still been biting fairly deeply. Many city centre retail chains have no great disposition to stay open extensively on Sunday. The Act may be put to the test only in the warmer weather as we approach the season when retail chains must attract more people. We have not yet assessed the Bill's impact, yet the measure will add to it.

The measure is not being taken as part of a general review of licensing and licensing powers. Some of the Bill's supporters, including the Consumers Association, have spoken about the way in which the licensing system now works. The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) spoke about that, too. Some of the instructions tabled were on that subject. I am not yet persuaded by their arguments. I am still happy for magistrates to exercise discretion and to receive advice from the police on disorder problems that they might expect, or difficulties that are associated with particular licensed premises.

Some people argue that this matter should be dealt with by the planning system, which is more a appropriate system through which to decide whether a premise's long opening hours are an intrusion, for example, on a residential area. It might have been more appropriate, therefore, to consider the extensions as part of a general review of licensing legislation, especially as the Bill effectively gives magistrates important discretion to reimpose the existing Sunday afternoon closing periods if, in their view, it is necessary for reasons of disorder or anything of that sort.

It is not clear from reading the Bill whether the restriction order that magistrates impose will be peculiar to one set of premises, or to several sets of premises in a given area, but that is an important discretion. The Minister has attached importance to it. Again, it makes one think that the matter should be considered in the context of a more general review of how the licensing laws work.

Perhaps the most important problem in relation to the Bill, and the biggest anxiety that I have about it, is its total lack of staff protection. Last year, the Government were forced to include protection for staff in the Sunday trading legislation because of pressure from hon. Members. To many of us, however, that protection was inadequate. In the main, the protection was for existing staff. The Bill, however, contains no element of protection for people who are in a demanding trade and whose ability to have time with their families on Sunday afternoons is being taken away.

I think especially of the effect on licensed house managers and pub staff, but the matter also affects quite a lot of licensees. Some licensees are in favour of the change; others are against it. It will, however, have a powerful effect on the family life of people who cannot afford to employ someone else to do their job on Sunday afternoons. They will lose trade if other premises stay open for the whole afternoon and people choose to go there rather than to a pub that will close.

Peter Love, general secretary of the National Association of Licensed House Managers, said:

> "This government seems intent on introducing Sunday opening without any consultation.
>
> The inclusion of Christmas day and Good Friday in these proposals further destroys the family and social life of public house managers."

No protection exists for people who work in the licensed trade. Their freedom is at stake. The Minister sought to cast the Bill in terms of the freedom that it would give to people. Whenever he does that, however, he ignores the freedom of people who work in the trade to have some time on Sundays with their families and to themselves. He offers them no assistance in securing that time.

I shall declare a small interest as someone who contributes regularly to the *Clubs Journal*. My impression is that not much call exists for the change among traditional clubs, but that some of them will feel pressured into Sunday afternoon opening in order not to lose customers to pubs. The Minister said that the Bill would "call time" on Sunday afternoon closures, but what if premises do not want to open and are pressured into doing so because of the competition?

People responsible for the management of a club have to have regard to its viability. That has been difficult to sustain, especially during the long period of recession. Clubs will not necessarily be able to gamble that they can keep their present trade if pubs in the immediate vicinity open for longer periods. There may not be much choice for them.

One prominent leader of the club movement said to me:

> "I don't believe our members will want this. It goes against our tradition of supporting families."

Generally, I do not detect in the club movement any desire for a change of this sort.

Greater pressure for change exists in the retail trade and especially among the supermarket chains. I sought to establish from the Minister what precisely was the position with Christmas day when it falls on a Sunday. I am still not sure that that has been made clear. What happens about Easter Sundays?

There should be no doubt that the recent Sunday trading legislation does not allow for large supermarkets to open on Easter Sundays or Christmas day when it falls on a Sunday. The Bill appears to remove the constraint on the selling of alcohol on those days, but it is not clear how the two pieces of legislation are to interact. It might be possible for a new anomaly to be created deliberately in an attempt to drive another wedge into the law. Some supermarkets might open for the permitted alcohol sales period but then claim that there is an anomaly because their customers can buy alcohol but not groceries. One can imagine the exercise in which they will then become engaged—the very reverse of what they did before. Supermarkets are experienced in public relations and are adept at pursuing their own interests, so let us make it clear that the exemptions applicable when Christmas day falls on a Sunday and on Easter Sunday are to remain.

Mr. Couchman: The right hon. Gentleman will remember that we were on opposite sides of the Sunday trading argument, but that we were in the same Lobby when debating Christmas day and Easter. I would be equally unhappy if the Bill were used as a wedge to enable supermarkets to open on Christmas day or on Easter Sunday.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He reflects the views of many hon. Members who favoured more general opening on Sundays but wanted to afford special protection to those two days. However, that leads me to ask why pub Sunday opening hours on Christmas day and Good Friday are included in the Bill.

Christmas day strikes me as especially difficult for those who work in the licensed trade. We should remember that, for licensees and pub managers, the pub is their home. Their only chance of having some peace on Christmas day to enjoy with their families is when the doors are closed and the customers have gone to their own Christmas dinners. They can then have a little peace and quiet in the place which is their place of work and their home. I am surprised that the Government have hooked Christmas day into this exercise, which is supposedly about Sundays. We should consider during the Bill's later stages whether to take Christmas day out of the Bill.

I have already mentioned the discretion afforded to magistrates. It is important that we know how clause 3 will work and in what circumstances the Government envisage that magistrates will place restriction orders and reimpose Sunday closing. For example, will those circumstances extend to circumstances in which people who live near pubs experience a great deal of disturbance on Sunday afternoons? I am not talking about real disorder.

The Minister made it clear that if there is persistent disorder as a result of Sunday afternoon opening in a particular locality, he would expect it to be brought to the attention of magistrates and for them to take it seriously. However, most people experience milder disturbance. Some pubs are situated in residential areas. As happens with Sunday trading, the Bill could mean cars coming and going and doors banging all afternoon. Residents would lose the peace that they want on a Sunday afternoon and some of their liberty would be lost. Will the magistrates' powers be interpreted strictly to cover gross abuse of the Sunday opening provisions, or will they take into account what is perhaps more of a planning argument about whether it is appropriate that a particular activity should continue at all hours of the day and night in a residential area?

The Bill has support from various quarters. It is supported by the Campaign for Real Ale, the Consumers Association, brewers and some people in the tourist trade. It is a limited addition to the changes already made, but I do not detect a great groundswell of opinion among people who feel that this is an important step that should be taken now. The desire to rush the Bill through without proper consultation and without its being examined in the context of licensing law more generally could lead to our passing inappropriate legislation. I do not believe that it has been the subject of adequate consultation. It could have been dealt with much better as part of a wider review. That is the advice that I offer to hon. Members as they consider it now.

5.24 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Before doing so, I should like to declare a residual interest in the licensed trade. Until 31 October last year, my family had been involved in the trade for 100 years. Until that point, I and my wife ran a small family company operating seven public houses in London, of which I was the joint licensee with my managers. On 31 October, my family's public house operating company was disposed of to another small company. Thus, my very long direct connection with the trade came to an end. I remain for one year, and for one year only, a non-executive director of that company, so I have a vestigial interest.

I was recently elected vice-chairman of the parliamentary beer club which now has, I think, 160 members and may be rivalling the clubs all-party group for the title of largest group in the House. It is, of course, a non-remunerated position, and Madam Speaker is our president.

I shall retain my interest in this important sector of the leisure industry. I must disagree a little with my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) about magistrates. After 25 years of appearing in magistrates courts for licence changes, transfers and brewster sessions, I have no quibble with the way in which magistrates go about their interests. In that connection, I should add that my wife has served as a magistrate for slightly longer than I have served in the House, so hon. Members will understand my reason for agreeing with magistrates.

Mr. Hawksley: Does my hon. Friend accept that there are inconsistencies in magistrates' decisions and that it can create problems when different benches make different decisions, especially as the House believed that it was legislating in a particular way?

Mr. Couchman: I do not disagree with that, because we allow magistrates a degree of latitude and flexibility in the way in which they go about their business. Different

[Mr. Couchman]

licensing benches will be mindful of the different conditions in their areas. It is a difficult issue but we do not want the magistracy to become a rubber stamp. We must therefore allow magistrates to exercise their duties as they see fit. However, perhaps the Home Office could issue guidance in respect of the vexed question of whether the issuing of children's certificates is being constrained by magistrates exercising their discretion in a perverse way. I shall not say too much more about that, but it is worthy of consideration in Committee.

In response to the comments of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), let me say that I do not agree that there is any relation between the Bill and last year's Sunday trading legislation, except in so far as supermarkets are affected. Clearly, an anomaly was created last year when supermarkets were allowed to open for six hours between 10 am and 4 pm on Sundays, although their off-license sections were restricted to opening between noon and 3 pm.

We have lately heard a good deal about the problems confronting the pub trade and off-licenses, especially in respect of the damage being done by the legal importation of duty-paid beer, wines and spirits and illicit liquor sales by bootleggers. There is no doubt that some of the latter trade seems to be organised by gangs of criminal who are driving a coach and horses through the single market provisions, bringing in large quantities of duty-paid liquor from France where the duty is much lower.

Mr. Enright: Is not more harm done to the licensed trade by its own practice of making huge profits on soft drinks sold in pubs than by the illicit importation of drinks?

Mr. Couchman: If the hon. Gentleman had come into one of my pubs last year and ordered a pint of beer, he would have enjoyed certain facilities, service and the appointment of the premises. If he entered that pub and bought an orange juice or a lemonade, he would enjoy precisely the same facilities. Pubs sell not only drinks but a service that involves the sale of a drink. Indeed, the retail profit made on the sale of orange or tomato juice is not unreasonable when compared with the profit on a pint of beer. Opposition Members have always got that wrong. I accept that when soft drinks are purchased in an off-licence, there is room for lower prices, but it is different where the on-licensee must take into account the provision of his services and the payment of rents, which have risen tremendously in recent years.

I was discussing the importation of duty-paid liquor and bootlegging activities. Last week, Customs and Excise gave the Public Accounts Committee, of which I am a member, figures to April 1994 in volume 12 of the 1993-94 appropriation accounts, paragraphs 24-30. They suggest that the Treasury receipts on alcohol and tobacco during 1993-94 fell short by some £200 million compared with the figures for 1992-93, which were already short by a fair margin. We can only estimate the extent of illegal bootlegging, but it may account for a further shortfall of some £35 million. The loss to the retail trade will be several times that sum and may reach as much as £1 billion. That is a huge loss of retail trade to the on-licence and off-licence trade.

There is a tendency to blame that serious blow to profits and jobs in the industry on my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. His perverse refusal to narrow the gap between United Kingdom and particularly French rates of duty has contributed to the continuing recession in the licensed trade and it will be a long time before he is forgiven for his change of heart between the November and December 1994 Budgets. However, I believe that the reasons for the continuing mediocre trade, particularly in London and the south-east, are far more complex than simply a loss of trade caused by the importation of liquor from France.

Drinking habits have changed, even in the 25 years that I have been involved with the public house trade. Let me offer a few examples of why our nation now drinks less. Lunchtime drinking—the traditional pint and a sandwich or shepherd's pie—is now frowned on by many employers, who are intent on getting the same level of concentration in the afternoon as in the morning. Many Irish workers in the building industry who went home during the recession now return to find that health and safety rule supreme on the building site, and any hint of drinking will lead to instant dismissal. No one can disagree with that on safety grounds, but building workers have traditionally been an important source of income to the publican.

Another example of that practice which, again, one fully understands, is British Rail's setting of a zero limit for its random breath testing of all grades of staff, day or night. Effectively, that means that British Rail employees cannot drink at any time of the working week because of the time that it takes for the body to discharge alcohol. The pub probably no longer represents the warm and comfortable haven from unwelcoming homes that it did in the past. That is certainly the case for many of our citizens. Contrary to the lager lout image of the minority, young people are much less inclined to drink, particularly when driving, than, dare I say, their parents. If they go to all-night raves, they accompany the illicit substances that they take with water, not alcohol.

The recession has been bad for pubs and the recovery is still elusive for most of them. Pessimists, and I include myself, doubt whether the trade will ever recapture the good days of the mid-1970s and late-1980s. Small traditional pubs in a secondary position, for which catering is unlikely to be more than a small part of their business, have been particularly hard hit by the recession and the fact that strong, usually brewery-managed catering pubs offer much greater facilities.

Pubs for which catering is a major part of their business can already open during Sunday afternoons. As a result of the 1988 Act, it became possible for pubs that provide substantial food to continue to serve food and drink throughout the afternoon break. That led to an unlevel playing field because small, traditional pubs for which food was a much smaller part of their business and which provided much simpler food did not qualify. That alone is a good reason why the House should give the Bill a Second Reading today.

Pubs that cannot open on Sunday afternoons are prevented from showing their customers football matches on BSkyB on Sunday afternoons. Many people would like to stay in the pub to watch such matches on television on Sunday afternoons. I agree with the wise words that appeared in *The Licensee and Morning Advertiser*, the

trade paper, on 2 February this year. Mr. Terry Oates, president of the Federation of Licensed Victuallers Associations, said:

"To show Sky TV, landlords have to pay an extra charge compared to residential users. At the moment Sunday hours require them to close when its main attraction, football coverage, begins.

The government, along with the federation, is trying to make visiting a pub more family-orientated. Relaxing Sunday hours would allow better trading on what is seen as a day for families."

Mr. Oates has got that right.

It is interesting to note that all-day opening will not be compulsory, according to Mr. Oates—he seems to know—and he will not open all day. However, many members of his federation have wanted all-day opening for some time and have been urging the Government to make those changes for the past 18 months. As my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge said, that will be particularly important for pubs in tourist areas.

The Bill will act as a lifeline for small, traditional British pubs and I shall certainly support it in the Lobby. So long as the landlord, whether or not he is a brewer, is not allowed to insist on Sunday afternoon opening and resists the temptation to increase rents in recognition of a supposed new trading opportunity, as the jargon goes, Sundays may once again become a good trading day for traditional pubs. I am sure that few hon. Members, whatever their feelings about drink and drinking, would welcome the death of the British public house, which is unique in the world.

As I listened to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister speak to the British Retail Consortium on 24 January and announce his intention to introduce the Bill swiftly, I thought back to my days in a large south London pub, with a disco and functions suite, which I managed for four years. I remembered just how precious was the Sunday afternoon break as an assured break once a week and wondered whether I should support the Bill, but then I remembered how good trade was at that time, even without Sunday opening.

The House should not stand between a publican and his customers during Sunday afternoons. If I have a complaint, it is that opening time will remain at noon because the best advantage that small, traditional pubs could gain in changing to Sunday hours would be to bring forward opening times from noon to 11 o'clock. My suggestion will no doubt bring howls of derision from certain Opposition Members and will be fought by those who still see that as a conflict with church-going.

However, people who go to those small pubs frequently go home for lunch, so they will not derive great benefits from the proposed opening hours. They would have derived greater benefit from an earlier opening time that made the 11 o'clock opening standard throughout the week. I recognise that that will have to wait and that those darts club committee meetings that are scheduled to start at 11 am on a Sunday will have to wait some time before they are legitimised.

Since I came to the House in 1983, we have had many debates on our obsolete licensing laws. In common with the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), I am a veteran of the Licensing Act 1988. I made one of my first major speeches during the debate on the Consolidated Fund at Christmas 1983, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) and I debated our licensing laws at some length at 7 o'clock in the morning. We both decided that our time would probably have been better spent down in one of the early houses at Smithfield market.

Since 1983, I have taken part in most of the debates on our licensing law and the Bill is at least the third piecemeal reform of it since then. Today, we should be discussing a more radical change in the law, for example, a later terminal hour for Fridays and Saturdays, which is one of the trade's great requirements and on which it has been consulted, and the question of dual licensing. In that case, people who manage a pub might have a licence of one type whereas the premises could be subject to another type of licence. Should a licensee disappear all of a sudden, that would avoid an immediate crisis over the licence of the premises.

Like Terry Oates, I welcome the Bill, however limited it is. British pubs are still in grave danger and it behoves the House to support them. That support is offered by the Bill.

To those who think that the Bill is another step on the road to damnation, let me assure them that, in the past, we were told just that not only by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), but by Lord Braine, then my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point. He was apoplectic at the prospect of doing away with the afternoon break during week days. Of course he was proved wrong, as was the hon. Member for Swansea, East, because a more civilised drinking pattern has followed the abolition of that afternoon week day break. I believe that its abolition has been of great benefit, particularly to older people who like to go out for a drink, who wanted to extend their lunchtime drinking to perhaps four and five o'clock in the afternoon and then to go home and not come out again. They do not feel comfortable coming out at night and prefer to stay in, in front of the television, but they enjoy the sociability and friendship of the pub during the afternoon for a longer time than was once allowed.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister has told the House, little increase in drunkenness or crime has arisen out of the changes brought about by the Licensing Act 1988. I am certain that the Bill will have a similar civilising effect and I hope that the House will give it an unopposed Second Reading.

5.43 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Before I reply to the speech of the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and his remarks about damnation, I should pay tribute to the former right hon. Member for Castle Point, now Lord Braine. I recall that when his colleagues gave a litany of their interests in the trade, he would declare but a general interest. I believe that he made a signal contribution to the debates on licensing matters. He is sorely missed. Alas, attendance in the House today is thin, but when he spoke he always attracted a goodly attendance.

The hon. Member for Gillingham illustrated part of our problem with creeping incrementalism. As he said, we are veterans of the debates in 1988. At that time, he justified the changes to the licensing laws by using the housemaid's argument that the changes went only as far as we wanted to go and that it was only a little baby. He told the House:

"I should have preferred Sunday lunchtime to be extended from 11 o'clock to 3 o'clock"—

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

to be fair, he advocated that 11 o'clock opening today as well—

"but if it is to be extended from midday until 3 o'clock I do not believe that the question of licensing hours will return to the House for quite a long time . . . it will remove the licensing issue from this House for probably a decade. If"—

this is the key point—

"the extension had been from 11 o'clock to 3 o'clock, I suspect that it would probably have removed it for all time."—[*Official Report*, 27 April 1988; Vol. 132, c. 454.]

Now, perhaps because of the possibility of watching Sky television or other cogent arguments that the hon. Gentleman adduced, he believes that the missing incremental gap should be removed.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the advantages of extended licensed hours to elderly people. That is rather like the argument that one hears from Conservative Members about those elderly ladies on fixed incomes in Cheltenham, when hiding behind those ladies are the larger vested interests that those Members represent. The evidence from the Scottish precedent following the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 and, as far as we can judge, from the Licensing Act 1988, which covers England and Wales, suggests that those who have taken greatest advantage of the liberalisation provisions have not been elderly folk, but younger folk under the age of 35 and the heavy drinkers.

If the damnation predicted by the former right hon. Member for Castle Point has not been visited upon society, that has nothing to do with the civilising effects of liberalisation, but rather the recession. If the hon. Member for Gillingham and others believe that the Government's policies will lead to greater national wealth, that, in itself, will lead to greater consumption. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell me that the key determinant of consumption is not wealth.

Mr. Couchman: We discussed earlier whether there was an increase in heavy drinking immediately after the 1988 Act. I stick by my suggestion that it lasted for about a fortnight. The country was hardly in a recession in 1988-90, so one would have thought that that drinking spree would have lasted for two years rather than two weeks if the hon. Gentleman's theory was correct.

Mr. Anderson: It may have lasted just two weeks in the hon. Gentleman's licensed premises, but the informed view is that it lasted for a year and then the recession took over. The key determinant of consumption is personal wealth.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On the question of vested interests, does my hon. Friend agree that the only communications about the Bill that most hon. Members received were from the Campaign for Real Ale and the brewers? They are particularly anxious because they are losing trade through the import of drinks from Europe. People can now bring back gallons of alcohol in their minibuses, take it home and distribute it locally.

Does my hon. Friend agree that those vested interests who want to extend the licensing hours on Sunday, yet again, are repeating the Government's wishes on Sunday trading? I know that my hon. Friend was a great supporter of my Bill to restrict Sunday trading. The Government may speak about freedom of choice and extending the rights of the individual, but does my hon. Friend agree that just as the retail companies were the vested interests behind the Sunday Trading Act 1994, so vested interests are behind the campaign to open pubs for longer on a Sunday?

Mr. Anderson: Of course, brewers have suffered as a result of bootlegging. That is a factor, but, unlike the Prime Minister, I cannot believe that the public interest is synonymous with the interest of the brewers.

It is highly significant, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) said, that the proposal to liberalise the hours on a Sunday was pulled out of the hat by the Prime Minister at the dinner of the British Retail Consortium. The context is very important as a clue to the origins of the proposals.

As a result, as my hon. Friend says, of the recession, as a result of the considerable increase in continental imports, and as a result of the mini-Budget in December, when the Government increased the duties on beer, it was obvious that the brewers were becoming pretty unhappy with the performance of what they deemed to be their Government, and the Government hoped to win back the support of the brewers, which, after all, had provided 10 per cent. of Conservative party funds at the previous general election. Several key brewers, including Allied Domeque—a major contributor to Conservative party funds—withdrew their funding from the Conservative party in 1994.

The context therefore makes one slightly suspicious of the Prime Minister's motive in producing the proposal out of the hat, with no consultation, as was said earlier, either with representatives of the clubs or with representatives of the licensed trade.

Historically, the beerage swung from the Liberal party to the Conservative party following Gladstone's Licensing Act 1872. I am rather proud because the Liberal Member—I repeat, Liberal Member—who promoted that Bill, Henry Bruce, was the only other member of my school, Swansea grammar school, ever to have served in the House of Commons. In the 1874 election, as a result, Gladstone complained that he had been washed away in gallons of beer.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose*—

Mr. Anderson: Let me continue, if I may.

During the debates in the other place on that 1872 Bill, Bishop Magee of Peterborough commented, "Better an England free than an England sober," sentiments that were echoed on 24 January 1995 by the Prime Minister, who clearly considers that social safeguards against drinking are no more than bureaucratic red tape. "Set the people free," says our Prime Minister to the brewers.

Mr. Jenkin: I intervene simply to point out that, if the hon. Gentleman had met any brewers or publicans recently, he would know that they hardly feel that the Government are in the pocket of the brewing or licensed trades interests. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission review of the brewing industry had them screaming with outrage at the Government. It is outrageous for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that we are somehow in their pockets.

Mr. Anderson: The hon. Gentleman makes the argument fairly. It was precisely for the reason that the brewers were becoming disenchanted that the Prime

Minister felt that he had to give them a sop. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the history of those beer orders, which shows that Lord Young speedily retracted much of the effect when the brewers barked. Does the hon. Gentleman deny that 10 per cent. of the Conservative party's funds at the previous general election came from the brewers? Does he deny that, mysteriously, during that general election campaign, advertising hoardings that were formerly used by the brewers suddenly became available for the Conservative party? If he wants to deny that, I am ready to give way. Those are the facts.

It was Lloyd George, after all, from the Liberal party, who used the peerage for party purposes; the Conservative party uses the beerage for party purposes. If the hon. Gentleman has any evidence to the contrary, I should be very happy to consider it.

The only real pressure for longer hours comes from the drinks trade. The only plausible benefit is the increased profits that it hopes to make. That process, as I said to the hon. Member for Gillingham, is incremental. It was forecast, and it is precisely as we feared.

I recall the broken promise made in 1988, when the then Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), said that the Licensing Act 1988 would in no wise relate to Sunday; the Government did not seek to reverse the amendment that had been moved in the House of Lords. Now we know that the Government plan to abolish all limits on Christmas day and Good Friday. In my judgment, that is part of a generalised assault by the Government on our Christian heritage, and an encouragement for increasing humanism and secularisation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: From suggesting that the Government are in the pockets of the brewers, the hon. Gentleman now moves to suggest that we are heathen fanatics attacking Christianity. Has it occurred to the hon. Gentleman that many Opposition Members will support the measure, that it is a deregulation measure, which will greatly enhance the quality of Sunday afternoons, and that it does not help the standard of debate in the House to suggest that the measure is being proposed other than on the basis of removing unnecessary controls that limit people's freedom of choice? Why does not the hon. Gentleman meet the argument head on and explain why he wishes people's freedom of choice to be limited by his opinions of what is an appropriate way to spend a Sunday afternoon?

Mr. Anderson: The Minister must contain himself. I shall come to that.

I am arguing that the Government intend the natural consequences of their actions, and that the natural consequence of what they have done in relation to Sunday trading is that an assault is taking place on the long-held Christian traditions in this country. This incremental measure may be regarded as part of that.

I therefore repeat my general arguments in relation to the value of Sundays to families generally, and more specifically to the lives of publicans and their wives, whose working conditions are often appalling, and who need a break. That is not an idea that I have drawn from the air; it is the result of several conversations with licensees in my constituency.

I confess that, when I began that telephoned public opinion poll, I did so with some trepidation, as I feared that the answers might not wholly accord with what I hoped they might be, but I was not to be disappointed. I shall give the House an idea of the comments that I received from representative publicans—licensees—in my city of Swansea. One said:

"I am very much opposed to it. I have only just moved to 3 pm. The family and I now have our lunch at 3.45 pm."

Another licensee said to me yesterday:

"I know that this will cream off the licensed trade's leisure hours."

Another said:

"Sunday is the only day we have to spend together and sit down together."

Another, rather bigger, business man in my constituency, who serves perhaps 200 meals on a Sunday, said that he was very keen to clear his public House by 3.45 pm so that at last his family could sit down to a meal together.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Can the hon. Gentleman explain to us what in the Bill prevents such a publican from closing his doors at 3 pm?

Mr. Anderson: It is exactly the same pressure as will come in respect of Sunday shopping; it is market share. People will find that, simply as a result of competitive pressures, they have to move. May I give the hon. Gentleman another response from a licensee in my constituency, the only one who was fairly neutral on the issue? He said:

"Yes, I shall open during the Sunday afternoon, if only because I shall now be able to do legally what my competitors are doing illegally"—

which surprised me a little.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): In the course of asking the publicans for their opinions on those matters—which is a very good exercise to undertake—did the hon. Gentleman ask them whether their regular customers would be likely to come to the pub at that time on a Sunday? If they did not, would the pubs close as a result? Surely they would not stay open if there were no customers.

Mr. Anderson: One of the constant themes that came through the survey—it was not selective questioning, in that I already knew the answers—was a general unhappiness about the state of the trade. The cake is only so big and the licensees wondered whether working longer hours would lead to a greater return. Nevertheless, they said that they would feel impelled to stay open for the reasons that I have given. I did not ask the licensees whether people would come to the pubs, because they would not know the answer. But they felt that they had to stay open, if only because of the current economic pressures upon the trade and their wish to compete.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Anderson: I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman and I must make progress.

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is quite clear that the hon. Member does not intend to give way and, in that case, the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) must resume his seat.

Mr. Anderson: I pointed out to the hon. Member for Gillingham that there is a key link between consumption and wealth. Therefore, there is a danger that steadily rising incomes will mean greater alcohol consumption. There is also some linkage between consumption and availability. For example, in Finland the 1969 extension of opening hours and the abandonment of various other restrictions led within six years to the virtual doubling of alcohol-related deaths, the incidence of violent crime and days lost at work.

The linkage between alcohol availability and consumption was accepted by the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham, the then Minister of State, Home Office, in debate during the proceedings of Standing Committee H in 1987. He said:

"If the hon. Gentleman then asks whether it"—

that is, the extra hour's trading—

"would lead to an increase in consumption if we did seek a relaxation on Sunday, the answer is probably yes because the licensing regime on a Sunday is much more modest".

He repeated that point about linkage when he said:

"That will probably lead to an increase in consumption and, if people have to drive there, a risk of increased drunken driving".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee H,* 26 November 1987; c. 190, 128.]

My view would be less hostile if the Government's liberalisation measure was accompanied by any evidence of their serious concern about alcoholism and the problems associated with alcohol consumption. Far more public money is devoted to seeking to combat drug abuse and AIDS than to alcohol abuse. The harmful effects of alcohol are clear in terms of road accidents, domestic strife and street violence.

According to the British crime survey, in about half of all violent crimes, the victims state that the assailant was drunk, and about 25 per cent. of violent crimes occur in, or in the vicinity of, licensed premises. I mention in passing the associated longer national health service queues and the number of working days that are lost every year through alcohol-related absenteeism.

I concede that there is some evidence that the Government have responded to increasing public concern about the multitude of problems related to alcohol abuse. They released the report "Action on Alcohol Misuse" in 1991, set up the Health Education Authority, and established priority areas in "The Health of the Nation" document in 1986.

Yet certain Government activity, such as the introduction of the incremental measure today, flies in the face of their attempts to combat alcohol abuse. The grant to Alcohol Concern was reduced last year and the Government are reluctant to adopt a range of policies to improve the situation.

For example, the Government could introduce a "tax-as-you-drink" system, which would link duty to the alcohol content of drink. They could use taxation to encourage the development of a market for super light beers, with 2 to 3 per cent. alcohol content, and wines, with 4 to 6 per cent. alcohol content. The Government could introduce unit labelling of alcoholic drinks in pubs and retail outlets. In August 1994, the Government issued the "sensible drinking message" that men should drink no more than 21 units of alcohol per week and women should drink no more than 14. Yet brewers have responded by increasing the alcohol content in beer.

Other Government measures could include monitoring the effectiveness of alcohol education, allocating more resources for new health centres and random breath testing. Such measures would show that, while the Government are liberalising the licensing laws and thereby allowing easier access to alcohol, they are also aware of the dangers of alcohol misuse and devoting public money and ministerial attention to that campaign.

The whole point of extending the licensing hours is to increase consumption. The higher running costs associated with longer hours can be paid for only by an increase in sales. The longer-hours lobby has not yet proved that a more permissive regime has any other advantages, whereas the risks are well documented. Tough controls are undoubtedly one of the main reasons why Britons drink less and why Britain has fewer alcohol problems than most western countries. The Prime Minister—a weak Prime Minister addressing the British Retail Consortium and the representatives of the brewing industry—clearly prefers populist gestures to the long-term interests of our nation and a spurious freedom to an attack on the problems of alcoholism.

6.6 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): As I listened to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), I despaired that we are spending so much time discussing a very small deregulatory measure. Given the tone of his warnings about the risks of a "more permissive regime", one would think that we were considering deregulating nuclear power. The moral overtone in the words "more permissive regime" would be more appropriate to a discussion about the deregulation of pornography.

In fact, we are talking about the sort of small deregulatory measure that should not be necessary in a modern, mature and democratic society. I believe that adults are quite capable of making decisions for themselves; they do not need to have their lives regulated to ensure that families sit down to a meal together. People should be free to make natural choices.

The purpose of the debate is to allow people to explore the pace of deregulation and its effects and consequences. Deregulation is sweeping the whole of Europe—the Europe that is so beloved of many Opposition Members. I can see that one, the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), is about to jump to his feet.

If Labour Members were to spend their holidays in France, for example, they would find a complete absence of regulation of licensing laws. One can stop at a roadside cafe at 7.30 am, in the middle of the day or in the afternoon and drink any kind of alcohol. I do not see Frenchmen rolling around the streets drunk, crashing their cars, or divorcing their wives as a result. I give way to the hon. Gentleman with enormous pleasure because I enjoy sparring with him so much.

Mr. Enright: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. You will have noted, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I did not "jump to my feet". I hope that I rose gracefully to intervene on the hon. Gentleman. Does

he recall the halcyon days of "back to basics" when the Prime Minister mused on the traditional English Sunday of ladies on bicycles of willow and of the green?

Mr. George Howarth: And warm beer.

Mr. Enright: And warm beer, indeed, as my hon. Friend reminds me. Is the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) now saying, as appears to be the tenor of his argument, that the Prime Minister, in order to prove that he is at the heart and centre of Europe, is turning to the continental Sunday?

Mr. Jenkin: There must have been some misunderstanding of the Government's "back to basics" policy in regard to Sunday, certainly from the perspective of the hon. Gentleman. The family Sunday was and is intended to be voluntary. There was never anything compulsory or legislated about the family Sunday. Even a Labour Government—who would be committed to much heavier legislation in many spheres of life—might draw back from legislating about family Sunday lunches. We need to keep the matter in perspective.

The hon. Gentleman did not deal with my point about Sunday licensing legislation or the equivalent on the continent. As he is probably even more committed to being at the heart of Europe than the Prime Minister is, one would have expected him to be more committed to continental Sundays.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my hon. Friend think that people go to church on Sundays only because they cannot go to the pub, that they have Sunday lunch with their families only because the pub is a problem for them around lunch time, that they rule themselves by the inability to get a drink and that as soon as it is all deregulated, family life will break apart, lunches will fall to pieces and people will stop going to church?

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend has inspired me. I have suddenly realised what Opposition policy should be. Pubs should be compulsorily closed between 12 and 2.30 pm to encourage families to go home and have their Sunday lunch. Perhaps that proposal will be made later in the debate.

I return to the comments of the hon. Member for Swansea, East. He has a paranoic terror of what is motivating the Government. It is either money that was paid to the Conservative party to encourage us to behave in a certain way, or money that was taken away from it that was making us behave in a certain way. He could not make up his mind about that. He seems to inhabit a world in which all kinds of motives are imputed to particular circumstances and individuals.

It beggars belief that the Government have caused more disruption in the brewing industry than any previous post-war Government because we have attacked its monopolistic tendencies. If we have paid the price of reduced contributions to the Conservative party, so be it, but that shows the Government's objectivity in the matter and not that we are prisoners of the brewing interest.

We need more deregulation measures. The Prime Minister speaks for the majority of people when he proposes deregulation policies. We should deregulate more retailing and licensing laws in future. It may not be helpful to my hon. Friend the Minister to say that it is likely to happen, but I hold out no long-term prospects for the survival of the present licensing or Sunday trading laws.

The laws simply freeze in anomalies and unfairness to one group or another. It is far better to let individuals decide when they want to shop and when they want to go to pubs to drink. We should allow the market to decide how best to deliver the services that consumers actually want.

Let us take as an example the problem of garden centres under the new Sunday trading regime. Most gardeners like to buy their garden produce early in the morning and plant it during the day, but the current regime does not allow them to go shopping until after 10 or 11 o'clock. If they do their shopping at a filling station or another shop that is not principally a garden centre, they can buy the produce at any time, so we are discriminating against garden centres.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I know that a number of representations have been made about garden centres in respect of the Sunday Trading Act. My hon. Friend suggested that it might be the Government's fault, but he will recall that it was a matter that Parliament itself determined on a free vote.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I should say that although I accept passing reference to other matters I hope that he will not expand upon garden centres, remembering the contents of the present Bill.

Mr. Jenkin: I accept your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I apologise.

I raised the matter tangentially merely because I have had representations from garden centres in my constituency. My constituents are particularly concerned that on Easter day, which should be their biggest trading day of the year, they are not allowed to open. I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister and although the Government may not feel compelled to examine the issue, the House will have to examine it at some time and, on a free vote, eventually we will get it right.

I wish to turn to what are called grey imports in the beverage business and to the serious problem of the differential duties between the United Kingdom and continental Europe. I welcome the Bill as it will help the brewing industry at a difficult time.

I may be rather unfashionable in this respect, but I think that sooner or later, in order to protect our tax base and ensure that our industry continues to prosper, we shall need to reimpose personal limits at points of entry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Enright: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that at one and the same time we should have deregulation of hours but re-regulation of the stuff that is actually drunk? That seems a little odd.

Mr. Jenkin: There is the small matter of the way in which a country's tax base has developed. The tax base of a nation state represents hundreds of years of inherited

[Mr. Jenkin]

cultures and values. It is impossible instantly to harmonise the tax base across the European Union without causing grave disruption.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We have a long-standing tradition here that the matters discussed should be relevant to the subject of the debate. The hon. Gentleman is now going very wide and I suggest that he draws to a conclusion or gets back to the point.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to you Madam Speaker, and I can hear the words, "closing time" in my ears.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that the key problem that he is discussing, which is relevant to whether British pubs will be more competitive, is that the Opposition have consistently opposed any widening of the VAT bands? The fact that our VAT bands are narrow along with our other problems may eventually lead to my hon. Friend's proposal.

Mr. Jenkin: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but I shall not be drawn.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): In an attempt to be helpful and to bring the debate back to the original point, my hon. Friend might be willing to hear the history of how Sunday restrictions were introduced and for what purpose. All the original licensing regulations, with one or two exceptions, were the result of an attempt by the Liberal Government—and thereafter a coalition Government—to stop munitions workers getting drunk during the first world war. The first world war is over and munitions workers are not getting drunk. There is a residual chapel vote, which has just been represented, but there is no reason whatever to have such restrictions.

Mr. Jenkin: I was going to avoid mentioning the war; it is not helpful to blame the Germans for everything. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the measures have long outlived there usefulness and I commend the Bill to the House.

6.19 pm

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I shall try to be fairly brief. I am the only woman present in the Chamber and I think that it will be self-evident when I finish that women in this place often find it easier than men to make brief contributions.

I shall first declare a registered interest. The Argyll group, which runs a number of supermarkets, makes a small contribution to the running of my constituency office.

As hon. Members will know, I have long had an interest in Sundays and legislation affecting Sundays. Sunday is often the only day that I have with my family—it is often my only free day. I welcome the freedom to shop and to engage in as many activities as I choose. Sunday will always a special day for me as it is the only day when I can exercise those choices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred to Sunday as a family day. Families should be free to choose what they want to do on Sundays. One of our favourite family pastimes on a Sunday is to walk in my constituency, through Sunnyhurst woods, up to the Darwen tower, which was built to record Queen Victoria's silver jubilee. It was only possible to build it because, one year earlier, the public gained access to Darwen moors. It is the centenary of the Darwen tower next year.

Our walk usually takes place after Sunday lunch. We walk down from the tower and reach the Sunnyhurst public house at about 5 pm. There is nothing that we would like better than to stop for a rest and a pint, but we cannot do so because the pub is closed. I am sure that many of my constituents who also enjoy that walk on a Sunday—particularly my good friend and patron of Sunnyhurst pub, councillor David Smith—look forward to the ending of the afternoon break.

Those opposed to this modest piece of deregulation may console themselves with one thought: if people do not use pubs during the new opening hours on Sundays, there will be no point in opening then and pubs will not do so. If, however, people want to use pubs then, they will continue to open. The House should vote today to give the public the chance to show what they want.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) mentioned the problems with supermarket staff. I, too, have seen staff on Sundays subjected to aggressive behaviour from customers who have arrived just to late to buy their six pack or bottle of wine. Such scenes could be avoided by removing the restrictions on the sale of alcohol in supermarkets.

One positive aspect is the gradual erosion of the notion that we have to be controlled and prevented from doing things because they might be bad for us—as if we should feel guilty about enjoying ourselves. It is important—I speak as a mother of three teenage children—for people to have a responsible attitude towards alcohol and its consumption. I hope that the Bill will lead to public houses becoming family friendly and women friendly. I believe that it will have that effect as public houses will seek to compete with establishments such as Harvesters, which serve food all day.

Mr. Jenkin: Does the hon. Lady share my concern about existing restrictions on families in many public houses? Should we not modernise the legislation so that all pubs are friendly places for families and we do not have the absurd situation whereby publicans have to apply for a special licence to make their premises available to families? If all drinking establishments were naturally family places, would not some of the more rowdy elements naturally be excluded?

Ms Anderson: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is important that public houses should be welcoming places for families so that children do not regard them as secretive places into which they are not allowed. Such an approach encourages inquisitiveness—children want to know what they are banned from. It would be better if pubs were open and easily accessible. I agree with the hon. Gentleman and thank him for his intervention.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the fact that we continually return to this place with little bits of licensing legislation. I agree that it would be nice to deal with all of them in one go. My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) mentioned one specific anomaly. We are today talking about the deregulation of licensing hours—in stark contrast to the current legislation on casinos.

We often think of casinos as places where people gamble for hundreds or thousands of pounds in the plushest parts of central London, but there are casinos all around the country. Many of them are used for pleasure by people on relatively low incomes who like a little flutter now and then. In the main, casinos cannot serve alcohol after midnight—we should consider that restriction. The industry brings in millions of pounds to this country and employs thousands of people. I understand that the Prime Minister was recently dining in a casino and was shocked when his drink was taken away at 12.30 am. Perhaps that is something that the Minister can consider changing—I am sure that he will have the support of the Prime Minister.

6.25 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I regret that I have not been present for the whole debate. I represent a Welsh constituency, Ogmore, which has the largest cell of the Klu Klux Klan in the country. The Anti-Nazi League had a demonstration here in London today, and I had to attend to that. I should like to have been in the Chamber for the start of today's important debate.

The Minister—I hope that he is listening—sent a short two-page letter on 9 February which seemed to suggest that the Bill was of little consequence to many people. I do not share the enthusiasm of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) for the Bill, and she does not share my enthusiasm for controlling Sunday trading.

I represent a constituency with beautiful views. It contains Ogmore castle and, not too far from it, a pub. Families would probably like to visit the castle and have a drink at 3 pm, when the pub might be closed. Restrictions have been lifted in Wales. Only a matter of years ago, we restricted Sunday opening hours and even prevented a number of pubs from opening at all on Sunday. I well recall going to a pub in Worcester, half of which was open on Sunday and half of which—the part that happened to be in Wales—was closed. If a customer went into one part, he could have a drink on Sunday, but he could not have a drink in the other half. That was ludicrous and I would not like that to happen today.

I have a fear, which I think is shared by quite a few Christians in the House and throughout the country. We are allowing licensing freedom on Sunday, which has always been a family day. We are allowing shops to open on Sundays and everybody thinks that that is excellent. As the senior Member sponsored by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, I know that, since shops have been legally open on Sunday—they have, for a long time, been opening illegally—USDAW members are finding that our predictions about the promises made to them by some large stores about double-time on Sunday and freedom of choice as to whether to work on Sunday have come true.

The Minister should talk to the licensees who, over the past 12 months, have already suffered the bitter experience of renegotiating their licences with the brewers. They are finding that, even now, they have little time to themselves. It will be worse if they are told that they have to work right through a Sunday. We are talking about giving leisure time to all families, but if licensees want a break to be with their families, they have to ensure that there are staff in the pub so that it can open.

Mr. Hawksley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Powell: I do not have much time. I have been given five minutes. I have been told that that is all I have, so I had better not give way. I shall have a job getting what I would like to say into five minutes.

I can visualise what will happen in my constituency once we tell licensees that they have to open all day. There is between 15 and 20 per cent. unemployment in my constituency, much of it long term. People have been out of work since 1983-84 and the end of the miners' strike: the Government decided to close every colliery in my constituency and declared 12,000 steelworkers redundant. Fathers without a job and without an interest go down to the pub in the week for a drink. On a Sunday they know that they have to get home at 3 o'clock, not only for their Sunday dinner but because the pub shuts. I know what will happen to their family life. The mother, son or daughter will have to go down to the pub and see if dad will come home at the usual time of 3 o'clock.

It is all right for my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen to talk about her lovely walks with her family and calling into the pub for a drink. Other families in Britain, especially in Wales, are out of work and have no money in their pockets, but they find the money for the man to go to the pub. On a Sunday afternoon, so that he can he go back to his family for his lunch—

Ms Janet Anderson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Powell: No. My hon. Friend knows that I have only five minutes.

I was surprised at the brief letter that we received from the Minister. He said that there should be practically no opposition to the Bill. The floodgates are being opened for all-day Sunday licensing hours.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said that, as the House of Commons defeated their measure on VAT on fuel, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor said, "We will get the money from somewhere. We will get it from the brewers. To console them, so that we keep their contribution to Conservative party funds for the next election, we will extend licensing hours on Sundays so that the brewers can rake some more money in." The effect on family life will be catastrophic. The House would be wise to reject the suggestion and keep the restriction on Sunday licensing hours for as long as possible.

6.32 pm

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): I rise to speak briefly on the Bill as the vice-chairman of the Back-Bench deregulation committee and one who served on the Standing Committee which considered the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill in 1994. I am the Member of Parliament for Scarborough and I also represent Whitby. It is a well-known constituency which relies heavily on tourism for its prosperity. The Bill is a continuation and amplification of the Government's deregulatory moves. The Bill aims to extend choice for both the consumer and the licensee.

[Mr. John Sykes]

In 1989, the Government introduced measures to allow pubs and clubs to open on weekday afternoons. I remember in the months leading up to implementation of the measure the dark warnings about eternal damnation, drunkenness on the street, violence and disorder. All have proved to be unfounded. In Scarborough and Whitby those measures have enhanced the prospects for tourism and, therefore, prosperity and employment for my constituents.

Visitors to Whitby, which is the home of Captain Cook and much else, come from all four corners of the world. Now, on weekdays, they can enjoy a drink in any of the numerous harbour bars, but not on Sunday. The walkers who tramp the glorious north Yorkshire moors can enjoy a drink when they arrive at Goathland—otherwise known as Aidensfield in the famous television series "Heartbeat", which is filmed in my constituency—during the week, but not on Sunday. Why is a Sunday afternoon drink any different from a Wednesday, Thursday or Friday afternoon drink? The Bill will put that right.

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 introduced, for the first time, children's certificates for pubs. That was a welcome measure for families with children. Many families, mine included, enjoy going for a drink on a weekday during the recess or on a Saturday, but we cannot do so on a Sunday afternoon. The measure works well, except on Sundays. The Bill will put that right.

Whenever I go to a pub on a Sunday afternoon, there seems to be a polite stampede to the bar at 10 minutes to 3. Blokes line up pint after pint and other assorted drinks to have before closing time. They drink them as quickly as they can get them down their throats, which leads to intoxication. The Bill will help to ensure that that does not happen and that people take a much more measured view of drinking.

At present, the licensing laws prevent shops that open on Sundays from selling alcohol between 3 pm and 7 pm. It is becoming impossible to justify preventing customers who have access to a complete range of goods, including food and tobacco—which, in my book, is far more dangerous than alcohol—from buying a bottle of wine. I do not see anything wrong with being able to buy a bottle of wine at any time of the day.

The measures in the Bill are extremely welcome. They will enhance tourism. I hope that the House will give the Bill a Second Reading.

6.36 pm

Mr. George Howarth: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This has been an interesting and long day for the Minister and for me. We started at 10 o'clock this morning dealing with drugs. This afternoon, we moved on to the problems of Sunday licensing hours. During the debate, we touched on such a wide range of interesting subjects as the origins of licensing controls in the first world war, Europe and the role of Germany in all this. My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) and I raised the implications for the casino industry. No corner of the entertainment life of the great British public was left out. At one stage, there was even a minor skirmish into the consequences of the "back to basics" debate, but on that subject, the least said, soonest mended.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) expressed a view that is not entirely unfamiliar to the House. He has been consistent and proper in the views that he has expressed. To put the record straight and to show that he is consistent with the debate that has taken place in Wales, I should like to quote from *The Guardian* of Tuesday 20 August 1968. The article is headed, "For a wet Sunday welcome in Wales". It makes the connection with the points that my hon. Friend made. It begins:

> "Welsh beer is a headier brew than most when there is a suggestion that it should be served on a Sunday: just thinking about the idea is enough to make some heads spin; talking about it triggers the passionate nationalism every Welsh man believes he ought to feel about internal affairs."

The lineage of the sentiment has just been expressed again by my hon. Friend.

Help is at hand from my hon. Friend's part of the world. I have before me a letter from the director of leisure of Ogwr borough council, which covers my hon. Friend's constituency. The director of leisure appears to support the idea of Sunday drinking. He says:

> "Without having to express any opinion on the merits or otherwise I do feel that if such changes are to be introduced that consideration at the same time be given to reviewing the law as it relates to public music and dancing. At present there can be no public dancing on a Sunday—which creates particular problems when say New Year's Eve falls or runs into a Sunday (clubs are in the main not affected as they are not 'public')."

If the Bill is given a Second Reading and eventually ends up on the statute book, on the first Sunday after that there will be dancing in my hon. Friend's constituency.

In certain contexts, the question of Sunday being a special day has been irredeemably changed. The argument about Sunday trading was the watershed for that. Until then, a number of other hon. Members and I had clung to the Keep Sunday Special position, but we have now moved beyond that—perhaps for good, perhaps for ill. This Bill is a tidying-up measure rather than a great issue of principle that should divide the House. Of course, I am not suggesting that there should not be a Division, if that is what some hon. Members want.

There is now trading on a Sunday and Sundays generally are viewed by the majority of people more as days of leisure than as days of worship. As someone who regularly attends church, I thought it wise to speak to my local vicar, Rev. Tom Steele, on the telephone yesterday. His view is that the argument is more or less in the past and that we cannot defend the historic position. He also said—this is characteristic of him—that he had spent many happy hours in a pub on a Sunday.

Mr. Enright: After services.

Mr. Howarth: It is as my hon. Friend says.

For those who want to worship on a Sunday—I am one—it is not impossible to enjoy a day of leisure, which might include a visit to a pub and Sunday worship, all within the one day.

Some hon. Members have raised important points that should be either answered by the Minister when he replies or, as some of them are quite detailed, dealt with in Committee.

The first point relates to the rights of those employed in the industry, whether they be bar staff, tenants, managers, licensees or others. It is important that those currently employed should not be expected, as a matter of course, to work additional hours. They should not be subject to any disciplinary action if, as is perfectly reasonable, they choose not to work additional hours on a Sunday. At a later stage of the Bill's passage, we shall seek reassurances on that point. Another point of concern is the lack of consultation on the proposals. That was mentioned by several hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe), for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) and for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson).

It is odd that, only a month or six weeks after the announcement was made in a great flourish of prime ministerial activity, the Bill has reached its Second Reading stage. Between now and the Bill going into Committee there should be further consultation on exactly how the proposals will affect all those associated with the industry.

All the anomalies in the licensed trade will not be sorted out by the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh and many others who are involved in the all-party non-profit-making clubs group and those who are associated with the club industry feel that things need to be changed. I understand that, in due course, they hope either to introduce a private Member's Bill in this place or to follow the applicable procedure in the other place, and I hope that the issues can be dealt with in that context.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen said, it would have been both proper and useful to bring all those matters together in this one Bill so that they could be dealt with at the same time. Those issues remain to be resolved and there are some anomalies that need to be dealt with.

One of my reservations has been mentioned by several hon. Members on both sides of the House: although we welcome the move towards pubs becoming more family friendly and are glad that the new system has been introduced, there is clear concern that the trade has not risen to the challenge. All too often, pubs and clubs are not attractive to families. No one wants to return to the archetypal image of pubs which was so unattractive that children were often left on the pub steps with packets of crisps and bottles of lemonade while mum and dad were inside having a drink. Those days were most undesirable.

The challenge for the trade is to make pubs attractive, bright, clean, decent places where families want to go, rather than, as all too often happens, places where no person would want to take his family for a couple of hours' entertainment. All the issues need more time given to them and more detailed investigation.

Mr. Ray Powell: Does my hon. Friend really think that children should be taken into a pub at 3 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon when that pub might already have been open for three or four hours? Most of the people there would have been drinking for three or four hours. Is my hon. Friend suggesting that it would be ideal to take children into that sort of place?

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I do not think that his question was intended to make me feel that way. It would be inappropriate to take a young family into many establishments. The force of my argument is that we should make more establishments family friendly. I have three children—a teenage son and two children under the age of 10. On occasions, my wife and I have taken them into pubs that serve food on a Sunday. It has been an enjoyable experience. Some pubs cater specifically for children and they provide special facilities such as colouring-in books. I would never want to take any of my children—or, indeed, even my wife—into a pub where people were drunk and there was violence or other difficulties. People make a choice and generally they would not take their families into that sort of establishment.

All these issues can be raised at a later stage in the Bill's passage, but they certainly require further discussion. It is a free vote tonight, so my hon. Friends will make their decisions on which way to vote. Having listened to their speeches, I know that how they will vote is fairly predictable. I do not mean that in any way as a criticism; I happen to think that the Bill deserves a Second Reading and we can discuss our reservations at a later stage. I shall vote in favour of the Bill.

6.48 pm

Mr. Michael Forsyth: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am delighted to respond to this useful debate. I very much welcome the support of the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth). As he said, we began our day this morning on drugs and we have ended up on drinking on the sabbath day. There has been a surprising degree of consensus on both those matters. I hope that it will not be long before we can find matters on which we disagree because so much consensus in one day is ruining my reputation.

Mr. George Howarth: May I reassure the Minister that, although we have managed to reach some consensus on two issues today, we shall return to battle tomorrow?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is not here, but I hope that the message will go out to every miners' welfare in the land that the hon. Gentleman is the man who wants to stop miners being able to drink there on Sunday afternoons. Indeed, he told us that there was no demand for this measure. I do not know where he spends his time these days, but it is obviously not in the clubs and pubs around the country—

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): In Belgravia.

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend suggests that he knows. The hon. Member for Bolsover obviously does not spend his time in the miners' welfares or in the other establishments that will benefit from this legislation. Meanwhile, with some trepidation, I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Evans: I just thought the Minister might like to know that the hon. Member for Bolsover spends a good deal of his time in Belgravia, in disguise, waiting for his American friend to summon him to her presence.

Mr. Forsyth: I shall not follow my hon. Friend down that path.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North referred to employment protection and drew a parallel with the provisions of the Sunday Trading Act 1994. There is a distinction: that Act created a situation in which people would be required to work on Sundays when they had

[Mr. Forsyth]

every expectation that that was not a possibility, given the nature of the law. This Bill does not do that; it merely extends Sunday working hours, so I do not see a parallel. I am sure, in any case, that we can discuss the matter in Committee—the hon. Gentleman gave notice to that effect.

The hon. Gentleman was also concerned about consultation. I do not know whether I am allowed to say this, but the fact that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that this measure would be introduced as part of the deregulation exercise has helped no end in ensuring the necessary agreement to bring the Bill before the House. I believe that the country will welcome that.

The hon. Gentleman feels that there has been so much speed about the process that there has not been enough time for consultation. We shall welcome any views expressed on the implementation of the Bill, but it does extend people's freedom and I think that it will prove popular. There has been widespread bewilderment on the part of the general public when they, able to shop for the first time on Sundays, have found partitions put up at certain times of the day in supermarkets, screening off the sections that sell alcohol and deal with licensed sales.

The hon. Gentleman also expressed anxiety at the fact that, when the 1988 Act was passed, there was no mention of any wish to liberalise Sunday hours—a fair point. The explanation is that the Government at the time had just had something of a setback on the issue of Sunday trading. Many of those who had signed early-day motions did not actually support the findings of the Auld report when it came to voting in the Division Lobbies. It would not have been right to introduce such a measure while the issue of Sunday trading was still up in the air.

In 1988, Sunday drinking hours were extended from 2 pm to 3 pm. That became known as the Ferrers hour, after my right hon. and noble Friend. I understand that the Ferrers hour has met with general approval throughout the land. This measure provides for a further popular extension of hours. I have no idea whether anyone's name will be attached to that extension, but we all live in hope—

Mr. George Howarth: The Forsyth extension?

Mr. Forsyth: I was thinking more in terms of the Howarth extension.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) got himself into a real tangle. Let me have a third go at explaining the position. He asked, I think, whether supermarkets would be able to trade on Sundays when Christmas day is a Sunday, and on Easter day, as a result of the measure which provides for the sale of alcohol on those days when shops are able to trade. The answer to his question is no. The Sunday Trading Act specifically prevents large shops from trading on Christmas day when it falls on a Sunday, and on Easter day. I hope that that reassures the right hon. Gentleman and that he may even feel disposed to support the Bill tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) asked about licensing committees and the exercise of discretion. I was concerned to hear what he had to say, based on his experience, about what is happening in respect of new children's certificates and the conditions that are being implemented. I can assure him that I will get Home Office officials to monitor carefully what is going on. It is early days yet, and I very much hope that this will be a real opportunity to create the family pub which most, if not all, hon. Members would like.

Worries expressed about the exercise of discretion by magistrates do not appear to be reflected in the decisions that they have taken in respect of afternoon openings and their ability to control them when problems have arisen and there has been a need for restriction orders. I am not sure whether it is right not to allow magistrates some element of discretion.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed suggested that the protections in clause 3 would be limited to disorder—not so, as I explained in my opening speech.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) made an extraordinary speech in which he detected all kinds of conspiracies behind the Bill. That was unworthy of him, but I do agree with his remarks about alcohol misuse and the dangers that it represents to our society. Part of ensuring responsible drinking is encouraging people to see pubs as family places, not restricting their hours unreasonably.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), who apologised for not being present at the end of the debate, made a moving plea for what I can only describe as the harmonisation of our licensing laws with Europe's—an interesting reversal of the position that he usually adopts in the House. I expect that, if he were here, he would intervene to tell me that at least this decision would be taken by the House of Commons.

The hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) made an excellent speech which stood in contrast to the one by the hon. Member for Swansea, East. She described finding herself after a Sunday walk outside a closed pub at 5 o'clock. Hundreds of thousands of people in this country have had a similar experience and will benefit from the legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), with his considerable experience in the licensed trade, gave us an insider's view of how this legislation would benefit the licensed trade, which is experiencing some difficulties at the moment.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) made the speech that we would expect of him and came up with the extraordinary proposition that pubs should be closed to stop people going who do not have the money to go to them. That is ludicrous—why should the rest of the population who want to spend their leisure time as they choose have restrictions placed on them so as to deal with those who run their lives less responsibly?

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes), in an excellent speech, underlined the importance of the measure for tourism and described how jobs and prosperity depend on the removal of petty restrictions of the sort with which the Bill deals. He said that he wanted it pushed through the House as quickly as possible.

If the House gives the Bill a fair wind and it completes its stages here and in the other place, it will be possible to implement its provisions rapidly after Royal Assent. Whether the tourist and leisure industries have the benefit of the legislation in the coming summer season is in the hands of hon. Members. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 116.

Division No. 74] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ancram, Michael
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin-Walker, John
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Bayley, Hugh
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Bradley, Keith
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burden, Richard
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Churchill, Mr
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Coffey, Ann
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cummings, John
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Dicks, Terry
Donohoe, Brian H
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fisher, Mark
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Godsiff, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hall, Mike
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Doug
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Home Robertson, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Hutton, John
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
MacKay, Andrew
McKelvey, William
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mandelson, Peter
Mans, Keith
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Maxton, John
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
O'Neill, Martin
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pearson, Ian
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Radice, Giles
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Stott, Roger
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tipping, Paddy
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John

Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wood, Timothy
Wray, Jimmy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. Simon Burns.

NOES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Callaghan, Jim
Cohen, Harry
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dykes, Hugh
Eastham, Ken
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fraser, John
Fry, Sir Peter
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Horam, John
Hoyle, Doug
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Macdinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Neubert, Sir Michael
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pawsey, James
Pike, Peter L
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Robathan, Andrew
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Timms, Stephen
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon. Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ray Powell and Mr. Derek Enright.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Local Government and Housing (Scotland)

7.12 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1995, a copy of which was laid before the House on 2nd February, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995, a copy of which was laid before the House on 2nd February, be approved.

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

Mr. Lang: This is the annual opportunity for the House to debate the local government finance and housing support grant orders. Traditionally, the debate provides an opportunity to consider not only the detail of the orders but the wider issues relating to local government and housing finance.

I propose to speak briefly to the orders and then make some general comments on matters relevant to them. I hope that that will enable the debate to move forward.

I start with the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1995, about which I need say little. It is necessary because of a reduction in the pool rate of interest used to estimate local authorities' loan charges. It is accepted and normal practice for Ministers to bring forward a variation order in these circumstances. That will reduce total housing support grant payable in 1994-95 from £25.7 million to £24.2 million.

The draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995 provides that the total level of housing support grant payable in 1995-96 will be £22.3 million. Broadly speaking, that sum represents the difference between the eligible expenditure and the relevant income of those authorities which, in the absence of grant, would have a deficit on their housing revenue accounts. Its purpose and the assumptions used are explained in detail in the report that accompanies the order.

Our estimate of management and maintenance expenditure is based on an assumed average spending level of £748 per house. That represents a 7.5 per cent. increase over the equivalent average for the current year and is further evidence of the Government's commitment to the maintenance of the physical condition of Scotland's housing stock.

For the purpose of the HSG formula, the assumed average standard rent for next year has been set at a notional £37.48 per house per week. I should stress that that is not a forecast, nor is it a guideline or even a recommendation: it is an assumption used solely for the purposes of grant calculation. The actual rents charged by authorities may be higher or lower according to the local decisions about housing income and expenditure that local authorities have taken over the years.

I shall discuss the implications of the subsidy settlement for actual rents in a moment, but before doing so I should draw the attention of the House to the question

of general fund contributions. Such contributions represent a subsidy from council tax payers to council tenants. That kind of subsidy is indiscriminate in that it benefits all tenants, regardless of their personal circumstances; and it is unnecessary to the extent that tenants who are unable to meet the costs of their housing receive assistance in the form of housing benefit. As in previous years, therefore, the proposals in the Housing Revenue Account General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 1995 prevent authorities from budgeting to make general fund contributions next year.

The effect on local authority rent levels will be relatively small, as the large majority of local authorities in Scotland do not receive housing support grant in respect of their mainstream council housing. Clearly, the subsidy proposals will have no impact on the rent decisions of those authorities. On the 11 authorities that will receive grant in respect of their council housing, the effect of the change in grant will vary. In most cases, grant is a relatively minor component of housing revenue account income and the impact is likely to be outweighed by the authority's own decision on such matters as management and maintenance spending.

As Government subsidies form a small proportion of housing revenue account income, it is difficult to forecast average rent increases with any degree of accuracy. I expect, however, rent increases for 1995-96 to average between 4 per cent. and 5 per cent., as was the case in 1994-95. That is on the assumption that local authorities will wish to make real improvements in the housing services that they provide to their tenants, and it is right that the extra costs should be met by the tenants who benefit.

The Government's proposals for housing support grant next year are, I believe, a fair and reasonable subsidies package that balances the interests of the tenants, the council tax payer and the national taxpayer.

I now turn to the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995. Its purpose is explained in detail in the report that accompanies the order.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Before the Secretary of State does that, can he perhaps explain to the House why, once we remove the community care element of about £40 million from the settlement—money that is, of course, rightly and properly set aside for the community care developments that we all want to see—he is imposing on Scottish councils a cut of some 10 per cent. or 11 per cent? How does he expect the councils to maintain the level of service to their tenants without pushing rents through the ceiling or cutting services drastically?

Mr. Lang: I do not recognise the figures to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The grant to which I have just referred is payable only to 11 authorities and represents a relatively small proportion of support for council housing. The vast majority of support comes through housing benefit, where an anticipated £800 million will come through next year.

The purpose of the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995 is explained in detail in the report which accompanies the order. The position is relatively straightforward and, again, I do not think that I need say very much about the order itself.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The tenants of Greenock and Port Glasgow are slowly beginning to stand on their own two feet, and I understand that just over the horizon is the enticing promise of several hundred jobs. May I plead with the Secretary of State, however, to respond favourably to the representations of Inverclyde district council concerning what a constituent recently described to me as "that damned eyesore"—the Gourock rope works? I personally have made numerous representations—I would like the thing to be pulled down—but will the Secretary of State please respond to sincere representations made to him and his ministerial colleagues by members of the council?

Mr. Lang: I share the hon. Gentleman's hopes for the employment prospects of Greenock and Port Glasgow, and I note what he has said about the Gourock rope works. I know the building well. The matter involves Historic Scotland, however—the building is listed—and it would be inappropriate for me to comment, even if the issue were covered by the terms of the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995. I suspect that if I tried to respond in any detail I would be ruled out of order, so I shall press on.

Under the so-called AEF guarantee, the level of revenue support grant payable to local authorities for each of the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 is adjusted either up or down in the light of any variation between their estimated and their actual level of non-domestic rate income. The objective of the arrangement—which has been fully accepted by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—is to ensure that each authority receives the combined amount of revenue support grant and non-domestic rating income that they were promised at the time when authorities were first notified of their settlement for the year in question. At that stage, my Department made an estimate of the level of NDRI that each authority would receive. The guarantee arrangement has been necessary because of the difficulty of estimating NDRI with any accuracy, mainly because of appeals against valuation that take some time to be resolved.

The order makes a further adjustment to the levels of revenue support grant payable for each of the three years covered by the guarantee in the light of returns that local authorities submitted to my Department last autumn showing their actual levels of NDRI for the years in question. Because of the effect of successful appeals against 1990 valuations, there has, in general, been a reduction in the level of NDRI in comparison with previous estimates. The order, therefore, provides for the payment of extra revenue support grant, totalling nearly £65.7 million, to compensate for the reduction.

I should make it clear that that figure is net. Although 61 authorities will receive extra rate support grant, the remaining four will receive less. That is because, against the general trend, their level of NDRI has increased as compared with previous estimates. Subject to the House's approval of the order, the extra RSG will be paid to the authorities concerned in April.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): This may appear to be a convoluted question, but it is not intended to be. The health board in my area proposes to close Ravenscraig, Bridge of Weir, Merchiston and Dykebar hospitals. Has any consideration been given to the stress and strain that that would cause

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

to Inverclyde and Renfrew district councils, which would have to provide health care in the community? Has the Secretary of State included that in his budget?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman has put his point on the record very effectively, but it does not relate to the order that we are debating—and, to the extent that it might relate to it at the margin, it would relate to the distribution formula used for the allocation of resources between different authorities. That formula is agreed with COSLA and reviewed every year.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The Secretary of State must know that, owing to a combination of the financial arrangements that he is imposing and the capping regime, Highland region will be down £12.9 million this year. That will undoubtedly have an adverse effect on local services. The council currently faces a choice between closing its job and enterprise unit, with the loss of about 120 jobs—which would be a very bad thing—and sacking an uncertain number of teachers, perhaps 200 or 300.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman anticipates me: I have not yet reached the order to which his comments relate. However, in the light of what I am about to say about the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1995, I shall be happy to give way to him later if he wishes to pursue the point. The order that I have just been discussing relates specifically to the adjustment of non-domestic rating income to take account of the outcome of valuation appeals, so that local authorities receive exactly what we undertook to give them.

Certainly in terms of the amount of money involved, the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1995 is the main order that we are debating. It represents the final stage of the local government finance settlement, details of which I first announced on 29 November last year. The settlement provides for the level of Government-supported expenditure—that is, total grant-aided expenditure and provision for loan and leasing charges—to be set at £6,116,900,000, an increase of 1.72 per cent. on the current year's figure. It also provides for aggregate external finance—which comprises revenue support grant, non-domestic rating income and a number of specific grants—to be set at a level of £5,306 million.

The report that accompanies the order provides a detailed explanation of its purpose, but it may be helpful if I briefly summarise the position. The order has three separate purposes. The first is to distribute the revenue support grant and NDRI components of AEF for 1995-96 to individual local authorities. The specific grants component of AEF, which for next year totals just under £397 million, is distributed on the basis of claims by authorities, and is therefore not covered directly by the order itself. A total of just over £3,716 million is distributed as revenue support grant, and £1,193 million is the distributable amount of NDRI.

As in the past two years, NDRI is being distributed to regional and islands councils only, with the agreement of COSLA. That means that district councils will again receive their AEF support solely in the form of revenue support grant and specific grants.

The distributable amount of NDRI takes into account my Department's estimate of the amount of business rate income that local authorities will collect next year on the basis of the unified business rate poundage of 43.2p which I also announced on 29 November. When we took over control of business rates from local authorities, businesses in Scotland faced a local business rate that averaged 76.6p in the pound. The Government, with the full support of the Scottish business community, have spent the last five years, and £440 million, working towards a unified business rate throughout Scotland and England.

Next year, for the first time, Scottish business will operate on a level playing field with business south of the border. Our unified business rate policy has already delivered significant benefits to Scottish business—at least £440 million worth per annum. What is more, the guarantee that we have given to maintain that level playing field permanently will ensure that the benefits continue.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I acknowledge and welcome the movement that has been made to try to reconcile the positions north and south of the border, but will the Secretary of State re-examine the exemption scheme carefully? I do not think that the orders for the exemption scheme that he has announced have yet been laid. I think that, when the revaluation details are known to small businesses in south-east Scotland, they will cause considerable concern. I know that transitional protections will limit the amount of the actual bills, but the increases will nevertheless be substantial in relation to anticipated inflation rates. That will affect small businesses throughout Scotland, not just in the south-east. Will the Secretary of State look again at the exemptions and transitional protections that he has announced, so that the amounts paid by small businesses can be restricted even more than he intends them to be?

Mr. Lang: I constantly review such matters, but I must point out that the benefit of the reduction in the business rate from 76.6p in the pound to 43.2p makes a dramatic difference to businesses large and small throughout Scotland. We have also introduced transitional relief schemes in the light of revaluation—schemes that are specifically more beneficial to small businesses than to larger ones. I expect the benefits to be widely felt by businesses in Scotland.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On the subject of assistance to business, will the Secretary of State reconsider the effective prohibition of purchase and lease-back schemes from the end of this financial year? Does not he appreciate that, in a range of regional councils in Scotland, those schemes are an important part of industrial strategy, and that their effective cancellation will cause great damage to many businesses? Will he reconsider that point?

Mr. Lang: I do not accept that anything like the damage implied by the hon. Gentleman will be caused. There is no reason why local authorities should not, for the rest of this year, continue to take advantage of the schemes that we have announced. Most local authorities are doing so. The exception is Grampian regional council, which seems unwilling to deal with the realities of the scheme. My officials are more than willing to continue to make the position clear to that council.

The schemes are available until the end of the current financial year and we are considering various aspects that we may wish to clarify further. I am confident that the limited effect of the schemes in relation to local government expenditure overall does not justify the sort of comments that have been made. Our measures are sensible in the context of overall public expenditure.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Does the Secretary of State agree that his figures and calculations are based on a notional figure of £37 average rent throughout Scotland, when the average rent is only £27? On the general fund contribution, does he agree that everyone who applied last year was refused?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman rose to make a point that I covered some five or 10 minutes ago. I made it clear to him that the rent figure of £37.48p per house was used exclusively as a notional figure, and solely for the purpose of grant calculation, in the context of local authorities' resources under the HSG formula, and taking account of management and maintenance costs. He is right—rents are some pounds lower. Indeed, they are some pounds lower than in England. But making a direct relationship between rents and the figure that I mentioned is not relevant.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Is the Secretary of State creating a level playing field by setting that universal business rate level? How does he react to the criticism that the estimated target yield will be exceeded by almost 3p in the pound, which will put an extra burden on Scottish businesses?

Mr. Lang: If the estimated target yield is exceeded, the chances are that it will do so because the rating base has grown, which will be the result of the expansion of Scottish industry. I thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that, rather than detract from it.

We are creating a level playing field. It is astonishing that, just as we have secured our goal, the policies of Opposition Members seek to throw away the benefits that Scottish business enjoys. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), speaking with all the authority of an official Front-Bench spokesman for the Labour party, has confirmed that a future Labour Government would return control over the level of poundages to local authorities.

The hike in business rates that would inevitably result from local authority control and the destruction of the level playing field that we have achieved would seriously undermine the ability of Scottish companies to compete in the marketplace. Existing businesses would be threatened, new businesses would be deterred and our efforts to attract inward investment to Scotland would be jeopardised.

Labour's motives in proposing such a policy have patently nothing to do with the needs of business and nothing to do with the needs of the Scottish economy. I have not heard a single Scottish business man calling for business rates to be returned to council control. Labour clearly aims to satisfy the desires of its free-spending councillors, irrespective of the needs of business.

I wrote to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) on 18 January asking him to confirm whether that policy would, indeed, apply in Scotland. I pressed him on the matter again in the House on 28 January. Despite that, I have yet to receive an answer from the hon. Member. I know that developing policy is a difficult and novel experience for Opposition Members, but the hon. Member for Hamilton only needs to tell the House whether he supports the policy of his colleague, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras; or is the hon. Member for Hamilton afraid of admitting Labour policy, as it would be so damaging to the interests of Scottish business? The hon. Gentleman need not fear answering; I can assure him that this is not a planted question from the Scottish National party.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): That was a Conservative Central Office comment, meticulously delivered in the music hall style that has become the hallmark of the Secretary of State for Scotland. In the Secretary of State's consideration of the consultative document, which was published by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), and which relates solely to England and Wales, did the Secretary of State read the autobiography of the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), the other man with the whiskers? In his fine book entitled "Speaking My Mind", he says that the universal business rate was a mistake, that it has separated businesses from their areas and

"diminished the calibre of councillors because local businessmen no longer stand for election to be financial watchdogs on local councils."

Conservative Members are not unanimous about the future of the UBR. Labour's consultation will take place in Scotland. It will have a Scottish policy to protect Scottish business and Scottish industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will do the same down south.

Mr. Lang: I am not sure if I am supposed to take it from those latter remarks that policy will be the same north of the border. It is astonishing that the hon. Gentleman is not yet prepared to say that it will not be the same. He plans to allow a free-for-all for local business rates. That would lead back to the 76p in the pound level achieved by Labour authorities before we introduced the uniform business rate. It will be noted throughout the business community in Scotland that the Labour party shrinks from committing itself to maintaining the level playing field that we have so painstakingly secured for the Scottish business community.

The AEF total for next year has been distributed among individual local authorities using exactly the same methodology as in previous years. The methodology involves equalising, first, for variations in authorities' assessed need—as determined by their grant-aided expenditure assessments—to incur expenditure and, secondly, for variations in their tax base and, consequently, in their ability to raise income locally from the council tax. Just over £1,303 million of the AEF total for next year is being used to equalise differences in authorities' GAE assessments, while a total of nearly £3,962 million is being shared among authorities in proportion to the number of council tax band D equivalent properties in each authority area. I hope that the House finds that clear.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Secretary of State regard this as an appropriate moment for me to pose again the question that I asked earlier? In the case of Highland

[Sir Russell Johnston]

regional council, the combined effect of the measures and the financial and capping arrangements will lead to 12.9 per cent. less money for services. That means that the council immediately faces the choice of closing its job and enterprise unit, with the loss of 120 jobs and of a great opportunity for people to enter new employment, or sacking X number of teachers. Is that the sort of choice that the Secretary of State wants to give local authorities?

Mr. Lang: It is not; nor do I accept that it is necessarily the choice that they face. Of course I acknowledge that Highland regional council has been one of the authorities that has argued about the distribution formula from time to time. Its argument, however, is not with me; it is with other local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which has agreed with that formula, on the basis that money is equally and evenly distributed, taking account of relative need through a sensitive formula.

As for the overall quantum, it is well known that expenditure has risen sharply in local authorities in recent years. There has been an increase of some 20 per cent. in real terms in the past 10 years. Last year alone, in real terms, local authorities have had 2 per cent. more expenditure than had been anticipated following inflation rates estimates at the beginning of last year.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Secretary of State's convoluted prose serves only to obfuscate the truth. He is trying to pull wool over our eyes. The position described by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) is replicated throughout the whole of Scotland, so it is not a question of distribution. Strathclyde is facing terrible options.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): It faces a crisis.

Mr. Foulkes: Indeed. Community education is one the services that is threatened. Voluntary organisations will not have places in which to meet. That means that we will have more crime and more drug taking among young people. That is sort of thing that will happen. The Secretary of State knows that, as he has made cuts, local authorities have made efficiency savings year after year. He must give them some guidance. Where will they find the savings? Will they have to sack teachers or will they have to accept any of the other options? He must say, and he should not leave it to local authorities. I know what he is up to. He is hoping that they will get the blame for the problems when the election comes on 6 April. He is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is the end of a lengthy intervention. Interventions are supposed to be short and to the point.

Mr. Lang: If I were to seek to give guidance to local authorities of the kind that the hon. Gentleman suggests he would be the first on his feet, accusing the Government of intervening in local government decision making. The fact is that local authorities have had a substantial expansion in resources at their disposal over the years.

If the problem in Strathclyde is so severe, why did the authority expand its staff numbers so substantially last year at a time when some other local authorities were retrenching? When the hon. Member for Hamilton makes his speech, perhaps he will be able to confirm whether the report in *The Scotsman* last Friday was correct. It reported that Hamilton district council is contemplating not an increase in next year's council tax but a 10 per cent. reduction. That is hardly the action of a council under the sort of pressures to which the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes).

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Lang: I think that I shall give way to a Conservative Member this time.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Is not the previous intervention typical of the Opposition? They call for devolution and responsibility, but when they get that responsibility, what do they do? They whine and gurn and try to pass the buck back to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Lang: I could not have put it better, so I shall not try.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lang: No, I have given way many times and I must make progress.

The second purpose of the local government finance order is to increase by relatively small amounts the level of AEF payable to two local authorities for 1994-95. The authorities involved are West Lothian and Western Isles. In the case of West Lothian, the increase is the result of the district council taking on additional housing benefit responsibilities, and in the case of the Western Isles the additional AEF is to enable the islands' council to subsidise the costs of internal air travel in the Western Isles following the introduction of the air passenger tax last November.

The third purpose of the order is to redetermine the level of AEF for 1993-94, taking into account changes in each authority's council tax base since the original distribution as a result of, for example, successful appeals by householders regarding the tax band in which their property should be located.

I should make it clear to the House that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has been consulted about the detail of all four orders and has had no points to raise on any of them. I fully recognise that COSLA is unhappy about the overall level of next year's local government finance settlement—I shall say something about that in a minute or two—but the convention has raised absolutely no complaint about the way in which the settlement total is being distributed among authorities.

The methodology for determining authorities' grant-aided expenditure assessments is kept under regular review by the distribution committee of the working party on local government finance which comprises representatives from the Scottish Office and the convention. While there are inevitably complaints from authorities which lose as a result of a change in the distribution methodology, I think that one of the strengths of the system is the extent to which it operates on the basis of consensus. I hope that tonight we shall not hear from the Opposition the sort of allegations that have been made in these debates in previous years—that, in some

way or other, the distribution penalises particular authorities or that it has been manipulated by the Government. It has not.

I said earlier that I proposed to say something about the overall level of next year's local government finance settlement. I fully accept that it is a tight settlement, but it should not come as a surprise to anyone in local government or to Opposition Members. I have consistently warned local authorities over a period of years that they needed to bear in mind the limits on the levels of public expenditure and to look closely at ways of delivering their services more efficiently. For the most part, they have chosen to ignore that advice. Most councils have continued to increase the numbers of staff that they employ.

I believe that local government must play its part along with the rest of the public sector in helping to control the level of public expenditure. Every extra £1 spent on local government would mean £1 less for health, £1 less for industry and £1 less for all the other areas for which I am responsible at the Scottish Office. If Opposition Members are arguing for more money to be given to local government, they should tell the House which other vital public services will be deprived of resources to fund this higher spending. How many millions would these services lose to finance the spending desires of local councils? Or perhaps they will tell us what taxes they would raise to enable local government to spend more. Would business rates be the first target? Or would they raise income taxes? Without those answers, no one need attach any credence to the Opposition's cries of underfunding.

Although I have acknowledged that it is a tight settlement, I certainly do not think that it is an unrealistic one, given low inflation. Nor do I think that it is unrealistic to expect local authorities—in common with the rest of the public sector—to fund any pay increases from efficiency savings. If authorities had made some attempt to find efficiency savings in the current year to meet the cost of 1994 pay increases, they would not have stored up for themselves the need to find savings in the forthcoming year to cover the cost of 1994 and 1995 pay increases.

Almost every year in these debates, we hear allegations from Opposition Members that the Government are underfunding local government in Scotland and have destroyed local services and local authority jobs. The hon. Member for Hamilton was no different in last year's debate. He claimed that the consequences of the 1994-95 settlement would be thousands of job losses, service reductions and an extra 10 per cent. on council tax bills across Scotland. What was the reality? The numbers employed in local government rose instead of falling; the average increase in council tax levels was, in fact, not 10 per cent., but 5.5 per cent.; and the hon. Member for Hamilton and his colleagues were also wrong about cuts in services.

The reality of the situation is very different from what is suggested in the Opposition's rhetoric. Let us consider the facts. In the past 10 years, expenditure by Scottish local authorities has increased in real terms by more than 20 per cent. and nearly doubled in cash terms. In the seven-year period up to June 1994, staffing levels in Scottish local authorities increased by more than 6 per cent. while, in the same period, staffing levels in English authorities reduced by almost the same percentage figure. Even after the 1995-96 settlement, the level of Government-supported expenditure is 33 per cent. per head of population higher than the comparable English figure.

I could go on to talk about improvements in particular local authority services and, if pressed, I should be happy to do so, but these figures demonstrate clearly that the Government, far from underfunding and attacking Scottish local government, have made it prosper.

It is against that background that next year's settlement must be viewed, and it is also against that background that I commend the orders to the House.

7.46 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): The Secretary of State described this year's settlement as extremely tight, but that is surely an understatement. In fact, for two of the regional councils in Scotland—Lothian and Strathclyde—it is not only tight but punitive and arbitrary and it will lead to reductions in real services for real people. The Government's decision will force up local council taxes, all local charges and, in the process, inflation, at the very time when the Government are yet again claiming that in Scotland and elsewhere the recovery has just started.

The Secretary of State did not have the gall to describe the housing settlement as extremely tight. It is not just extremely tight; it means strangulation. Without doubt, it is among the most savage and vindictive housing settlements for many years. Those who will pay the price will be council house tenants and the thousands who languish on council house waiting lists all over the country. Council taxes will be forced up by 10 per cent. on average, even after stringent cuts by many local authorities. There is little doubt about that now. Services will be affected and the quality and availability of housing will decline all over Scotland.

Why? Why are local authorities and the Scottish people being expected to bear all this pain? The reason is simple: the Government's need to find cash this year to fund election tax cuts next year. They want to pass on a tax increase one year in the form of a tax saving next year. It is a cynical, brazen abuse of central Government power so that tax bribes are available for an election Budget.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): The hon. Gentleman said that this year's settlement is not sufficient. He has clearly done his sums but, if he wants to be taken seriously, he must tell us by how much this year's settlement is short. Which aspects of the block should be cut to fund the local government settlement? If new money is needed, has the shadow Chancellor agreed? If not, which of his shadow Cabinet colleagues' budgets will have to be cut to provide the hon. Gentleman with the money that he wants?

Mr. Robertson: I do not know whether that speech was given to the hon. Gentleman as a consolation for not being the new Minister. If so, he was sold cheap. Believe it or not, the Tory Members present on the Back Benches are the reservoir of talent now available to fill future resignations. I exclude the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) from that reservoir as he beached himself long ago.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) asked about the savings. Let us start with the money that was wasted on Health Care International. If that is not

[Mr. Robertson]

enough to fund the increases that should be made available for services, let us take the £700 million that will be wasted on the unnecessary and unwanted reorganisation of local government. That is a start for the hon. Gentleman. I suggest that he writes it all down and puts it in his next speech—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Mr. Robertson: I am slightly more understanding than you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand the hon. Gentleman's frustration.

All those cuts to keep back money for next year will be in vain because nobody will believe the Government on taxation ever again. A Government who lied so clearly and unequivocally before the last election are unlikely to be trusted on anything to do with financial management in the future. That is the verdict not of the Opposition but of an opinion poll that gives the Secretary of State for Scotland a rating only 2 per cent. higher than that given to Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein in the last elections in Northern Ireland. It is the Scottish people's verdict on what the Government have done for the past 16 years and what they are doing now. The Scottish people will not be fooled by a Government-dictated council tax increase this year, which may be followed by the same amount of money next year in tax reductions. They are much too intelligent to be taken in by that.

The Government's disgraceful discrimination policy is in sharpest relief in their housing budget. The statistics speak for themselves. Fourteen years ago, the housing support grant stood at £228 million, with a further £100 million from general funds. Next year it will be reduced from £328 million to £22 million. That tells its own story.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House clearly about the difference in housing benefit during the same period, because that money goes directly into the housing coffers?

Mr. Robertson: It demonstrates the poverty that exists in Scotland. It is astonishing that a Conservative Member boasts about the amount of housing benefit being paid in Scotland. That is public expenditure to help people in need because of the poverty created by the Government's economic policies over the past 16 years.

Mr. Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No, I have been generous enough in what I have said.

Over the past 14 years, some £200 million has been taken out of housing, in a housing environment where the Government's statistics tell the story of the problems that face Scottish housing. A survey carried out by Scottish Homes paints a bleak picture. Statistics collected and collated by that Government agency show that 4.5 per cent. of all Scottish housing is below what is defined as a tolerable standard. That is a total of 100,000 Scottish homes in both the public and private sectors. They also show that 13.5 per cent. of those homes suffer from dampness and 20 per cent.—one in every five—of houses in the public and private sector suffer from condensation, mould and dampness. Those conditions affect 500,000 houses.

That is the extent of the problem facing Scotland today, yet the Government's public expenditure White Paper tells the Scottish people that they intend to cut expenditure on housing by 20 per cent. over the next three years. So, in response to a housing crisis that is unparalleled in modern times, the Government will cut the amount spent on housing. Under their convoluted system of calculating, rents for council house tenants will be forced up yet again by at least 5 per cent.—2 per cent. more than the Government's calculation of inflation. When the Government took power in Scotland, council house rents were on average £4.92 a week. When the new settlement comes in next week, they will be £27.77. That is a stark fact about the rents paid by ordinary Scottish families.

Now, 40 per cent. of Scottish housing investment goes not to local authorities but to the super-quango, Scottish Homes, which has been given more generous relief and flexible financial surroundings to spend the money.

Mr. Graham: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Robertson: May I just give my hon. Friend the benefit of a further statistic? No less than 80 per cent. of Government grant in aid now goes to Scottish Homes for it to spend.

Mr. Graham: My hon. Friend will be aware that I represent an area with one of the biggest concentrations of Scottish Homes property. It recently gave notification that, once again, rents would go up massively. Bearing in mind the fact that ever since Scottish Homes has been in operation, we have had year-on-year, massive rent increases, when will we reach the end of it?

Mr. Robertson: We shall reach the end of this bleak and dismal point of view at the next general election. It is part of a strategy, not an accident. It is not even a policy of the Scottish Homes board—weird, wonderful and highly political as its policy decisions are. It is a decision by Her Majesty's Government to drive people out of the rented sector. Using the excuse of choice, they drive people into a single form of housing tenure: owner-occupation. That is why rents have been artificially increased in both the rented and Scottish Homes sectors.

Two years ago, Scottish Homes received £250 million to write off its capital debt following the sale of 30,000 of its houses, presumably at a discount, which left it with an on-going capital debt. Why have not local authorities in Scotland, which, after all, had to dispose of some 300,000 houses, received relief for the capital debt that they continue to hold following the sale of council houses? Where is the equity of treatment? Are the Government interested in a balanced housing policy? Do they care for people who need a house, or are they simply obsessed with getting locally elected and democratically accountable councils out of the business of providing housing for rent? I fear that the answer to those questions is ominous.

Given the contrast between the housing settlement and the favourable treatment given to Scottish Homes, a new and sinister aspect is creeping into how that quango is operated. Not only is it taking over the bulk of Government assistance to housing, but it seems to be taking over the political job of the Government. The members of the Scottish Homes board, whose names the

Secretary of State on Monday could not recall without referring to his notes, has taken on itself the decision deliberately to deny tenants—

Mr. Lang: Rubbish.

Mr. Robertson: The Secretary of State could not give the names when my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) asked him to tell him the names without looking at his list.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I will give way to the Secretary of State if he would like to give me the names—

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No, I am not interested in the hon. Gentleman. Would the Secretary of State like to tell me now, without looking at a piece of paper, the names of the members—

Mr. Gallie *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is bobbing up and down like a jack-in-the-box, but it is the Secretary of State who cannot recall the names of those on that powerful board. He cannot name them, but they have taken a decision in his name. That board has made a policy decision deliberately to deny its tenants the right to choose a local authority landlord.

At least I know that the board includes Councillor Daphne Sleigh—who is one of that last remaining number of Tory elected councillors. Those board members get paid in salary and expenses £250,000 a year—that is what the Scottish Homes board pays its members. The chairman of the board gets paid more than a Member of Parliament, but rejects the advice and views of Members. The board of Scottish Homes is now dismissing the views of all Scotland's Opposition Members by deciding that it will deny its tenants a choice. We are beginning to see the untrammelled arrogance of the Tory quango state.

Last week, the chairman of Scottish Homes, Sir James Mellon, sent me a letter not just defending his board's indefensible decision to deny choice to tenants—defending it might have been technically legitimate—but going beyond that and attacking the Labour party and challenging it on its housing policy. He ended with an unconcealed sideswipe at Scotland's local councils. Sir James Mellon, a former diplomat, who has never stood for election in his life, said:

"Real democracy is once again at work.
Yours sincerely, Jimmy".

He and Mr. McKinlay then offered themselves for interview and press conferences. They happily threw the whole weight of their publicity machine behind an unconcealed attack on the Labour party. Ministers are now able to stand aside and let the quangos do their political dirty work for them.

Why is Scottish Homes now engaged so blatantly in the party-political debate? Quangos are supposed to be responsible to Ministers; they are not supposed to free, party-political agents in their own right. The Secretary of State, not unelected placemen, is supposed to be responsible for policy, Scottish Homes should leave politics to the politicians.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Is my hon. Friend aware of another negation of democracy concerning Scottish Homes? When hon. Members table questions to Ministers about Scottish Homes the only response we get is that the chairman of Scottish Homes will reply to us. That letter is sent to the Member rather than being published in *Hansard*, available to the public gaze.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend speaks with great wisdom and perception on this matter. He has underlined, as I have also sought to do, the remarkable and disturbing new development in the way in which that public body is now deploying its financial resources, and its considerable publicity resources, in the party political interests of the Government.

I find the behaviour of Scottish Homes quite extraordinary, because it represents a major and disturbing shift in the way in which quangos are run. I must inform the Secretary of State that I intend to write to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary to the Cabinet to ask whether that behaviour is in line with present policy. It should also be drawn to the attention of the Nolan committee that unelected chairmen of quangos are now entering into the party-political arena. As a consequence, the independence of public service is seriously in question.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): When my hon. Friend writes to the Prime Minister he should point out that tonight's debate, which is a political one, essentially involving civil servants, is also being repeated not only in the media but door-to-door on Scottish housing estates, because the staff of Scottish Homes, who are understandably trying to make sure that they have a job to go to, are promoting a particular option, because that is all that Scottish Homes will allow. It will not allow free choice.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, because people are being denied the right to choose a local authority as their landlord. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that other choices are also being limited as a result of the deployment of the resources of Scottish Homes.

On previous occasions I have spoken highly of some of the work of Scottish Homes. Perhaps I should regret that, because Sir Jimmy Mellon quoted my commendable words in his letter to me. I accept that Scottish Homes has a creditable record and has done many innovative things. I am saddened by the fact that the chairman and the board have taken it upon themselves to become an extension of the Tory party political machine.

The local government settlement has been a tight one for all councils. For many councils, prudence and careful management—as in the case of Hamilton district council—has produced an outcome that will allow them to keep the council tax level stable or even, in some cases, to reduce it. In the case of Lothian, Strathclyde and other regions, the effects of the settlement will be punitive. The Secretary of State says that no representation about the distribution was made to him by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. However, according to annexe 1 of the briefing note—I am sure that even the Secretary of State has been handed it—Strathclyde's budget will be cut by £15 million in this year. There is little doubt that it is suffering far more than other regions.

Despite Strathclyde's long-standing record of financial prudence and cost-effectiveness, it will have to make serious cuts in service this year and perhaps put the

[Mr. Robertson]

council tax up by about 20 per cent. It will do so reluctantly, but necessarily because of the settlement. Cuts of £107 million are not just extremely tight for the council, but border on dangerous. They endanger key services such as education and the police and will force above-inflation charges for rail, bus and ferry services. That is bound to have an impact on concessionary fares for the most vulnerable. Strathclyde is cutting not at the fat, but at the bone. This year, cuts made by Lothian will also seriously affect the quality of valuable services.

One of the roots of the problem is the Government's failure to cover the pay settlements for this year, especially that for teachers. In the light of inflation increases, the pay settlement—5.1 per cent. over two years—was not generous. It was a cautious one. A Scottish Office observer sits in at the teachers pay negotiations, but this year not a word was heard from that person. The local authorities across Scotland have now been left with a bill for £144 million to cover the pay settlements, £65 million of which is meant for the teachers' pay settlement.

What are the efficiency savings about which the Secretary of State talked? What are councils supposed to do? Are they meant to increase class sizes and the pupil-teacher ratio? This year, the Secretary of State published yet another glossy document entitled "The Parents Charter in Scotland". It was costly publication. On the quality of teaching it says:

"You"

—the voter; the public; the citizen; the council tax payer and the parent—

"have the right to expect that the staff who teach your child will be suitably qualified, professionally competent and well motivated. You can also expect high standards of teaching at all times."

The Secretary of State has said that people should expect that, but at the same time he is demanding massive efficiency savings, especially in education budgets. If they want the quality teaching and teacher motivation that is required to comply with their objectives, the Government cannot run away from their direct responsibility for financial settlement this year.

The Government continually tell us that the councils are increasing their staff. We hear that refrain year on year, as though it was a great crime for councils to increase their staff at a time when 250,000 people are out of work. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) says, yes it is. No; he says that it is a crime. *[Interruption.]* The price that some people will pay to get on to the Front Bench. The Whip said nothing.

We are allowed to believe that it is a crime to increase jobs at a time when 250,000 of our fellow citizens are out of work but, if it is a crime, there are some remarkably obvious culprits in the dock. Tory Stirling district council, Tory Berwickshire district council and Tory Bearsden and Milngavie district council are all employing more people than they did last year.

Moreover, the Scottish Office is employing more people, although the Secretary of State massages the figures. Oh yes, the hard core of the Scottish Office has decreased in numbers, but when one takes account of the impact of the agencies, one finds that—

Mr. McMaster: Sir Jimmy Mellon.

Mr. Robertson: Not even Sir Jimmy Mellon. No; we are talking about the direct agencies such as the Prison Service. It emerges that, in 1990, there were 255,500 full-time equivalents in local government; in 1994, there were 255,300 local government employees, down by 0.8 per cent. However, in the same period, the Scottish Office, the Secretary of State's empire, has increased by 4 per cent. So if it is a great crime that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South will pronounce on, in his propaganda role, let us ensure that the criminals are fully identified.

The Secretary of State genuinely knows—he is not an unintelligent man—that local authorities, in many cases, have had to increase their labour force, including those Tory councils, because he has placed new burdens on them; massive new burdens in terms of community care, and continuing burdens in collecting the poll tax, something for which he and the Conservative Government should bear responsibility until the end of time. We should have no more homilies about the iniquities of increasing staff levels, because there is the same strong smell of humbug as comes so familiarly from the Government.

I should like to add my voice—this may sound peculiar in this week of all weeks—to the opinion that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) expressed in relation to notional receipts. Many councils—including the Conservative councils, because the representations made to the Secretary of State were from every council in Scotland—feel that the decision that has been taken about notional receipts is unfair, unjust and will work against the interests, not only of local government, but of industrial development.

Labour councils will make the best of the settlement, and they will work efficiently and with dedication to ensure that people are spared the full impact of the settlement. However, as usual, the Government have produced a bad deal for local government, especially for housing authorities, and a bad deal for Scotland in general. They simply will not now tackle the real problems confronting the Scottish people.

This is simply one more settlement in a long line of attacks on the power and the services of locally elected councils. Those attacks have wounded more than the structure of local government, which can, and will, be revived by a new Government after the next election; they have hurt the people—many of whom are the most vulnerable in society—that local government helps and serves. The Government will never be forgiven for that, and they will pay a heavy price for it.

8.13 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I admit that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) put a strong argument to persuade the green vote to join him. Indeed, I suggest that he is the champion of recycling because, if speeches are anything to go by, it appears that he uses the same whining and whingeing speech every year in this debate. He makes the same prophecies every year, but he never looks back and says, "Sorry, I was wrong last year; I will attempt to get it right this year."

The hon. Member for Hamilton spoke about additional expenditure for local authorities and explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) where all that money would come from. He would stop waste, like the money that was expended on Health Care International. As Government input of £30 million into HCI attracted private investment of £150 million, I do not regard it as anything to apologise for. As, in the past eight years, people in and around Clydebank have found employment, I do not think that the money has been wasted. I think that many people in that area will have been grateful for the £30 million injected by the Government and grateful for the jobs that have been provided.

At the end of that, we still have a first-class hospital, possibly the best hospital in Europe, which can be used to earn money for the United Kingdom, for Scotland, but, above all, for people who will find jobs in that hospital in the years to come.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I admire the hon. Gentleman's new enthusiasm and conversion to the idea that the Government should be investing in industry to stimulate employment directly. That goes completely against the philosophy of the Government, or is he saying, "No; we do not invest directly in manufacturing, we invest only where private medicine can make a fast buck"? Is that the distinction that he makes?

Mr. Gallie: What I am saying is that when the Government have money to invest, they consider the best means of achieving a sound capital project and the best means of creating work with the money that they have to invest. I am suggesting that that project created a lot of work, and achieved many of the aspirations that I would expect if Government are to use much-valued taxpayers' money to try to support development of industry and commerce in our country.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North) *rose—*

Mr. Graham *rose—*

Mr. Gallie: I give way to the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham).

Mr. Graham: Does the hon. Gentleman remember the argument that I made earlier about four hospitals in my area that are earmarked for closure? If the £30 million that the Government squandered in Clydebank had been put into our area, we could continue to provide a much-needed service and at the same time stimulate the local economy.

Mr. Gallie: In the past I have used the services of the new hospital in Greenock, and I believe that if the Government invest, as they evidently are, in new hospitals, new clinics and new health centres there must be a reduction in older buildings. Opposition Members appear to fail to recognise that. They appear to think that one can keep everything from the past yet they expect what is new in the future. There is a rationale, and there is a balance to be struck. The hon. Member for Hamilton, in the search for cash, said that he would have stopped local government reorganisation. I would have to say—

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Gallie: Give me a break and let me try to get on a little bit.

The hon. Member for Hamilton said that he would stop local government reorganisation because there is no clamour for it. Perhaps that is so in Hamilton, but in Ayr there was certainly a clamour to get rid of Strathclyde regional council. That was a promise that we made in our manifesto and, as usual, Conservatives meet their manifesto pledges and, as usual, we are doing so to a reasonable time scale—a time scale that the hon. Gentleman, in yesterday's argument, said was not achievable, yet now we find that we are bang on track. The elections for the shadow authorities are approaching. In Committee last year, the hon. Gentleman said that that would not be possible. The elections are coming up and the hon. Gentleman probably has his colleagues throughout Scotland all geared up for them. What the Conservatives promise, the Conservatives achieve. We will seek value for money.

Dr. Godman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gallie: No, but I may give way later. I have only until 10 o'clock to finish my speech.

Labour Members constantly moan and whine that local councils do not receive enough money, yet those councils are currently receiving 40 per cent. of the Scottish block grant.

Labour Members advocate a Scottish Assembly. If an Assembly is set up—I will do everything in my power to oppose such a move—it will place strain on local authority budgets because each Assembly member will want to spend money in his own area. Local authorities will be deprived of the very generous settlements that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has provided for them in recent years.

Just as councils blame all their failures on underfunding from the Scottish Office, so too would a Scottish Assembly look to Westminster—to the seemingly bottomless pit of money that can be dipped into on a whim. The Conservatives recognise that there are no bottomless pits; funding is limited.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for displaying his characteristic elegance and courtesy. I simply point out to him that I am the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow. Many people in my constituency are deeply concerned about the inadequacy of the local community care programme that is being drawn up by the relevant parties and they are concerned about the threatened closure of Ravenscraig hospital.

Mr. Gallie: I fully accept that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) is who he says he is. The concerns that he expresses about community care could be echoed by virtually every Member of Parliament for Scotland. A time of change is a time of anxiety and concern. I was concerned that the introduction of community care meant passing responsibility to Strathclyde regional council. I welcome the fact that in future the new South Ayrshire authority will take responsibility for the provision of community care. I am sure that it will work very closely with the health boards and the health trusts to provide a very good service in the area.

During a recent sitting of the Scottish Grand Committee I asked what increase, if any, there had been in local authority spending over the past four years. I was told that there had been a 14.5 per cent. increase. I was puzzled by

[Mr. Gallie]

that answer because Labour Members are always saying that local authorities face constant cuts. In the past 10 years, local authority expenditure has increased by 20 per cent. I would like to know where the cuts are; I would like Labour Members to justify their claims.

Has staffing been cut in local authorities? No, because since the late 1980s the number of local authority employees has increased by more than 6 per cent. The hon. Member for Hamilton addressed those issues a short time ago. He and his colleagues constantly talk about cuts in local authority services and numbers.

Dr. Reid: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gallie: No, I have been more than fair in giving way. I know that Labour Members will complain about me later for speaking for longer than I had intended.

Let us look at the facts. The aggregate external finance settlement, which comprises revenue support grants, non-domestic rates and other grants, totals £5.3 billion this year—that is 45 per cent. higher per person in Scotland than in England. That is food for thought. Yet local authorities continue to complain. It is a tradition for local authorities to complain. One year they will have something to complain about and no one will believe them—it will be a case of the boy who cried wolf.

Labour Members have threatened the business community, commerce and industry that a Labour Government will go back to the old ways and lift the controls from non-domestic rate contributions. That will also remove the inflation controls on non-domestic rates. If that is not true, I will give way and allow Labour Members to deny it. There is no protest from Labour Members, so obviously they intend to remove those controls.

I compliment and congratulate my right hon. Friend on the moves towards a uniform business rate. Business and commerce in Scotland have called for that measure for years, and we are all grateful for it.

Much has been said about the difficulties that we face in the housing sector, but since 1979 more than 250,000 new homes have been built in Scotland, and 20,000 new homes are constructed each year. Housing philosophy has changed and no Conservative Member should apologise for that. In 1979, 63 per cent. of housing was publicly owned; today, the figure is just over 45 per cent. Scotland is moving into the modern world—a world which recognises that people like to own their own homes, invest in their property, improve their facilities and reap the rewards that flow from that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hurry up."] No, I have given way a number of times. I warned hon. Members that, on that basis, I was liable to extend my speaking time.

Strathclyde regional council claims that it will be underfunded in the coming year. I must acknowledge that the settlements are tight. I expected them to be tight, particularly in the wind-up year for regional councils. Strathclyde regional council should have recognised before now that there would be financial constraints and it should have planned for them in the long term. However, long-term financial management has never been Strathclyde's forte.

In the months ahead, I expect my right hon. Friend to stick stringently to the statements that he has made about capping. His capping intentions are not idle threats and local authorities must be kept to the strict capping limits. I expect the same to apply next year when the new local authorities are established. I ask my right hon. Friend to cast his mind back to the introduction of the community charge. I believe that it was the right way to fund local government. The Government made one major mistake in introducing the community charge: they did not cap the authorities from the first year. On that basis, local authorities extended their expenditure and community charge payers met the costs.

Finally, having mentioned Strathclyde, I should draw attention to another local council, Tory-controlled Kyle and Carrick district council. When the Tories took control from Labour in 1992, they inherited a £4 million deficit, which they have paid off in just over two years. They have still managed to improve services and provide a range of new capital projects. I predict that this year, despite the tight settlement, they will not impose a 25 per cent. increase in council tax. They will not be talking about a 20 per cent., 15 per cent. 10 per cent. or 5 per cent. increase. I believe that Kyle and Carrick will produce no worse than a zero increase in council tax. Time will tell whether my prediction or that made by the hon. Member for Hamilton is right.

8.30 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): We have to remind the Government that 25 years ago we were clearing out the slums of Glasgow, which were the worst slums in Europe. People were living at 600 or 700 to the acre in rat-infested houses owned by private landlords. Tuberculosis was rife and people were dying of poverty. Past Tory Governments acknowledged that poverty and allowed it to continue.

We are still in the same position. We have a golden opportunity to look after the people of Scotland and of Glasgow. In Glasgow, there are 22,213 dwellings below a tolerable standard and 7,000 houses are lying empty. In 1982-83, Glasgow received 5,673 applications of homelessness and in 1993-94 the figure was 12,500. No one has laid a brick in Glasgow since 1986.

We hear about all that is happening in Scotland, but it certainly is not happening in Glasgow, where some of the blackest constituencies suffer high infant mortality rates, rat infestation and decaying houses that are unfit for human habitation. The Secretary of State had a golden opportunity to give Glasgow the opportunity to do something about that, possibly by increasing the housing support grant, but what figures have the Scottish Office produced?

Since 1991, £22 million has been cut from the housing support grant, representing a cut of 95 per cent. in 1994-95 and a cut of 99 per cent. in 1996-97. Those are the figures we are given. We understand the policy, as I shall explain later in the debate.

There is an old Scottish saying that the Scottish Office formula should go out the window because the notional figures are a damned disgrace, especially when they apply to some of the most deprived constituencies in Scotland.

The Scottish Office works on a notional figure calculated on rents 10 per cent. higher than they really are. That represents a direct cut for local authorities in

Scotland. Rents are calculated at £37.48 when, on average, they are only £27. It is a damned disgrace, a fraud and a lie to the Scottish people and it should not be tolerated.

The Scottish Office has calculated a notional figure for lost local authority rents because of the right to buy as 3 per cent. when the actual figure is 3.5 per cent. That is another cut being exposed.

The Secretary of State for Scotland said that he was expecting rent increases of around 4 or 5 per cent. Why should that be when people find it difficult to pay their existing rents, particularly as inflation is running at 3 per cent.? His figures and his assumptions are wrong because Glasgow is proposing a 6.2 per cent. rent increase next year. One reason for that is the capping and the cutting.

I thought that housing support grants were to get rid of the bad housing in Glasgow and to keep rents down, but the Government policy is to ring fence housing so that it is funded by the people who are paying rent.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wray: If the hon. Gentleman will let me get started, I shall give way later. A further increase in rents in Glasgow of £1.02 is due to the right to buy, as local authorities have lost that housing stock. That has never been cash calculated as the Scottish Office never took it into consideration.

Then came the crocodile tears from the Government, who said that they were looking after the people who were suffering. They said that they set up a general fund contribution for local authorities that have many problems and are suffering from cuts. Last year, everyone applied to the general fund and everyone was refused, so the general contribution fund holds no water.

Mr. Gallie: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the capital raised from the sale of local authority housing has been passed back to Glasgow district to allow it to reinvest in its housing stock? Will he say what proportion of rents are paid through housing benefit in Glasgow?

Mr. Wray: What a shock I have for this man when I give him the figures for housing benefit and tell him where it is going.

The Scottish Office should release the money to allow Scottish local authorities to build. If they are releasing it, they are not releasing it for housebuilding because they want it back in the private sector. We shall complete the cycle and we shall end up with the slums that we had in the 1950s and 1960s.

Mr. McMaster: The devious trick that has been used in Scotland is that when the Government give a local authority its capital allocation they deduct whatever it has been given in capital receipts. That sleight of hand has stopped many houses being built. Council house tenants are now the most heavily taxed people in the country. They pay the burden of homeless persons units for all local authorities and people are increasingly becoming homeless because many of those who have bought owner-occupied houses cannot keep up the mortgage repayments and council house rent payers are left to pick up that social problem.

Mr. Wray: My hon. Friend is correct. He has experience of a good working-class background and understands what slums are. I came from a family of 10, who lived in a room and kitchen. Seven of the family were bedwetters, which made it difficult—we invented the sauna.

In most cases, housing is the largest single expenditure for individuals and families on low incomes. Governments earlier this century realised that and adopted policies to ensure decent housing for everyone, regardless of income. The policies were successful. The National Consumers Council found in 1977 that those on low income often received better value for money than others—mostly due to good quality, subsidised council housing. Those in private rented accommodation suffered to some extent.

Now we come to the sad story of when the Government took over in 1979. The election of the Tories in 1979 changed the position completely. Their policies totally altered the role of the public sector rented housing. The changes involved minimising public involvement and, as in other sectors, giving way to market forces.

The main thrust of the Government's proposals was as follows: ownership was to be extended; Government expenditure was to be reduced and targeted more effectively; and local authority responsibility was to be decreased by increasing private ownership and transferring homes to housing associations, such as Scottish Homes, with the support of the majority of tenants. In addition, the private rented sector was to be improved and the number of housing associations was to be increased. The Government were taking housing out of local authority control—even though local authorities could probably have done something about the problems.

As well as those UK-wide plans, specific legislation for Scotland was introduced. Scotland, with its history of low ownership and large numbers of council houses, was seen as having plenty of potential. Legislation introduced included the Scotland Act 1980 and the Housing Planning Act 1986. Those Acts were supposed to benefit the poor. They introduced the right-to-buy scheme that allowed tenants to buy their houses at market value minus a discount based on the length of occupancy. They changed subsidies from buildings to households to help those most in need and shield the poor. The decline in council houses and the increase in private sector dwellings and housing associations was meant to increase the choice of accommodation available.

What happened? The policy of increasing home ownership has been a success in terms of numbers—with an increase of 450,000 new owners, but the prospect of home ownership has been unrealistic for those on low incomes. Even with discounts of up to 70 per cent. on the market value, the price was beyond the means of those on low incomes. Recently, they have also been unable to take advantage of the rent-to-mortgage scheme as repayments were once again too high.

The Government then committed the cardinal sin—the bright Cabinet brought in deregulation. In 1989, the Tories deregulated private rents. Since then, housing benefit for private tenants has increased from £1 billion to £4 billion in 1993-94. That was mostly due to the massively increased rents—public money went straight into private landlords' pockets. That was a disaster for the Tories who said that deregulation would increase the supply of flats and houses and so decrease rents. Rents were also pushed up when council house building came to an end and restrictions were placed on housing associations' building programmes.

[Mr. Wray]

The financial consequences of deregulation have not only caused massive rent increases, but misery for tenants, especially the poor, and huge bills for taxpayers. In 1989, public payments to landlords via housing benefit was £1.4 billion; last year that figure rose to £3.83 billion—a 280 per cent. increase. The Government have even suggested that by 1996-97, that could possibly increase to £5.2 billion.

I shall cut short my speech because I know that a number of hon. Members want to contribute. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) has, over many years, represented a district similar to mine in council and Parliament. I want to give him the opportunity to speak. I know that he will be as compassionate as other hon. Members who represent Glasgow constituencies.

The Government's housing record is a scandal and a disgrace. The Government must be reminded of their legacy. We will not let them forget it.

8.45 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I shall make only a brief contribution to the debate. I shall speak purely and simply about housing, which is important.

A civilised society has a duty and a responsibility to provide adequate housing at affordable rates for all its citizens. It is one of the great indictments of this country that we have been unable to achieve that objective with the vast sums of public money that have been spent. That is not because the public purse or taxpayers' money has not been spent; vast sums of taxpayers' money are spent.

I shall give an example from my constituency. Angus district council is being congratulated because it has kept down its council house rent increases. That is why the council has been unable to build up adequate funds to maintain its stock of property in a fit condition for modern people. Angus, like every other council with houses to rent, has failed to make use of housing benefit as a means of pouring vast sums of money into its housing coffers. It is available as of right to individuals—which is what every hon. Member would want.

I listened to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). I know something about living in a small house with eight children and sharing a bed with four others. The only marvellous thing about that is that today my family—we are nearly all pensioners now—is still as close as we were when we were children. Perhaps there are lessons there for all of us. The entire family was at my eldest brother's home the week before last, and it was great to see everyone there.

There has been a failure to cash in on the £800 million being spent every year in Scotland on housing benefit. Of course, I know that the money does not all go to council houses, but council landlords have failed to cash in on that golden tap because they have set rents at unrealistic levels. The levels should ensure that there are adequate funds to carry out the necessary maintenance repairs and modernisation in the lifetime of those dwellings. If the landlords had done so during the lifetime of housing benefit—which has been with us for a long time—there is no doubt that we would not now be suffering. I see that the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) is shaking his head. The trouble with the hon. Gentleman is that he does not understand that, unless one takes the money that is available as of right, it will be used elsewhere and will be lost to the council house coffers.

Mr. Welsh: Angus district council has kept its rents down by good management and has used housing benefit for the benefit of tenants. The hon. Gentleman fails to remember that when the Conservative party was in charge of Angus district, it wiped out all reserves and left nothing for the ratepayer. The Conservative council gave poor service and poor value for money.

Mr. Walker: If the hon. Gentleman is telling me that there are no problems with maintenance, condensation or damp in Angus district council, he is talking rot. He knows it and I know it. I have to deal with the problems of my constituents who are the tenants of Angus district council.

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: I am about to sit down. I did not say to the hon. Gentleman that there were not some things that Angus had done well. I said that it had not cashed in on all the funds that were available. That is an indictment of the council.

Mr. Welsh: Is this an intervention?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Has the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) concluded his speech?

Mr. Walker: I said that I would be brief.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Commendably brief.

8.50 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I do not propose to be quite so brief. It is an indictment of any party for it to argue, as the Secretary of State did when he met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, that it is all right to thump up rents because housing benefit will cushion the increases. The people who are entitled to housing benefit are those in poverty and in the greatest need. The Government shelter behind those in greatest need to provide some doubtful justification for their policies.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) suggested that local authorities should thump up their rents because they could claim the money in housing benefit. One wonders what the Secretary of State for Social Security would do if that happened. It has happened in the private sector and the Secretary of State is taking steps to stop it. The councils would not be allowed to get away with it for long.

Every year one has to go back to basics to work through the various ways in which housing grants are allocated. Housing finance may often appear complex, but the simple fact is that, as investment in housing has been restricted, there has been a rise in homelessness. Nothing in the housing orders before us gives us any confidence that the necessary increase in investment in housing will be provided to meet the problems of dampness and condensation that the hon. Member for Tayside, North mentioned. Nor is there anything to bring any hope or relief to those who have waited too long on waiting lists. I am sure that in our constituency surgeries we all deal

with constituents who have housing problems. One fears that one cannot go back and tell them that anything in the orders is cause for hope.

The debates on housing finance and revenue support grant are an annual ritual. When I first came into the House, I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) speak in a similar debate. He said that he had been making the same speech for 15 years. We face this evening a set of orders which, no matter what is said in the debate, are essentially non-amendable. The Secretary of State's word will be law.

It is interesting to ponder the fact that in the regional council elections in May last year, out of 453 regional and islands councillors, only 31 Conservatives succeeded in being elected by the people. Yet we have a Tory Secretary of State who will largely determine the budgets of Scotland's councils. With some 87 per cent. of councils' income in the hands of Ministers and with capping powers, the Secretary of State has taken over the function of council treasurers the length and breadth of the land. To us, that is a travesty of what local democracy should be about. The essence of accountable democracy is that local representatives have a financial responsibility. That has all but been taken away by the steps that the Government have taken.

This year's settlement is particularly draconian. If one excludes community care provision, it amounts to a 0.5 per cent. reduction in cash terms. One can bandy figures about, but when one puts them in the context of services, it becomes clear just what is happening to our local authorities and the people who depend on local authority services as a result of the settlement.

The settlement has put strains and constraints on local authorities. It takes no account of the pay increases for public sector employees except those for the police. A 5.1 per cent. increase for teachers over two years is scarcely a generous settlement, not least when we are expected to have a well-qualified and well-motivated teaching profession. To meet the constraints, there will have to be a reduction in the number of teachers, or it will not be possible to employ additional teachers to take account of rising school rolls.

The figures for 1991 to 1993 show that 75,000 primary school pupils in Scotland are in classes of more than 30. That is an increase of 3.6 per cent. There has been a 17.7 per cent. increase in the Borders and a 12.9 per cent. increase in Tayside. In secondary schools, 89,000 pupils are taught in classes of more than 30. That is an increase of 35.9 per cent. over the two years. That must be set to increase even further as a result of the orders that we are debating.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber outlined the choices that Highland regional council will face as a result of the revenue support grant settlement. Grampian regional council will require a base budget saving of some £31 million. Let us consider what £31 million amounts to. It is equivalent to the council's total spend on nursery, special and community education in the current financial year. It is the equivalent of the annual salaries of 10 per cent. of the council's work force. If a teacher's annual salary, including on-costs, amounts to £24,500, £31 million is the equivalent of the salary bill for 1,265 teachers—the staff required to run approximately 18 of the council's 38 secondary schools or 145 primary schools.

The total salaries and wages budget of the police was £31 million. That figure is equivalent to twice the spend on Grampian fire brigade in 1994-95. It was the entire planned spend on road maintenance, including winter maintenance. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland would like to tell us which of those services should be cut as a result of the constraints placed on Grampian regional council. Make no mistake, when the cuts take place, we shall make sure that the responsibility is on his lap and not on that of the councillors whom he is making implement his dirty work for him.

In my constituency, there will have to be a 5 per cent. reduction in spending to keep within capping levels. Some key decisions will have to be taken on the basics such as maintaining the ferry services to some islands, on which the islanders very much depend. Perhaps in 1980 and 1981 there was some fat that could be cut, but now we have had year after year of cuts, so there is no fat left. We are eating into the muscle. Local authorities are right down to the bone.

Where does the Secretary of State think that the savings can come from? He makes great play of the increases in staffing, yet he has never said what proportion of the increase relates to extra responsibilities for functions such as community care and devolved school management. Those are Government policies which local authorities have to implement. They require extra staff to do so.

In giving his figures, the Secretary of State said that he would like to see a reduction in spending on libraries. For centuries, public libraries have been an important part of the community, yet he wants to see a programme to run them down. The Secretary of State wants fare concessions to be limited. He has even suggested in some of his figures that he looks to councils to make savings on burial grounds. I remember when that was suggested on a previous occasion, when Shetland Islands council was trying to meet its budgetary demands. Someone suggested that it should dig shallower graves. We now have a Government who hold out the possibility that councils should dig shallower graves to fund basic services.

I assume that most hon. Members received representations this week from the National Association of Funeral Directors. It drew attention to the pressures on many families as a result of the limitation on social fund payments for funerals. Now the Government advocate increasing burial charges.

I have outlined some of the real choices that local authorities will have to make. That leads to a fundamental point. There is a breakdown in trust between central and local government. In a mature democracy, there are different centres of power. While there will sometimes be friction, at the end of the day they should work together in partnership rather than in conflict.

I admire people of all parties who intend to stand for election to the new authorities on 6 April. They will have a pretty thankless task. In many of the smaller councils with limited budgets, they will have to choose which services to cut. There will be little scope for innovation or positive action in the interests of the communities. There will be no joy in making choices between cuts. It is no basis for establishing a new system of local government. We need to reinvigorate local democracy and recreate a positive partnership between central and local government.

[Mr. James Wallace]

The Secretary of State has sought to blame COSLA for the problems, but the blame lies fairly and squarely with the Government. When services are cut and when the increased council tax demands fall through the letter-boxes, the blame will lie on the Treasury Front Bench. Our candidates will ensure that people know those facts before 6 April.

9 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I am surprised that the Secretary of State, who has presided over the worst-ever unemployment in Scotland, should say that too many people are employed in council services. He should ask the question: if the councils start sacking employees, where will they go? The railway workshops, the tobacco industry in Alexander parade in my constituency and the shipyards have all lost labour. If it were not for the local authority, there would not be an apprentice in the building industry in Glasgow. The great private sector, about which Conservative Members are always bragging, get benefits from that. When the young apprentices have finished their training in the direct labour departments, the private sector is the first to snap them up. It wants the bricklayers, the carpenters and the electricians, but it does not want to train them.

Hon. Members have already referred to Scottish Homes. That organisation snaps up the young officials who get diplomas and training from housing departments in places such as Glasgow and Renfrew. When there is so much unemployment in Scotland, the Secretary of State should not say that local authorities should sack staff. He and his Ministers should be creating more jobs in the private sector to take the pressure off local authorities.

One area that could do with more employees is the concierge service, which should operate in every multi-storey dwelling in Scotland. In the old days, people came out of tightly knit communities in the old tenements and went into the new flats. There was no problem then. Now, unfortunately, in some of the multi-storey flats there is a certain element who will not give the other people peace and quiet and there is vandalism.

Great waste is associated with the hospital in Clydebank. I have spoken in debates in the House and highlighted the way in which Government money has been spent on so-called job creation schemes; that money has gone down the drain. Why not spend money on a concierge system that would give 24-hour coverage with video cameras in the multi-storey flats?

Some of the homes in those multi-storey dwellings are like palaces, but the residents are ashamed of the entrances—they are ashamed to bring their friends and relatives into those blocks. It is no easy answer to say, "Pull them down." In certain areas of my constituency that would be the equivalent of pulling down a small town. It would be ridiculous. A concierge system would be a great benefit.

As I said, some of the homes on the council estates in my constituency are absolutely beautiful. Recently, I went into one and I can say that no interior designer could have designed the inside of that house as well as my constituent had done. It would have done a Barratt show house proud. There is that sort of home on every council estate in Glasgow.

People need backing; they do not need a Government who cut the support grant. The Minister knows that in some of the housing estates the people are fighting against terrible odds. In the next tenement to that beautiful home was a house where the damp was so bad that the resident had to pull the bed away from the wall so that she and her children could have a decent night's sleep. Scottish Homes will not provide the money to reroof the tenement.

I did not do my training in the building industry, but I know that if a roof is neglected the rest of the building will crumble. The resident had lived in the community all her life, as had her husband. There is a network of relatives and friends around them. She does not want to leave her home, but if the roof is neglected she will be forced to leave and the local authority will have to rehouse her.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) was brought up in the Gorbals and I was brought up on the other side of the city in the Anderstoun district. We were brought up in the slums, so we know what it is to get a council house. Many people who went into those council houses were very proud of them. Now, the properties need a lick of paint, reroofing and repairs. This is not the time for the Government to neglect them.

As the Minister may know, the chief medical officer in Glasgow appeared on a BBC television programme on Monday evening saying that the life expectancy of young couples on those council estates, compared with people only half a mile up the road in Bearsden, is being reduced by 10 years. In almost every estate people are living in life-threatening conditions. We must do something about the dampness and the neglect. Resources must be provided to combat anti-social behaviour, which is a serious problem. Some young couples who are unemployed are being aggravated by their neighbours and that will cause stress. Any heart specialist will say that such stress leads to heart attacks and shortens people's lives. It is an indictment on the Government. Many people in Scotland have to be on housing benefit, but any person in receipt of housing benefit would say that he would rather have the dignity of a job and be able to pay his own rent—something which the Government fail to understand.

The question has been posed: where is the money to come from? In my constituency, all the good housing stock has been bought by the sitting tenants. I do not begrudge them that—it is their right under the legislation. I was not against the sale of council houses, but I thought that it should have been qualified by an obligation on local authorities to build another council house for every council house sold. Furthermore, they should have been given the money to do that. In my constituency, many council houses have estate agents' "For Sale" signs up in front of them. The unemployed rail workers and tobacco workers will have no chance of buying them; they will go to the highest bidders. If market forces are to prevail, the only way to resolve this problem is to enable local authorities to provide decent housing for the people who cannot afford it themselves.

I have another suggestion for finding the money. There are some signs, thank God, that the troops will be able to leave Northern Ireland. That being so, the Army will no longer need the resources that it used to need to maintain 24-hour security coverage. The same applies to the British Army of the Rhine. The Government did not begrudge the Army, Navy and Air Force the money in the past. If there

is to be a peace dividend now, it should go to pay for the basic right of every man, woman and child in Scotland to a decent home and a decent roof over their heads.

9.10 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) has made an impassioned plea, based on hard-won experience, on behalf of his constituents. Too many of our fellow citizens face these problems. That is what the debate is all about: how are we to react to the conditions in cities that we see all around us, to ensure that our citizens enjoy decent homes and living standards?

We have heard a concerted assault from the Opposition on the Government's proposals, but from the Government we have heard no reaction—only a statement that this is the best of all possible settlements. We have heard no justification or rationale from the Government. We have heard about no general plans for local government finance. We have certainly heard no attempt to relate the Government's budgetary proposals to real councils and real services in the real world.

No wonder the Government have not made this attempt—their proposals are wholly inadequate for the purpose. This settlement ignores Scotland's wealth and imposes a freeze on and cuts in essential daily local services. How can it be realistic to make Glasgow, Edinburgh and Renfrew, with all their problems, freeze their spending to avoid capping, and not even to permit them to allow for inflation? Councils such as Clydebank also face cuts. This time, the Government are putting the squeeze on all the councils of Scotland, with the exception of two of the smaller ones. For the second year running, the Government have made no allowance for wage increases in cash or for capping purposes, and their policy seems set to continue.

Even prudent councils find themselves facing massive council tax rises or unacceptable cuts in basic services—all due to this settlement. I thoroughly agree with Councillor Rosemary McKenna who has said:

> "Once again we will NOT be making choices about how we provide the best service to Council Taxpayers. Rather we will be looking at how we can provide a service which meets Government imposed targets."

This is the Government's internally driven budget, certainly not the people's budget.

Grant-aided expenditure may appear to be 1.1 per cent. higher for next year, but when provision for care in the community and for other new burdens is taken into account, the settlement turns into a reduction in the provision for current services of about 0.5 per cent. While oil-rich Scotland needs better services and a job creation programme, all we get from this London Government are cuts and closures. It is not good enough. The Government clearly lack the imagination and the impetus required to solve Scotland's problems.

That is why there is no war on poor housing conditions. There are no major housebuilding or improvement programmes that would use Scottish skills and Scottish materials to get folk off the dole queues and to create assets for generations to come—and to meet today's real housing needs. Instead, we are offered only housing support grant, which cuts net spending by 12 per cent. in cash terms and by 19 per cent. in real terms over the next three years. Meanwhile, gross spending is to fall by 10 per cent. in cash terms and by 17 per cent. in real terms over the same period.

In real terms, taking into account capital receipts of £175 million, less will be directly invested from public sources in Scottish housing three years from now. So much for the future offered by this Government. The truth—as opposed to the Government's policy—is that 500,000 houses, 30 per cent. of Scotland's housing stock, suffer from damp, condensation or mould. Forty-two thousand households are homeless. Such massive problems affect all too many of our fellow citizens' daily lives, and they are not being tackled to ensure an end to them even in the distant future. The most vulnerable in society bear the brunt of the failure of Government policies.

When will that unacceptable situation change? I suspect that the same will happen next year and the year after that, as this incompetent Government stumble from crisis to crisis. Those cuts are only part of a series imposed on local government over the past decade. While central Government load more responsibilities on local authorities through legislation, they increasingly impose financial cuts—the worst of all possible worlds.

The budget is hopeless and offers no chance of improving housing services this year, next year or the year after. It is time that finance was related to real need and time for Scottish local authorities to enjoy a period of stability, to permit longer-term planning to meet the actual needs of people in their areas.

No one expects the backlog of Scotland's social and economic problems to be solved instantly, but we have the right to a logical, long-term plan that will do something about them, and the Government have failed totally to provide one. We wait in vain, and this load of financial rubbish will only store up more trouble for local authorities and the people who rely on the essential daily services that local authorities provide. Pocket money instead of investment will not do. Massively rich Scotland deserves better, and now Scotland can do something about that.

The Secretary of State slid away from my point about unified business rate levels and its effect on Scottish business. The first common UBR may not provide a level playing field. Scottish rentals have risen 53 per cent., whereas the figure in the rest of the UK was only 1 per cent. To maintain the same yield, revaluation would require a similar level of 42.3p in the pound in England.

Scottish rental evidence suggests a considerable rise in rateable values. I would be happy if that were a sign of increased business, as the Secretary of State implied, but it is a sign of revaluation. The Scottish Office's lowest estimate of revaluation is that the tax yield on 42.3p would produce £80 million more than was required to meet the Government's suggested yield. The figure could be higher, which would not be the promised level playing field. I invite the Minister to respond tonight to the comments of the Scottish Council (Development and Industry).

It is clear from the settlement that the Secretary of State has no interest in fighting for Scotland. His constant refusal to help overcome Scottish councils' financial problems is based solely on Treasury dogma. His much-vaunted seat in the Cabinet has done nothing to stop Government and Treasury actions in respect of Scotland

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

and our local government system. The Secretary of State should step aside and allow a Treasury Minister to lead the debate, because the right hon. Gentleman is obviously not master in his own house.

9.18 pm

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Are not thousands of houses in Scotland affected by damp and difficult and expensive to heat? There appears to be no disagreement about that among Conservative Members—but instead of doing something positive, the Government have cut housing support grant year in, year out. If Ministers had to spend a Scottish winter in some of those houses, perhaps they would do something—and double quick.

Such properties may be called houses; they certainly cannot be called homes. In my constituency and in the city of Glasgow, far too many sub-standard houses are causing untold misery, discomfort and problems for tenants, especially health problems, for young and old alike. The incidence of asthma is greatly increasing among young children. Bronchitis, chest problems and poor general health are widely prevalent. Dry, comfortable homes are essential to combat such ailments and are also cost-effective in reducing national health service expenditure.

The housing support grant formula is a framework that shows central Government policy decisions to be implemented. The Government are committed to giving no central Government or local taxpayer support to council housing, and will continue to manipulate the formula—that is what they do—to ensure that that continues.

It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friends and neighbours the Members for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) and for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). Some of their excellent remarks are well worth repeating, and I make no apology for doing so. I am grateful also to Mr. David Comley, the director of Glasgow district council's housing department, for providing facts relevant to the debate. Glasgow manages approximately 120,000 houses. Rents in Glasgow are due to go up by 6.2 per cent. from 1 March—double the new, increased rate of inflation—an average amount of £1.94 per week, which is not a small amount, as the Secretary of State said, especially to the many thousands of people eking out a miserable existence on very low incomes. It is a hell of a lot of money to those people. It ill-behoves the Secretary of State to dismiss such a large increase for so many poor people in the way in which that he did.

The council's commitment to investing in its housing stock means spending £104 million on improving it in the current year, and that has added 51p per week to the rent. The loss of stock, which has been mainly due to the right-to-buy sales, demolitions and transfers to new landlords has resulted in £1.02 per week being added to the rents paid by a reduced number of tenants. The cessation of direct Government support to the council housing service, which, in the early 1980s, paid for around one third of the service, has added a further 40p per week. At the same time, the council, by a very painful decision-making process, has been trying to reduce tenant-borne expenditure and has reduced employee costs by more than £1 million, yet still managed to increase spending on repairs in real terms.

In addition, other services are being improved. The multi-storey flat concierge service will be expanded to benefit a further 3,000 homes next year. As a Member who has 13 blocks of multi-storey flats in his constituency, I warmly welcome that, because where the system already exists it is popular and cost-effective. Tenants feel safer, especially the frail and the elderly, and vandalism is reduced. It is hoped that the housing alarms service can be made available to a further 3,300 tenants next year. Again, that is a popular and essential service, providing additional security.

Unfortunately, much remains to be done, for example, the 1,000 sub-standard Winget houses in Carntyne, in Glasgow's east end. I must express my gratitude to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, who accepted my invitation to visit those houses 18 months ago, and especially for his subsequent decision to make an additional £250,000 available for a pilot scheme to see what could be done. Perhaps he will consider extending his contribution and thus allow the pilot scheme to cover more houses than it presently does.

I must tell the Minister, however, that only last week a tenant of one of the houses that he visited—an elderly widow—came to see me at my weekly surgery, and she was in some distress. She is no further forward than she was five years ago. Her roof and windows still let in rain water and her front door has gaps all around it. She cannot heat her house adequately. It is continually freezing, and one can see that old lady's health deteriorating as each month goes by. It is sad to say, but there are far too many similar cases throughout Scotland.

Why will not the Government accept that there is genuinely a serious problem in far too many houses and do something other than make the position worse by making further cuts? People are dying before they should because of the inhospitable housing conditions in which they are forced to live. The scale of Glasgow's problems is far greater than anywhere else and should be recognised accordingly. Glasgow district council is trying its best; the Government are not.

Let me say a little about the revenue support grant. Do the Government not realise the scale of the crisis facing Strathclyde regional council, which estimates a shortfall of £115 million in grant-aided expenditure, as well as this year's deficit of just over £20 million because the Government would not make any allocation for wage awards to council staff? Just to maintain the current levels of service while remaining within the Government's capping limits, the council would have to cut next year's expenditure by £107 million and raise the council tax by 25 per cent.—all because the Government have shifted the burden from the national Exchequer to local council tax payers. That is just because the Government want to build up an election treasure chest, allowing them to announce a giveaway Budget next year in a blatant attempt to bribe the electorate to re-elect them. It will be a failed effort, because you cannot fool all the people all the time.

A cut of £107 million means an across-the-board reduction of more than 5 per cent., and that could mean the loss of 5,500 jobs. There could be fewer police, firefighters and home helps. Some residential homes, police offices, fire stations and outdoor centres for

youngsters could be threatened with closure. Grants to voluntary and cultural organisations are at risk; fees and charges for services will almost certainly increase substantially. All in all, the situation is very depressing and worrying.

Like many other hon. Members, I am receiving pleas from constituents regarding the possible closure of Ad-Tec, a Strathclyde regional council project, as a result of the cuts. Ad-Tec provides courses for people with learning difficulties and physical disabilities. The training that it gives enables such people to find employment. A constituent wrote to me:

"I am 24 years old and I go to Ad-Tec four days per week. I have a Learning Disability and was shocked to find out that Ad-Tec may have to close due to the budget cuts . . . Ad-Tec offers us training in clerical skills but more importantly assists us in our search for work. At Ad-Tec we do things like typing, computing, filing, word-processing, communication, literacy, and advocacy. I would like to have a Job when I am finished at Ad-Tec."

Vulnerable people like that constituent are most at risk and will suffer most as a result of the cuts. Are there no limits to the Government's lack of compassion or humanity?

The orders only make a bad situation worse. The only welcome order would be the order of the boot for this Tory Government—and the one bit of good news is that it will come at the next general election.

9.27 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am also grateful to my hon. Friends who have spoken briefly; I intend to speak briefly as well to leave time for my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), if he is lucky enough to catch your eye.

I do not wish to repeat all the points that have been made about rent rises, and the fundamental housing issue—that everyone has the right to a warm, dry and comfortable home. Those points have been made forcefully by my hon. Friends, and I shall simply associate myself with what they have said. I shall concentrate on a couple of specific points.

The Minister would be surprised if I did not mention floods, and it would be churlish of me not to place on record that the Minister recently awarded an additional borrowing consent of £2 million to Renfrew district council. Local Members of Parliament are very grateful for that, because it will allow us to start clearing up the aftermath of the floods. However, we now need to know exactly what will be provided to finance that additional borrowing. Everyone in Renfrew district knows that not a brass farthing of new money was provided; although an additional borrowing consent was provided, the debt must be serviced and the mortgage paid in future years.

When I met the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) during what turned out to be his last few days as a Minister, he gave me a verbal assurance that there was a formula called top-slicing—an unfortunate phrase, given the source of the assurance—which would build money into the local authority's revenue side in future years to service the debt. He followed that up with a letter dealing with future revenue support grant, and he explained the principle of top-slicing, but no such assurance has yet been given on housing. I ask the Minister to give that assurance either tonight or by way of a letter after the debate.

Flood prevention is the issue that exercises the minds of my constituents who were flood victims. As they begin to move back into their homes that were devastated by the floods, they need to have an assurance that those floods, or anything like them, cannot happen again. That is why I have presented the Natural Disasters (Scotland) Bill to the House. It tries to make someone responsible for flood prevention in Scotland because, at the moment, no one is. Local authorities have a permissive power to apply for additional moneys for flood prevention, but they need not use it; indeed, the Secretary of State need not fund any application.

There are opportunities in that Bill. They will arise again when the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency Bill comes from the other place. I ask the Minister seriously to consider what can be done to assure the people whose homes have been devastated that there will be flood prevention, because they are now buying new furniture and trying to rebuild their lives.

Mr. Bill Walker: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his stand on flood prevention. He knows that he has my full support.

Mr. McMaster: I am grateful for that.

Every Opposition Member supports that Bill, so at least 62 of Scotland's 72 Members of Parliament support it. I have laid a motion before the House to refer the Bill to the Scottish Grand Committee for its Second Reading. On Friday this week, if the Government do not object, that Bill can proceed to the Scottish Grand Committee, where I will happily accept Government amendments if they feel that there are any problems.

I have not given the Minister warning of my next point, so it would be unreasonable to expect detailed replies tonight, but I urge him to consider it. I am in a position to accuse Scottish Homes and its board of, at best, gross incompetence and, at worst, criminal negligence over the case of Waverley court in Paisley. Six years ago, the local management of Scottish Homes decided that it would empty a 56-flat multi-storey block in my constituency. I would have called it a clearance; it called it a diversification of tenure. It decided to empty that multi-storey block and to sell it to the private sector.

Six years later, that multi-storey block of 56 flats remains empty. The reason is that Scottish Homes, in its incompetence, emptied the block before checking that its proposal for redevelopment could happen. It proposed to empty the block and convert it into cheap homes for first-time buyers. Once it had emptied it, it found that no mortgage lender in the land would give a mortgage for such a block. It has been to see housing associations to ask whether they will consider the matter.

I have met Scottish Homes management locally. No housing association wants anything to with that block of flats. It was built only 20 or 30 years ago, yet it stands idle. The Minister has stood at that Dispatch Box before and criticised local authorities for empty housing stock. The number of empty houses in Renfrew district council is lower than not only the national average for councils, but the national average for the private sector. The district council has turned the general situation around, but Waverley court is still a problem. I have here a letter from

[Mr. McMaster]

Mr. John McPherson from the Oliphant Oval in Paisley. I know him well; he is a good man who works hard for the community. He writes:

"Are Scottish Homes so well off that they can ignore lost revenue in this block of flats for six years? Just how much revenue has been lost over the six year period this building has lay empty?"

His questions deserve to be answered.

I deal finally with the non-housing aspects of the orders. To illustrate the orders' impact I cite the case of a couple to whom I spoke only last week. The husband works for Strathclyde's community education department and the wife also works for the council—she heads a unit that promotes understanding between European member states, a project encouraged by the Scottish Office. They now find themselves working for departments at the head of the hit list. David and Edna Paterson are good people. Does the Minister think it right that Members of the Treasury Bench and Conservative Back Benchers boast that people who have such a valuable contribution to make are losing their jobs?

There is one aspect of the orders that Ministers have not considered. When local government jobs start to go in the Greater Renfrewshire area, the constituency of Eastwood will be affected every bit as much as mine. I know from when I was a councillor that when local government workers leave their place of work in Paisley they do not return home to some housing estate or peripheral housing scheme but to Newton Mearns and Giffnock. The impact of job losses in local government will be a matter of political regret for the Conservative party.

I still keep on my desk a handy copy of the book written by Nicholas Ridley, and there is no doubt that the Government still see councils as enablers, not providers. The Government want them to meet once or twice a year, have dinner and award contracts but not get involved in the problems of the people whom they represent.

9.36 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) for being brief, to allow me to speak about Edinburgh district and Lothian region.

I wish to make three points about housing in Edinburgh. First, for years Edinburgh district has not received any housing support grant for council housing. I make my annual complaint, but the result is that rents will have to go up by £1.85 to cover increased interest rates and inflation.

Secondly, the housing support grant for hostels for the homeless in Edinburgh is being cut by £111,000, or 20 per cent. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for housing—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton)—can explain that remarkable cut.

Thirdly, the capital allocation for Edinburgh is being cut by £1 million to £32 million. There is also a strange change. Whereas, before Christmas, the receipts from council houses were said to be going to realise £12.5 million, we are now told that they could realise £13.5 million. I think that the first figure is more accurate, which probably means that in practice we have a £2 million cut in capital allocation for Edinburgh district.

In Lothian region, the problem is that the cap has been set very tight. This year, Lothian region is allowed to spend £596 million and, next year, it will be allowed to spend £600 million. By no stretch of the imagination can £4 million be said to cover inflation, for which £9 million must be allowed; pay increases, for which £17 million must be allowed; and other unavoidable expenditure, which I do not have time to list in detail.

An additional problem to which I draw the Minister's attention is that school rolls in Lothian will be increasing in August by, I am told, 1,400 pupils in primary schools and 1,100 pupils in secondary schools. An extra 130 teachers should therefore be employed, which would mean that from August an extra £3 million has to be found. I should like to hear the Minister's suggestions on how Lothian region's problem can be solved. I expect that we shall hear something about efficiency savings, but what does the Minister mean by that? Does he mean that we must have fewer teachers, larger classes and additional charges for school meals or for meals on wheels for elderly people, or a combination of all those? The Government should deal with that problem.

The amount of aggregate external finance has gone down even in cash terms, once community care transfers are taken into account. From April, it will represent 86.4 per cent. of Government-supported expenditure, whereas this year it represents 87.4 per cent. The Government must do something about the crisis facing Lothian region. They are unlikely to do anything because they do not have the money, having had to pay the costs of economic failure. Moreover, they are storing up money for tax cuts next year.

As I said in the Grand Committee, why not does the Minister put the needs of the children and the elderly of Lothian region before the Government's mad dash for next year's tax bribes?

9.40 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): We have had a good debate, but it would be fair to say that it has been predictable, with Labour Members universally condemning the housing and local government finance settlements that the Secretary of State introduced. Conservative Members who bothered to speak on the Government's behalf weakly tried to defend what cannot be defended in a democratic Chamber.

I suppose that the fact that Opposition Members represent 61 of Scotland's 72 seats and 75 per cent. of all those who voted in the last general election in Scotland shows that we reflect the overwhelming view of the Scottish people on the settlement. If we lived in a real democracy, all the orders before the House tonight would be defeated because those affected by them voted for hon. Members who want to see them defeated. Unfortunately, however, we do not live in a real democracy in Scotland, so we shall have the fiction of a Government majority voting on the orders when every man, woman and child in Scotland opposes them.

Some of the best contributions to the debate have come from my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall), for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), all of whose vast experience on housing matters was shown in their contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow,

Provan (Mr. Wray) reminded us what housing was like in Scotland before council housing was widely available. Rat-infested slums were thrown up by private sector landlords. I lived in one such slum in Springburn and, like all my hon. Friends, can remember the poor housing conditions in the private sector in Scotland which directly affected the health of working-class people. Infant mortality rates were much higher, tuberculosis affected people's chances of survival and working-class people in general lived for a much shorter time than those who lived in better circumstances and better housing.

The contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Provan was timely, given that only last week the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report showing that, once again, huge inequalities are beginning to develop in our country and working-class people are again at risk as their health begins to be affected by the poor housing conditions that have resulted from Government policies.

It is because we do not want to return to the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s that we care about the housing settlement. It is because we do not want to return to those bad times that my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) rightly described this as the most savage housing settlement in years.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: May I pose the same question as I posed to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), which he deliberately did not answer? If the settlement is inadequate, by how much is it inadequate? If the hon. Gentleman were a Minister now, on what settlement would he ask the House to vote?

Mr. McAllion: If the hon. Gentleman would stop intervening and listen, he would discover the answer to that question as my speech develops.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton also said, rightly, that the price that has been paid for the settlement will be paid mainly by council tenants. That remark was met by guffaws from Conservative Members, but the point was confirmed by the opening statement in the Secretary of State's speech, when he said that the Government were assuming, in the housing settlement, a notional rent of more than £37 a week. The Secretary of State knows that actual rent levels in Scotland are much lower than that. The Government are assuming income for local authorities which they will not receive. He is denying them the housing support grant that they deserve if we take into consideration the actual rent levels charged in Scotland rather than the notional ones which the right hon. Gentleman assumes in his housing settlement.

If we take the Secretary of State's own area, Nithsdale district council in his constituency, the actual rent is £25.72 a week. If his council were to meet the notional rent level that he assumes, it would have to put rents up by £12 a week, or 50 per cent. Perhaps the local Member has recommended that the council should do that, because he assumes that it has done it anyway. In fact, to take an even better example, Eastwood—the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who is normally present at such debates, is not here—would have to increase rents by £15 a week. What do Conservative Members want? Do they want their local councils to charge current rent levels or do they want them to charge those rents that they assume will be charged, according to the housing settlement? They cannot have it both ways. If they are going to preach in the House that councils should charge rents of £37 a week, they had better go back to their constituencies and preach the same. I suspect that none of them would do that, because they would be frightened of what would happen to them in terms of votes in their constituencies if they made such an absurd suggestion.

The COSLA brief, which was made available to all hon. Members, pointed out that, in the past 14 years, the Government, by reducing housing support grant and revenue fund contributions, have withdrawn about £2 billion of support for council housing in Scotland. We all know the consequences of the withdrawal of that massive subsidy, because we have seen rents rocket by almost 500 per cent., tenants in their tens of thousands forced on to housing benefit and the housing benefit bill rocket.

It really surprises me that Conservative Members force council tenants on to housing benefit. They have impoverished those tenants by forcing them into dependence on housing benefit and then expect those tenants to be thankful for that. The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) seemed to think that it was a blessing to receive housing benefit. He should go back to his constituents and ask them whether they like getting housing benefit. They do not; they would like to be able to afford the rents charged by local authorities.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman should visit Limlathem, which was the first place to introduce the equivalent of housing benefit. My parents were delighted. I would also be delighted today to see people being properly recompensed through rents and living in houses free from damp and subject to adequate supervision.

Mr. McAllion: If the Government continue with the housing policies which they have pursued in the past 14 years, the hon. Gentleman may be in receipt of housing benefit before long.

As the housing benefit bill has rocketed in Scotland, one of the strangest things to note inside the Tory Cabinet is how the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is almost pulling his hair out as he wonders why that bill has rocketed. He seems to be puzzled by that. He does not understand it. The answer is that the housing benefit bill is high because the Government's housing policy makes it high. That policy has forced councils to set rent at levels that council tenants cannot afford. Therefore, the Government have only themselves to blame for the spiralling housing benefit bill. If they truly want to reduce that bill, the best thing they could do would be to resign en masse and let someone who knew how to run housing policy take it over.

I compare the withdrawal of subsidy from council housing under the Government with their parallel injection of subsidy into non-council housing, particularly through Scottish Homes. We cannot discuss the policies of Scottish Homes in the past 14 years because, thankfully, it has existed only since 1989-90. What might have happened if it had existed since 1979? God help us.

Since 1989-90, Scottish Homes, through its various programmes to enable development and investment, has channelled £1,529 million of subsidy into housing associations, co-operatives, grants for rent and ownership for private developers and other low-cost home ownership schemes. On the one hand, the Government have withdrawn general housing subsidies for council tenants while, on the other, they have increased general housing subsidies for non-council tenants and other home owners. Why is that?

[Mr. McAllion]

Last year, the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for housing, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), was challenged on why he was cutting housing support grant and general fund contributions to council tenants. He said it was because

"This sort of subsidy is indiscriminate because it benefits all tenants regardless of their circumstances".—[*Official Report*, 14 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. 745.]

That is why he is withdrawing general subsidies to council tenants.

Let us apply the same logic to the Government subsidies that are paid through Scottish Homes. Are they indiscriminate, and do they benefit all, regardless of their circumstances? Let us take housing association grant, which is the main subsidy paid to housing associations. Of course the answer is yes, it is indiscriminate; yes, it does benefit all housing association tenants, regardless of their circumstances. Let us take grants for rent and ownership, which are paid to private developers to bring down the cost of new housing to first-time buyers. Yes, they are indiscriminate; yes, they benefit all, regardless of their circumstances.

Why are indiscriminate subsidies outlawed for council tenants when indiscriminate subsidies are increased for non-council tenants and householders? We need to know the answer. Why is it okay to subsidise non-council tenants but not okay to subsidise council tenants? If the Minister does not have an answer to that question in his speech, he had better think of one before 9.55 pm, because many people in Scotland will be waiting to hear why the Conservative Government discriminate against council tenants in Scotland, and we need to know the answer.

The answer cannot be that there are so few council tenants in Scotland that they do not count, because, according to the Government's figures, there are 12 times as many council tenants in Scotland as there are housing association tenants. If all the council housing, the new town housing, the Scottish Homes housing and the housing association housing are taken together, council house tenants represent 83 per cent. of the total. That is overwhelmingly the dominant type of renting in Scotland.

There are more council tenants in Scotland than any other type of tenant, so the question must be, why do so many people receive so little from the Government when so few people receive so much? We all need to know the answer to that question.

The housing support grant that is paid by the Government goes to the housing revenue account, which, in turn, helps to pay the outstanding capital debt owed by the councils in Scotland. I want to ask the Minister a specific question about a capital grant that was paid to Scottish Homes in 1992-93. It received £250,139,000 to repay a national loan fund debt on its housing.

According to the 48th report of the Committee of Public Accounts, which, the Minister will remember, conducted an inquiry into the sale of houses by Scottish Homes to Waverley Housing, the Department told the Committee that that payment of £250 million was in recognition of the houses that had been transferred out of Scottish Homes' ownership. The Department said that there was a danger that Scottish Homes might find itself responsible for servicing outstanding capital debt on houses that it no longer owned. Therefore, £250 million was paid to Scottish Homes so that it could redeem the outstanding capital debt on the houses that it had lost.

That is all very well. Scottish Homes had lost 30,000 houses at that stage to other forms of ownership, but councils in Scotland have lost about 260,000 houses to other forms of ownership. Where is the equivalent capital grant, which would be in excess of £2 billion, to local authorities in Scotland to help them to redeem outstanding capital debts? The Minister, who will have to answer that question, should think about it. The Government have given £250 million to Scottish Homes at a time when they deny more than £2 billion to local authority government in Scotland.

It is a matter of the way in which we distribute the purse between different forms of tenure. We would distribute it far more fairly, and that is the difference between the Opposition and the Government. We understand very well that there will always be demands on public spending, not only for housing but for health, education, social work and transport. There is never enough money to satisfy everyone, but being in government means having to learn to say no—we know that. As resources are limited, there is an absolute requirement on the Government to allocate those resources fairly, reasonably and in accordance with criteria that ensure that those in greatest need have the greatest priority in respect of the resources available.

According to the Scottish housing conditions survey in 1991, public sector housing, which was mainly council housing in Scotland, needed £691 million spent on it to bring it up to what the Government describe as a reasonable standard. Housing associations required only £30 million—less than 5 per cent. of that total. According to the same housing conditions survey, dampness in council housing is twice as prevalent as dampness in housing association stock, yet last year the Government gave £280 million to housing associations, and gave only £35.9 million to council houses in Scotland.

Why, when the crying need, whatever scheme of priorities one adopts, is to invest in council housing, do the Government concentrate resources in areas other than council housing? The crunch question is not whether we will receive additional resources, but what we can do with the resources that the Government have available to them at the moment. The Government are deliberately discriminating against council housing in Scotland. Deliberate Government policy and discrimination are making it almost impossible for the vast majority of people in the rented sector to live in decent conditions. The Minister must respond to that point.

I do not have much time left to talk about the finance settlement. The Secretary of State for Scotland repeatedly asserts that Scottish local government is profligate in its expenditure and in the number of people that it employs. I have already told the Secretary of State that COSLA will fund with the Government a joint inquiry into those matters. However, the Secretary of State refuses to commission that inquiry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton is quite right: the joint staffing watch figures which were issued in December last year and which cover the position until September point out that, between 1990 and 1994, the number of local authority employees was cut by 0.8 per cent. There is the Scottish Office staffing responsibility—I refer not just to the Scottish Office core group, but to

Scottish Office agencies such as Historic Scotland, the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, the Scottish Office Pensions Agency, the Scottish Prison Service, the Scottish Courts Administration, the General Register Office, the Scottish Record Office and Registers of Scotland. Far from reducing the number of people in his employ, the Secretary of State has employed more staff. To be fair to him, we have not included the people who work for Scottish Homes or for the Scottish enterprise network. If they were included, the situation would be even worse.

While the Secretary of State for Scotland spreads untruths about the way in which Scottish local government is profligate in the number of people that it employs, the reality is that he employs far more people and that that number is increasing at a faster rate. The truth will out eventually, despite what the Government say, because they are the facts.

9.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): No less than £800 million is spent on housing benefit in Scotland. It is the Government's policy to move away from generalised subsidies to target subsidies at those who need them. We anticipate that the sum will increase and that next year it may be above £900 million. They are very substantial sums and it is very easy for Labour Members to pour scorn upon the expenditure of such large amounts of money on those who need it. However, there would be massive complaints if a Labour Government ever tried to take that money away.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) raised certain constituency matters. I am glad that we were able to help with the Winget housing in his constituency. We have made certain that councils include condensation and dampness as one of the four key national priorities in their housing plans each year.

Glasgow will receive £92 million to enable the council to invest substantially in improving the housing stock. Glasgow could make greater headway were it not for the fact that it lost rents to the value of £8 million through its failure to let empty houses. Reducing the number of empty houses in Glasgow will make a substantial difference, and it lies within the power of the council to do that.

The hon. Gentleman should take up with Glasgow district council the matter of substantial surpluses. In two out of the past three years it has generated surpluses of more than £25 million. He could put in a strong bid for his own constituency arising out of that.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) asked about housing support grant for Edinburgh. Housing support grant is given to help with the deficits of hostels in Edinburgh and it is expected to amount to almost £441,000 next year.

This has been a wide-ranging debate—

Mr. Chisholm: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No, I must move on and answer some of the other questions. We must ensure that local authority services are sufficiently provided for every man, woman and child in Scotland. I accept that the settlement is a tight one because of the need to keep inflation down. There has also been substantial growth in expenditure and manpower in Scottish local government. For example, between 1987 and 1994 the number of full-time equivalent staff in Scotland's local authorities increased by almost 6 per cent. In the same period, staffing levels in English authorities decreased by more than 6 per cent. In the year to June 1994 Scottish local authority manpower increased by almost 1 per cent. whereas in England there was a fall of almost 2 per cent. If Opposition Members say, "How will we live with this settlement?" I need only point to the example of the constituency district council of the hon. Member for Hamilton.

On 10 February an article in *The Scotsman* stated:

"Hamilton District Council has agreed to cut council tax bills by 10 per cent., and council leaders have pledged not to reduce services to pay for the cuts. Instead they plan to expand services."

It continued:

"The overall package is a vindication of the restructuring which we initiated in 1992".

Mr. George Robertson: The Minister is one of a long line of distinguished failed Conservative candidates in Hamilton, although his forefathers used to own the whole constituency. He has given an example of a highly successful Labour council which, even in the face of adversity being thrust on it by the Government, has managed sufficiently to deal with its own resources. Others have not been so lucky, but clearly it is a successful council that has succeeded in the face of the Government rather than because of it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If the hon. Gentleman's local council can do it, so can every other council in Scotland and that proves my point.

What my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) said in his vigorous and substantial speech tonight was extremely important. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is not being given a fair chance. The noise is coming from the Opposition and his own side. Can we now have some order and give the Minister a chance?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I was pointing out that the level of grant-supported expenditure is 33 per cent. higher per person in Scotland than in England and the level of aggregate external finance is 45 per cent. higher in Scotland than it is in England. It is an example of the fact that the settlement is a substantial one.

I now turn to the issue of capping to which Opposition Members object most strongly. I quote the late Willie Ross, the Labour Secretary of State for Scotland. He strongly defended capping and he said:

"the Secretary of State ought to have these residual powers, especially as they now protect local authorities generally from excessive claims by individual authorities on the pool of grants."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 14 June 1966; c. 10.]

It is all very well for Opposition Members to complain about capping powers. When they were in power and had the responsibility—and I am one of the few Conservative Members who knows what it was like to be in opposition—their Secretary of State was only too glad to have exactly the same powers.

Mr. Wallace *rose—*

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have already given way.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

We shall maintain a unified business rate in Scotland pegged at the same level as in England on a permanent basis, ensuring that Scottish businesses have the same benefits and stability of competing on a level playing field with their English counterparts.

As my right hon. Friend pointed out, it is astonishing that the Opposition should be prepared to contemplate returning control over non-domestic rate poundages to local authorities and thus at a stroke completely to destroy the benefits that Scottish businesses will gain from the achievement of the unified business rate. We spent no less than £440 million in harmonising it, so it would be a tragedy for every small business man in Scotland if that was to be thrown away.

Dr. Godman: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for displaying his characteristic courtesy. Let me remind him of his visit to Gibbs hill in Greenock. What is the likelihood of the east end of Greenock being given partnership status? A promise was made to bring together Scottish Homes, Renfrewshire Enterprise and the local council. The Minister was extremely sympathetic to the idea. What is the likelihood of that area of my constituency being given partnership status?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That issue will be looked at with great care by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the hon. Gentleman will receive an answer to his request in due course. I am aware of the problems that the hon. Gentleman has in his constituency.

We have provided substantial sums for the reform of local government in Scotland—£5 million to cover the elections of the shadow councils and £36 million for the shadow authorities, to be paid during 1995-96. If an existing authority faced genuinely additional costs, we would expect it to discuss funding with the relevant shadow councils.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) mentioned housing benefit, which is of key importance in Scotland. This year, the figure is no less than £824 million and next year the figure is likely to be £926 million. That is not something to be looked at askance; it is a substantial sum. It is supplemented by no less than £80 million of urban aid.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I am totally at odds with the view being propounded by the Minister. How can he possibly argue that there is a positive incentive in having increased housing benefits, when people apply for them because they are living in poverty that is induced by the Government? They are living in housing conditions that are being made increasingly intolerable by the Government's expenditure cuts. I cannot believe that a Minister would be so insensitive as to take that view.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The houses would be in much better condition if the rents charged by local authorities had been raised so that more could be spent on management and maintenance. Everyone knows that the average rent in Scotland is £7 or £8 less than the average rent south of the border. Some commentators say that some of the housing stock south of the border is in better condition. If that is so, it is because more has been spent on management and maintenance over the past 30 years. The hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) came to see me; we shall look carefully at the issue of urban aid, not only in her constituency, but many others.

To the hon. Members for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) and for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) I say that the crux of the matter is that, when Labour was in power, it spent £215 on each house in Scotland in 1978-79. We have increased that figure to £672 per house for 1995-96—a substantial increase. Opposition Members cannot have it both ways; they cannot say that the Government should spend far more on housing, when a large percentage of public sector stock has been sold to the sitting tenants. Some 300,000 houses have been sold to sitting tenants—a factor that inevitably has to be taken into account.

I studied the reactions of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. We shall ensure that £35 million to £40 million is allocated for community care projects. That allocation will enable the authorities to achieve their aim. Housing capital and resources for rural areas has again been increased, and those areas receive more per capita than the rest of the country.

Substantial resources are being provided for the non-housing revenue account and, as for capital receipts, more than several billion pounds has been allocated to benefit public sector housing. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Welsh: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many English Members of Parliament have suddenly appeared who were not present earlier. They are taking a sudden interest in the debate and appear to have come to vote, but they do not to want to listen to the Minister. Would it be possible to hear the Minister? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is right. I have already appealed once to both sides of the House to give the Minister a fair chance. So far, that plea has fallen on deaf ears. I hope that the remainder of the Minister's speech will be given a fair hearing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am glad to draw my comments to a close. I shall study the points raised.

I must stress that more than 300,000 tenants have achieved their ambition of becoming owner occupiers, thus releasing almost £3 billion for investment in housing stock. Almost 300,000 new homes have been built in Scotland since 1979. The number of sheltered and amenity houses has more than quadrupled to more than 50,000 and investment per council house, at £672, is higher in real terms than was achieved by the last Labour Government. Significant inroads have been made and will be made in improving Scotland's housing. It is a success story. We will build on that success, as we are absolutely determined to do.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 247.

Division No. 75] **[10.10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*	Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Alexander, Richard	Ashby, David
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*	Atkins, Robert
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*	Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Amess, David	Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Ancram, Michael	Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Arbuthnot, James	Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Baldry, Tony

Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cllthorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'frd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shephard, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul

Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'cstle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffd, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Dennis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wiltshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Ms Estelle Morris.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

It being later than three hours after the first motion was made, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [10 February].*

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.—[*Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.*]

CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK BILL

Ordered,

That Glenda Jackson be discharged from the Select Committee on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill and Mr. John Heppell be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Roger Evans be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Mrs. Margaret Morrison

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

10.24 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I wish to raise the subject of the tragic death of my constituent, Mrs. Margaret Morrison, and of the failure of the criminal justice system adequately to deal with those responsible for her death. The case raises wider issues about the way of dealing with cases in which criminal activity by a motorist has resulted in or contributed to the death of an innocent pedestrian.

Mrs. Morrison—a much-loved, 84-year-old grandmother—was killed in a hit-and-run accident on 13 September 1992. The accident occurred on Premier road, Sunderland, at about 8 pm on a Sunday evening. Mrs. Morrison was leaving the offside of a car parked on the inside lane of Premier road. The car lights were on and the road well-lit, and the weather was fine. She had closed the car door and was standing close against it when she was hit by an overtaking vehicle. Another vehicle some distance in front had already passed her, so there can be no suggestion that she appeared suddenly in front of the vehicle that hit her.

Mrs. Morrison was carried 30 ft on the bonnet of the car, her head hitting the windscreen. The car slowed and she fell on to the road. The vehicle was then driven away at high speed, and was later found abandoned half a mile away. Witnesses saw two men leaving the car. Before it was abandoned, the passenger was seen to throw two one-pint cans of Scorpion high-alcohol lager into a garden. He was seen also carefully to wipe the side of the car that hit Mrs. Morrison with a coat. He wiped also the driver's side of the vehicle and closed the driver's door using the coat.

The following day, one of the men—Joseph Dorward, much the worse for drink—gave himself up to the police. He was 34 years old and has a long record of criminal activity. He admitted to driving since the age of 16 without a licence. In due course, he was charged with failing to report an accident and failing to have a taxed vehicle, insurance or a driving licence. Later, following strong representations from Mrs. Morrison's family, an additional charge of careless driving was added.

Dorward's passenger, Stephen James Greener, gave himself up on 16 September—three days after the accident. He was charged with aiding and abetting failure to report an accident and with perverting the course of justice.

The case went before Sunderland magistrates on 9 March 1993. Incredibly, they elected to hear the case against Dorward—the driver—but to refer that against Greener—the passenger—to the Crown court. The case against Dorward was strong. It could not be proven that he was over the alcohol limit at the time of the accident, since he had failed to stop and could not be breathalysed. In addition to the can of Scorpion lager that he had been seen drinking in the car shortly before the accident, he admitted to having consumed another two pints of beer several hours earlier.

Dorward not only had a string of previous convictions, many of them involving vehicles, but it later emerged that on 9 November 1992—two months after he killed Mrs. Morrison and while awaiting trial for that offence—he was again arrested and charged with driving without insurance, a licence or MOT certificate, and having a defective tyre. I submit that Dorward should have been tried for those further offences at the same time as he was tried for the offences arising from Mrs. Morrison's death. That would have enabled the magistrates to place in proper context any expression of regret made on Mr. Dorward's behalf and to sentence him accordingly. In fact, however, neither the Crown Prosecution Service nor the magistrates appeared to have been aware that Dorward was continuing to commit similar offences while on bail for the death of Mrs. Morrison. That became clear only when her son spotted a newspaper report giving details of Dorward's later conviction.

Dorward was fined £600 for the offences involving the death of Mrs. Morrison, payable at £3 a week and suspended until after he had finished paying—at the same rate—fines for a string of previous offences. In addition, he was banned from driving for 12 months. Not surprisingly, Mrs. Morrison's family were outraged, and so were many people in Sunderland. They take the view that, in the circumstances, the life of that innocent old lady should have been worth more than £3 a week.

As for Mr. Greener, he, in due course, appeared before His Honour Judge Capstick at Newcastle Crown court. Like Mr. Dorward, he had many previous convictions, including one for failing to stop after an accident. He was sentenced to 240 hours community service. Both the judge and Mr. Greener's counsel remarked that, as the driver of the car had not been sent to prison, it would not be right to imprison his accomplice, although a conviction for perverting the course of justice would normally result in imprisonment. The judge remarked that Mr. Dorward had been "lucky" to receive the sentence that he did. Counsel for Greener, pleading with the judge not to send his client to gaol, remarked on the "rather extraordinary disparity" that would arise between a sentence of custody on Greener and a fine already imposed on the driver.

"A member of the public,"

he said,

"looking at this matter and hearing of the consequences . . . would say it was a rather bizarre state of affairs . . . if the passenger loses his liberty whereas the person who . . . was directly responsible for killing the old lady . . . receives only a financial penalty. Such a marked disparity offends the common view of what justice is all about."

Indeed it does. In my view, the handling of the whole case offends the common view of what justice is all about, and I wish that I could convey the widespread sense of outrage in Sunderland that the case has provoked. I believe that it has been grievously mishandled by the CPS, and I have sought to obtain from the Director of Public Prosecutions an admission that that is so, but I regret that I have not been successful.

First, I should be grateful to know why, given the circumstances—I have given the Solicitor-General advance notice of the questions that I intend to ask, in the hope of receiving a substantive reply—Mr. Dorward was not charged with a more serious offence, such as manslaughter, with dangerous, reckless or careless driving as a fallback? Why, indeed, could he not have been charged, with Mr. Greener, with perverting the course of justice? That at least would have got him to the Crown court. Had he been charged with a more serious offence, I believe that there was a realistic prospect that a jury

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

would have convicted. I remind the Solicitor-General that it was only after the intervention of Mrs. Morrison's family that the charge of careless driving was added in the first place.

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend on obtaining an Adjournment debate on this very sad subject.

My hon. Friend will be as aware as I am, as we both represent the same city, that, in general, the incidence of car crimes in Sunderland is higher than anywhere else in mainland Britain—even Belfast. Does he not think that the very good efforts being made by the police to try to improve the position are grievously undermined by the case that he is describing tonight?

Mr. Mullin: I agree. There is no criticism of the police involved. They did everything that one would expect of them. The criticism and responsibility for this fiasco lies entirely with the northern branch of the CPS.

Secondly, why did the Crown allow the driver to be dealt with by magistrates while the passenger, who after all was only an accomplice, was sent for trial at Crown court? I am sure that there is an explanation that makes perfect sense to lawyers, but it will make none at all to those of us who are not lawyers.

Thirdly, I invite the Solicitor-General to agree that a fine of £600, payable at £3 a week, suspended until fines for previous offences have been paid, is an inappropriate sentence for an offence of this kind, particularly as the defendant, by his own admission, had been driving without a licence since the age of 16. Let me also put it to the Solicitor-General that a 12-month driving ban only adds insult to injury.

Fourthly, I would like to know why no member of the Crown Prosecution Service noticed that, within two months of killing Mrs. Morrison and long before he came to trial, Mr. Dorward was again arrested without insurance or tax. As I said earlier, if someone had noticed perhaps that offence could have been dealt with at the same time, and Mr. Dorward's evident lack of remorse could have been reflected in his sentence.

Fifthly, I would like to know whether Mr. Dorward has yet commenced paying the fine imposed on him for killing Mrs. Morrison. We should remember that more than two years have now passed. Sixthly, I seek an acknowledgment that the CPS handled the case badly, an apology to Mrs. Morrison's family and an undertaking that some lessons will be learnt for the future. I have conducted a lengthy correspondence with the CPS, which has so far exhibited a steely determination to concede nothing and to learn nothing from the mishandling of the case.

It has long seemed to me that cases involving death during the misuse of motor vehicles are not taken seriously enough by either the CPS or the courts. In a recent case—not in Sunderland—a widow who was unable to persuade the CPS to prosecute the person responsible for her husband's death successfully initiated a private prosecution. It seems to me axiomatic that if a person drives a car without a licence and kills or seriously injures someone, a custodial sentence should follow; the same applies to a person who drinks and drives, whether or not it can be proved that drink was responsible for the accident. I believe that the CPS should be much more ready to apply a manslaughter charge in cases of this sort, and I am sure that juries would be willing to convict.

Finally, I pay tribute to Mrs. Morrison's sons, David and John, who have been persistent but dignified in their pursuit of justice for their mother—and not only for their mother. They believe that, given Mr. Dorward's long record of criminal activity—much of it involving motor vehicles—there is every possibility that sooner or later he will kill or injure someone else. If that happened, those who failed to deal with him seriously on this occasion would bear some responsibility.

10.37 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on raising an important topic. Let me say at once that I share his feelings of sorrow and sympathy over the tragic circumstances of Mrs. Morrison's death, and share the grief of her family. Such cases, however, must be dealt with not on the basis of sorrow or grief, but according to the law of the land. The hon. Gentleman has a very distinguished record in remorselessly ensuring, and striving to ensure, that the law of the land is upheld. I hope to demonstrate to him that in this case the Crown Prosecution Service does not deserve brickbats, but acted properly, professionally, independently and in accordance with the law of the land.

The selection of the charges that are appropriate when a driver kills another person on the road is too often surrounded by myth, mystery, misunderstanding and ignorance, particularly when the criminal culpability of the driver falls to be considered. Let me demonstrate to the hon. Gentleman how the CPS approaches such cases as a matter of principle, leaving this particular case on one side for a moment.

The case starts in the police station, with the custody officers selecting the appropriate charge. In other circumstances, they may adopt a procedure that does not involve charge. A big difference may exist in the police's perception of a case, in the hurly-burly of the custody suite, and the lawyer's perception of it several weeks later, when all the evidence has been added together. If the hon. Gentleman has been to his local police station—if he has not, I invite him to do so—he will have seen the circumstances in which custody officers have to act.

No criticism can be made of either the police or the CPS if the initial preferred charges are varied, whether they be made more or less serious. They must always march in step with the evidence. The first principle that is applied—and the police try to apply it as well—is that the charge must reflect the seriousness of the offending; secondly, it must give the courts adequate sentencing power; and thirdly, it must enable the case to be presented in a clear and concise way without any diversions or red herrings. There must be a realistic prospect of conviction. Provided that test is satisfied, a prosecution must be in the public interest. In the interest of justice, it is vital that questions are approached in that order. We cannot approach cases in an emotional spasm, or on the basis that the defendant is a scallywag, and the book should be thrown at him.

Mr. Mullin: There is no need to waste a great deal of time on this aspect. I understand and accept that one must proceed on the basis of the evidence. I have read the

evidence and all of the statements. I have the file and the conclusions that I draw, rightly or wrongly, are based on that.

The Solicitor-General: I follow the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument. I shall come to the evidence in a moment, but I want to set it in the proper background.

Although the hon. Gentleman may be aware of how we approach these things, many people are not. For example, it would be wrong to say that, just because someone has been killed by a driver on the road, the appropriate charge is causing death by dangerous driving. To take an extreme case, a person may have stepped out into the road without warning. It may be pitch black. The person may be dressed in very dark clothes and, therefore, may be difficult to see.

Mr. Mullin: None of that applies in this case.

The Solicitor-General: I accept that, but I have a much wider point to make than the narrow one raised by the hon. Gentleman. Let me try to give him some satisfaction in applying those principles to driving cases in general, and to this case in particular. When a driver, as a result of his driving, causes someone's death on the road, three possible charges can be preferred, as the hon. Gentleman has said. The first is manslaughter—he would like that to be preferred more often; the second is causing death by dangerous driving; and the third is driving without due care and attention.

In deciding which is the appropriate charge, the prosecution must concentrate on the evidence. It must lay aside feelings of animus towards the defendant and his character. It must concentrate just on the evidence. If, out of sympathy for a victim, emotions run away with the lawyer and he prefers a charge that is not backed up by the evidence, it will result only in an acquittal of the person who should be convicted of a lesser charge.

Let us consider the three options. The first is manslaughter, in which case the prosecution has to prove recklessness. With respect to the hon. Gentleman, the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords disagreed with him in the cases of Seymour and Adomako as to the suitability of preferring manslaughter in this sort of case. They said that manslaughter is appropriate only in the most grave cases where it can be established that the driving was not only far below the required standard but reckless. There are in the casebooks instances of a vehicle being used as a weapon and deliberately driven at someone or of it being driven very close to someone to give him the fright of his life but, owing to a misjudgment, he has been struck and killed. In such cases, manslaughter would be an appropriate charge. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that such facts are a million light years away from the case that we are debating.

The second option is the charge of causing death by dangerous driving. As recently as 1991, the House visited this offence and redefined it in terms which, it was intended, should mirror the general public's idea of justice. The Road Traffic Act 1991 was passed to amend the existing law following a report by Professor North, now the vice-chancellor of Oxford university. As a result of that change, causing death by dangerous driving is deemed to have occurred where the driving falls far below—I stress the words "far below"—what would be expected of a competent, careful driver, where it would be obvious to a careful and competent driver that driving in that way would be dangerous and where it, in fact, caused death. In those circumstances, causing death by dangerous driving is the result and the proper charge.

The cases covered by that charge are infinitely various and each turns on its own facts. The worst cases involve racing or competitive driving, gross disregard of speed limits and prevailing road conditions or overtaking when it was perfectly obvious that it was dangerous to do so and the corner was well signposted, for example.

The third option is driving without due care and attention. In this case, the ingredients are that the driver has departed from the standards of a competent and careful driver but the driving is not so bad as to be viewed as far below that standard. In the case raised by the hon. Gentleman, there were in law only two rational options—causing death by dangerous driving or careless driving.

Mr. Mullin: Will the Minister give way?

The Solicitor-General: I shall give way in a moment but I want to follow the thread of the argument.

The Crown Prosecution Service was set up in 1986. The fact that it is sometimes gratuitously attacked by critics who do not know the full facts is rather disappointing. It is sometimes attacked for no good reason at all. We must remember that the CPS comprises 2,200 professionally qualified lawyers who are striving to do their professional best. They are supported by 4,400 support staff. Each year, they conduct 1.4 million cases the length and breadth of the country. It is perhaps not surprising that there is sometimes criticism somewhere along the line, given the total number of cases. However, it behoves critics to examine the facts carefully and not use emotive language about incompetence or disgraceful behaviour without great deliberation.

Mr. Mullin: What about perverting the course of justice as a possible way of getting the case into the Crown court? The man was seen speeding and he and his passenger were seen drinking while the car was going along.

The Solicitor-General: The facts of the case are substantially as given by the hon. Gentleman, but as the passenger—the deceased—got out, she was overtaken by the driver of a Vauxhall, which was immediately behind, and the driver moved over, exposing her to the path of the defendant. Until then, Dorward's view of the pedestrian had been obscured by the Vauxhall. He later admitted that he had been talking with his passenger and failed to see the lady until the very last moment. She was struck and tragically died of her injuries. Disgracefully, Dorward drove off and his passenger acted as the hon. Gentleman said.

The question was, how culpable was his driving at the time and what was the quality of it? After considering all the facts, careless driving was selected as the appropriate charge—in my view, rightly. I have 30 years' experience in the courts. Until my appointment in April 1992 I spent virtually every day of my life in the courts.

Such an offence is triable only summarily, so once it was selected there was no way in which Mr. Dorward could be tried on indictment. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the appropriate sentence is a matter for the

[Mr. Mullin]

independent court. It would be wrong of me as a law officer to cast aspersions on the magistrates in his locality, who must remain free from political influence.

The hon. Gentleman asks, "What about perverting the course of justice?" There was no evidence that the driver, Dorward, was involved in perverting the course of justice. That was done by the passenger. It would be stretching the law to breaking point to suggest that, in every case where a driver drives off in such an instance and does nothing more, he has perverted the course of justice, especially when, as this defendant did, he goes to the police station, surrenders and tells the police what he has done. The passenger was charged with perverting the course of justice and that offence is triable only on indictment, so it had to be sent to the Crown court, where it was dealt with by his Honour Judge Capstick, an extremely experienced judge who has sat for many years at the Old Bailey as well as in the north of England.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the other offences that came to light later. The CPS cannot be criticised for not knowing about that, as they took place later and the proceedings were initiated by the police by a special summary procedure that involves serving papers on the defendant. By the time the CPS knew about that case, sentence had been passed. It is not for me to say whether the outcome would have been much more serious for Dorward had the magistrates known about the second offence. Given the formidable list of Dorward's previous convictions, it is most unlikely that, had the magistrates been made aware that other offences had been committed shortly after the offence in question, it would have made a great difference.

There can be no criticism of the CPS for failing to spot that case among the hundreds of others with which it must deal. The CPS recognises that cases that involve the death of a victim cause anguish. Therefore, there is in place a procedure whereby a CPS lawyer will see relatives and friends of the deceased to explain the procedure. That was done in this case. The hon. Gentleman asked me to stigmatise the CPS's behaviour and agree that the case was grievously mishandled. I fear that I cannot join him in criticising the CPS in that way. I am satisfied that the high standards that it sets itself in witness care were fully complied with in this case.

Mr. Mullin: That was an extremely complacent analysis of the case.

I entirely accept that one must proceed on the basis of the evidence, but statements in the file record how the driver was seen speeding and making his brakes screech. He and the passenger were seen swigging strong alcohol shortly before the accident. As I mentioned, the driver failed to stop. The Solicitor-General said that he gave himself up a day or so later, but—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 16 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 23 February.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL (*By Order*)
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 23 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Peace Process

1. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for hon. Members to assist the peace process in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I hope that the Government's sustained efforts to encourage all-party talks on a comprehensive political settlement will continue to be supported in all parts of the House.

Mr. Field: My right hon. and learned Friend will recall the murder of the Isle of Wight's previous Governor, Lord Louis Mountbatten, so he knows that Conservative Members understand the pain of Ulster. Does he agree that, in the interests of the peace process, when the joint framework document is published all hon. Members should take a considered view of the overall package and not seize on certain elements of it? Will it not be in the best interests of all people in Northern Ireland if all hon. Members who represent parties in Northern Ireland take part in discussions on the contents of the peace document, for surely this is a unique opportunity to give lasting peace a chance?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We all recall the horrific act of terrorism with which his constituency is associated, as he said. It was reflective of the many, many hundreds that have afflicted the people of Northern Ireland. I agree with the approach which my hon. Friend helpfully suggests to the publication of the joint framework document, if that is agreed, as I hope it will be. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Mr. Molyneaux: Is not the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) unduly optimistic in assuming that Ministers will admit Northern Ireland representatives to any meaningful role in consultation or pay the slightest heed to what they say? Does the Secretary of State accept that it is highly dangerous falsely to allege divisions within parties, although that is not unusual in this House and in other quarters? Is it not even more dangerous to pursue the course of threatening to call the bluff of Northern Ireland elected representatives, a tactic that has failed so miserably and so disastrously in the past?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: On consultation, as the two Governments seek to use the document to offer a shared understanding of a possible outcome to the talks process, which would be consistent with the joint declaration, obviously—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who asked the substantive question, has left the Chamber. Perhaps his colleagues would let him know my view on such matters. I am sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State. Please continue.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: We have therefore wanted to learn the viewpoints of all parties, including, naturally, the party led by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux). We had reason to believe that we were confident that we knew the views of the Ulster Unionist party, to which we naturally attach importance. It is a question not of calling anybody's bluff but of inviting all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland to consider the issues that will be addressed in the joint framework document, and to address them together, whether bilaterally or around the table, in a way that was done fruitfully in 1992, and in a way that offered the opportunity—which was taken—for individual parties to table their own papers, whether on position or policy, which were used to great effect.

Rev. William McCrea: As the question relates to the peace process, will the Secretary of State tell us exactly what peace process we are actually referring to and talking about? Recently, the Prime Minister spoke to the people of the United Kingdom and of Northern Ireland. He said that, for the past five months, the people of Northern Ireland had been living without fear. Does the Secretary of State believe that that is factually correct? During those months, people have been murdered, bodies of young and old have been seriously brutalised by iron bars and clubs with nails, families have been, and are being, removed from their homes in my constituency because of continued intimidation and threat by the IRA, businesses have been bombed, not one pound of Semtex has been surrendered by the IRA, not one AK47 has been given up by the IRA and not one member of the IRA has renounced violence. Surely this is a tactical process rather than a peace process.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I suggest that the people whom the hon. Gentleman represents, among the people of Northern Ireland as a whole, reflect on the contrast in their lives between the time before the ceasefires were announced—or whatever one likes to call them—and the past five months. I acknowledge that acts of terrorism have continued; the murder of Mr. Frank Kerr in Newry was a particularly brutal example. I acknowledge that so-called punishment beatings have continued, which are no less political in their purpose than what went before.

However, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was surely alluding to the comparison between life in Northern Ireland before the ceasefires and life after. I stand to be corrected, but I am sure that, by the peace process, most

people in Northern Ireland are referring to a process of political discussion which builds on the existing peace and which will create the stability for which that Province has yearned for so long. I believe that that is a real prospect.

Dr. Hendron: Does the Secretary of State agree that he can help hon. Members to assist the peace process by insisting that the framework document and the Government's own document on strand 1 are published together? Will he tell hon. Members that both documents should be considered together, not separately?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Whether it is called the peace process or not, it will certainly assist people to realise that the Government are to be relied on when they say that neither of the documents is intended to be imposed. Neither document is intended as a blueprint. The documents are intended as aids to discussion and negotiation, which is what we hope will ensue.

Mr. Hunter: To further hon. Members' understanding of the peace process, will my right hon. and learned Friend return to his words a few moments ago? Are we to understand that the framework document is by no means a draft treaty, and is certainly not an exclusive blueprint, but is intended to promote genuine consultation, and that any constitutional party of Northern Ireland is at liberty to produce any alternative suggestion during bilateral talks with the Government?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am happy to confirm that and it cannot be said too frequently. I have already indicated that, during the last talks process, papers were produced by all sides, including the British Government, who played an important part in achieving the contingent agreement which was reached, particularly on strand 1. At the last Northern Ireland Question Time on 19 January, I told my hon. Friend something to the effect that we want to use that document to help get the parties back around the table again—not to make them conform to anything but simply to discuss the issues addressed in that paper. That remains the position. I hope that that will happen and, when it does, I look forward to papers being produced again by all parties.

Ms Mowlam: At this time of delicate discussions with Dublin, is the Secretary of State aware of the House's disappointment that there will not be a statement today on the appalling behaviour of so-called football fans—they were masquerading as that, but were really fascists—in Dublin? Will he join me in condemning their actions? Will he guarantee to the House that he will not jeopardise progress towards a balanced constitutional settlement for Northern Ireland by allowing any party to enter into pre-emptive negotiations?

Mr. William Ross: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I must take points of order, as usual, at the end of Question Time and after any statements.

Mr. Ross: Is this Northern Ireland Question Time or Dublin Question Time?

Madam Speaker: Order. Secretary of State.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I will not enter into the question of a statement, because I do not want to blur an expression of feelings which I think is shared by every hon. Member and everyone in the country. I have seen and read of what happened with utter disgust and I feel a sense of personal shame that it was done by people associated with my own country. For that reason, I do not mind saying that, at the next opportunity, I shall offer expressions personally not only of shame but of apology. As for the second matter, I think that we want to get to publication of this document as soon as possible.

United Kingdom Integrity

2. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it remains Government policy to support the integrity of the United Kingdom based upon the consent of the inhabitants of each of its component parts.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): Yes. We wholeheartedly support the Union in its present form. As far as Northern Ireland is concerned, it is, in fact and in law, an integral part of the United Kingdom, and the Government welcome and will support that position so long as it remains the wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Arnold: Will my hon. Friend reiterate the fact that, whereas the people of Northern Ireland will have the final say in all this through the referendum, the Conservative and Unionist party feels that membership of the United Kingdom by Northern Ireland is of immense value and that the United Kingdom is of greater value than the mere sum of its four parts?

Mr. Ancram: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. I would go further and say that the strongest cement that holds the United Kingdom together is the consent of the majority of the people of each of its component parts, which is something of which we are very much aware.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister agree that, if there is to be acceptance of stated Government policy on the United Kingdom, however neutral on Northern Ireland, there has to be confidence in the integrity of those who speak for the Government? Can he give us one valid reason why we as Ulster Unionists should not question his integrity, that of the Secretary of State and even that of the Prime Minister, in that we feel that we have been not only deceived but betrayed? Does the Minister not understand the depth of Unionist frustration and understand that we perceive that there has been capitulation to pan-nationalism and IRA thugs who threaten to use their guns and Semtex again if their will is not expressed in the Government document?

Mr. Ancram: I can only state regret at the hon. Gentleman's original remarks about the integrity of myself and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I hope that, in due course, he will reconsider his remarks, especially when the joint framework document is published and he is able to see what is in it in relation to the various consultations that have taken place in the past 12 months with, among others, members of his party, the Ulster Unionist party, who were sent to speak to me about the parameters that I should take into account in terms of these negotiations.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I would again ask him to wait to see the joint framework document. If it is to succeed as an aid to negotiation and

as a means of bringing parties back into discussion, obviously it has to be balanced. I hope that when the hon. Gentleman sees it, he will accept that it is.

Mr. Hayes: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Downing Street declaration, with all its constitutional implications, still stands? Does he agree that the long-suffering people of Northern Ireland deserve a just, genuine and lasting peace and that they will not want to put up with party political shenanigans? Does he further agree that the final arbiters of any framework document will be the people themselves, and no one else?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for recalling to the House the Downing Street declaration, because it was a statement of principles. The key principles enunciated in it were those of democracy and consent. Hon. Members will once again, I believe, see when the joint framework document is published, if that is what happens, that it, too, is based on the essential principles of democracy and consent.

Mr. Stott: The Minister will be aware that when the joint framework document is eventually published as a basis for discussion and negotiation, it will be welcomed by almost everyone in the House. Given the fact that the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), have backed the triple-lock process wholly and fully, should not the ordinary people of Northern Ireland expect and demand their elected representatives to engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue with the Government about the future governance of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Ancram: The House will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. I believe that all the parties from Northern Ireland in the House have very strong and genuine arguments to make and very strong and genuine positions to state. I hope that they will take the opportunity of stating those within the context that the joint framework document will make possible, by opening up a situation where negotiations, discussion and dialogue may again take place.

Water Privatisation

3. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to proceed with water privatisation in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): As the then Minister of State made clear to the House in April 1993, privatisation of water and sewerage services will not be possible in the lifetime of this Parliament. The Government intend in the interim to establish the Department of the Environment's water executive as a next steps agency by April 1996.

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Minister accept that if there is one issue which brings together all the elected members of Northern Ireland, either in this House or in local government, and the peoples of Northern Ireland, it is opposition to the privatisation of water services in Northern Ireland? Does he accept that the people of Northern Ireland, who enjoy the opportunity to pay their water charges with their general rate, will oppose any changes from such a procedure? Does he also accept that many people in Northern Ireland, especially those on low incomes, benefit greatly from assistance with their water charges through the general rate refund and that to take that away from them would be a crime? Will he forget all ideas about privatisation of water services in Northern Ireland and leave them as they are so that people may continue to enjoy that service?

Mr. Moss: I reiterate what I said a moment ago. There are no proposals to privatise the water services in the lifetime of this Parliament. Ministers have already had discussions with, and received correspondence from, locally elected representatives and others, and the Government are aware of the strong feelings and concerns on the issue. Although I welcome views from interested parties, the Government believe that privatisation will bring benefits to Northern Ireland, as it has done elsewhere.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Is the Minister aware of reports that grazing animals are being allowed access to the periphery areas of reservoirs, thereby causing a risk of pollution? Will the Minister confirm that the filtration processes are working efficiently?

Mr. Moss: I am happy to confirm that filtration processes are working efficiently. The straying of animals into the water executive's area has not been brought to my attention, but if the hon. Gentleman would care to write to me, I shall look into it in detail.

Mr. Spellar: Why does the Minister feel it necessary to impose yet another quango on Northern Ireland, which already has 160 with which to deal? Why is he still placing uncertainty over the future of the water industry, even after the next general election? Why does he not accept that water privatisation has proved intensely unpopular in England and Wales and proposals for it are proving unpopular in Scotland?

Does the Minister also accept that water metering is encountering intense public resistance? Will he give a commitment that that will not be the way in which he tries to charge for water in Northern Ireland and that, in fact, he will stick to a system of property rating, which is far more acceptable and collectable and far better for the health of the people of Northern Ireland? Why does he not depart from dogma and bring some common sense to the issue?

Mr. Moss: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, experience has shown that agencies enable a better and much more customer-focused service to be provided. They enjoy certain financial and management freedoms which allow them to focus on achieving a more appropriate and cost-effective delivery of service.

On metering, a number of options for reform of the charging regime for water and sewerage services are being considered. Although the Department of the Environment will continue to meter non-domestic supplies, there are no plans to introduce routine metering for domestic properties in Northern Ireland.

Framework Document

4. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement about

the progress made towards the publication of a framework document and of the Government's proposals for the internal administration of Northern Ireland.

8. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further discussions he has had with representatives of political parties regarding the framework document; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: We hope to publish the joint framework document and the Government's proposals for the internal administration of Northern Ireland as soon as possible. In the course of discussions with the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, I have discussed the principles that we would expect to underpin a settlement relating to all three sets of relationships.

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister state the process by which these documents will fall to be considered by the Northern Ireland political parties? Would it not be hard for people in Great Britain to understand if any of Northern Ireland's political leaders declined to take part in the process of discussion and denied the people of Northern Ireland the opportunity to vote for or against a considered set of proposals?

Mr. Ancram: Having heard what the right hon. Gentleman said, I should remind him that any referendum would be not on a set of proposals produced by the two Governments but on the outcome of discussions that take place on the basis, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said, of the joint framework document and other views expressed by other interested parties.

Obviously, the process after publication will have to be considered in the light of circumstances. We have made it clear that the document will be published along with the Government's proposals for discussion on internal institutions within Northern Ireland. The proposals will be public and we hope that, first, all concerned will study them with great care and attention to see precisely what is in them. I hope that we can then begin discussions on the basis of those proposals and, as I have said, possibly on the basis of other positions that may become available at the time.

In the first place, there may be bilateral discussions; but, at the end of the day, discussions must be around a table, because the whole purpose of the process is to try to come to an agreement between the parties which can then be put to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: My question is coupled with Question 5.

Madam Speaker: It is my understanding that Questions 4 and 8 are linked.

Mr. Ancram: I received a note at the beginning of Question Time informing me that one question had been withdrawn and the questions had been renumbered. I may be wrong.

Madam Speaker: No. The linked questions are the questions tabled by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—Nos. 4 and 8—which relate to the framework document.

Mr. Ancram: I apologise; I was wrongly informed.

Mr. Skinner: I had a letter saying that my question was linked with Question 8. Then again, the Government do not know whether they are on their head or their backside.

Madam Speaker: Questions 4 and 8 are linked.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that if ever there was a need for the framework document and a peaceful Irish solution, it was best exemplified by the horrific events at Lansdowne Road last night? Does he also agree that, for the matter to be resolved in the long term, we shall need a Government with a large majority and not a Government who have to depend on temporary pacts and alliances, with support being withdrawn week by week? Long-term resolution of the problem will probably need a Labour Government with a new idea.

Mr. Ancram: I can only say that, in the light of the present situation, with the future of Northern Ireland very much at the centre of what we should be considering, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's remarks are exactly constructive or helpful.

Mr. Barry Porter: Although I am very willing to wait for the publication of that document, it is important to point out to my hon. Friend that that which has seeped out so far, whether intentionally or unintentionally, has given some Conservative Members room for concern. If, indeed, that which has seeped out is what will be in that document, it may well be that some Members who would describe themselves as Unionists will take a less than sanguine view of the contents.

Mr. Ancram: May I advise my hon. Friend, as I have advised others, that I think that it is important to wait to see precisely what is in the joint framework document, if a joint framework document is agreed? Equally, I would ask him to wait to look at precisely what is in the Government's own proposals on internal institutions to see whether they match the criteria that he would seek for such institutions.

As part of the consultations that I have held with all the parties, I was seeking out the parameters in which I believed that we could find a basis for discussion and negotiation, and there were certain very firm criteria which had to be met: first, that no joint authority of Dublin and the United Kingdom Government was involved; secondly, that there was no joint sovereignty; and, thirdly, that there was no slippery slope in anything that was proposed. I believe that, when my hon. Friend sees the proposals, he will agree that we are firmly within those criteria.

Mr. William Ross: Why, whenever Ministers speak of the framework document and the peace process, do they roll the two together? It is an absolutely fundamental error to talk about two separate things as though they were one and the same. In so doing, they leave themselves open to pressure from the IRA under the threat of resumed violence if they do not give the IRA what it wants.

Mr. Ancram: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is correct. Certainly, I do not think that he should draw

that inference from anything that I have said in answer to this question. What I was saying, which is very important, is that the joint framework document is two legs of a three-legged stool. The third leg of that stool is the Government's proposals for the internal arrangements within Northern Ireland. It is very important that that package is looked at as a whole. I hope that Unionist Members, who have always struck me as people of great reason—I believe that to be the case—will do that.

Mr. Mallon: As we await the framework document, is it not informative to remind ourselves of what Edward Heath, Margaret Thatcher and John Major have in common? They have all gone ahead of the Unionists, they say; they have all sold out Unionism, they say; and they have all tried to create a united Ireland against the wishes of the people of the north of Ireland, would that it were so. Will the Minister confirm that underlying the framework document will be the principle of consent, that consent by definition requires agreement and that agreement by definition threatens no one except those who get undue pleasure out of threatening and being threatened?

Mr. Ancram: I personally do not think that the process in which we are engaged is to be assisted by anybody threatening anybody else. The process, as the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, is based on consent, and consent requires agreement; but in order to achieve agreement, there has to be dialogue. The purpose of the joint framework document and the document being put forward by the Government on internal arrangements within Northern Ireland has one central purpose: to get the parties back talking to each other again, as the people of Northern Ireland are constantly demanding that the Governments and their elected representatives should do.

Peace Process

5. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Northern Ireland peace process.

6. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Separate exploratory dialogues with Sinn Fein and loyalist parties have been held. It is desirable that they continue.

Mr. Riddick: Has not the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) actually said that he does not expect to live in a united Ireland in his lifetime? Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that Ulster Unionists should take some reassurance from the fact that the Conservative party, more than the other two main political parties, is the party of the Union, and that Conservative Members will simply not countenance a united Ireland or all-Ireland bodies coming into place unless it is quite clear that a majority of the people in Northern Ireland themselves actually approve that?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Of course that is so, and my hon. Friend and his colleagues will not be put to that test for the very reason that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has just explained: that the heart, core and centre of what the framework document, if agreed, will propose is consent and agreement. The constitutional guarantee of the future status of Northern Ireland is long-standing, and it will be compatible with anything that the British Government are prepared to propose in the joint framework document.

Mr. Maginnis: Will the Secretary of State tell us frankly and clearly where the Government's working assumption that the IRA is in a permanent ceasefire now stands? Is not it true that dozens of young men have been beaten to a pulp by IRA punishment squads and that 39 families have had to be removed from their homes in the past few months under the Government's special purchase of evacuated dwellings scheme? Does not the IRA delegation—or, as those involved call themselves, the Sinn Fein delegation—which comes to Stormont from time to time refuse to speak on behalf of the IRA, and say that it has nothing to do with the IRA? Is not it true that those involved refuse to talk about the decommissioning of weapons? How long will the Secretary of State head up this charade that is supposed to be a peace process?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: There are a number of issues in that question. The first part related to the working assumption, which the Prime Minister announced in October and which the Government were prepared to make: that the ceasefire was intended to be for good. That assumption depends on what is done and on what is not done. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point to activities which, as I said to the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) a minute ago, are no less political in their intention than what went before the ceasefire. Those activities put a strain on that working assumption.

I hope and believe that it is the intention that there shall not be a reversion to violent means of securing political objectives, but we cannot know whether that is the intention. Only those involved can know whether that is their intention. The rest of us have to rely on what is done and what is not done.

On the exploratory dialogue, most people think that it is better that people should talk and that the parties previously associated with paramilitaries should be exploring the Government's position. Unless they know and fully understand the Government's position, there is a danger that, in that curious world, they could act on a misapprehension. I understand the hon. Gentleman's scepticism, and I know that he has expressed it frequently. Although I see the grounds for it, I do not propose at the moment to give way to it.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Has not national backing from successive Governments and the determination not to have the United Kingdom destroyed by the bombs and bullets of the IRA and not to be pushed off course by the turning of women into widows and children into orphans helped to start the peace process? More controversially, might not extreme and fearful Unionism do more to undermine support for the Government's policy than some of the work of the provisional IRA over the years?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I thought that this question was going to be helpful. I do not want in any way to suggest that I underestimate the grounds for fear that people on whatever side of the political equation in Northern Ireland have. The history of Northern Ireland provides a ready explanation for the fears, anxieties and suspicions that abound. Of course the unknown is more capable of producing those things than what is known, and that is why I, along with most people in Northern Ireland, look

forward very much to having the document published. The sole purpose of the document is to suggest a possible outcome to the resumed talks process, and we shall invite people to come back together to discuss the issues that it addresses. I hope and believe that that will occur.

Ms Mowlam: Does the Secretary of State agree that the nature of the questions in the House today suggests that there is a need for the speedy publication of the framework document as soon as possible, and that the clear hope of most hon. Members is that everyone will consider the package on the table and make a judgment on all parts of it? I simply add that obviously that is our focus, and understandably the focus of the Government at the moment, but there is growing anxiety on the Opposition Benches that the parallel process to the unfolding framework document is the need for economic regeneration. In meeting after meeting that I have had in Northern Ireland, people have been seriously worried that the Government lack any clear strategic plan about the way in which additional funding for Northern Ireland will be spent to help the process.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I think that I have said enough about the joint framework document to be excused from dealing with it once again. I do not find the depression that the hon. Lady apparently meets in her welcome visits to the Province. I find people rejoicing in the fact that unemployment is decreasing on a steadily established trend of more than 1,000 a month. We have better figures now for employment and unemployment than we have had for the past 13 years. I invite the hon. Lady to cheer up.

Peace Process

7. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to hold discussions with editors and reporters concerning the Northern Ireland peace process.

Mr.Ancram: My ministerial colleagues and I have frequent contact with representatives of the press and broadcasting organisations at all levels in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Their questions are wide ranging and cover all aspects of Northern Ireland affairs, including the "peace process". There will be facilities for the media to study the joint framework document if and when it is published, along with our proposals for discussion on internal institutions in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dykes: I strongly welcome the Government's determination not to be thrown off course or scared by extreme views and mischief making. Does my hon. Friend have any more information on the recent mischievous press leaks, in *The Times* and other newspapers, about the draft proposal?

Mr. Ancram: An official inquiry into the leak is under way, headed by a senior Northern Ireland Office official. It would be inappropriate for me to speculate, pending the outcome of that investigation. I think, however, that it is important, during the process of seeking a settlement to the problems of Northern Ireland, that the media play their part by keeping the public fully informed of what is happening.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is it not passing strange that a Government who, allegedly, are defending the Union should, through a Government official, advise a journalist or an editor that their policy is to face down the Unionists? Will the same assiduousness be shown in tracing that official as, apparently, has been shown in tracing those who leaked to *The Times*?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman has any specific information to give me or my right hon. and learned Friend about that matter, we should be pleased to hear it.

Jury Trials

9. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to return jury trials to Northern Ireland.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): The majority of trials on indictment in Northern Ireland are already conducted before a jury. As we have made clear in the past, when violence ends, the emergency legislation—which includes provision for non-jury trials—will have served its purpose. As lasting peace becomes firmly established in Northern Ireland, normality can return.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister agree that now is the time to repeal the emergency legislation and give the right to a jury trial to everyone in Northern Ireland—a right that has been denied to them for nearly 15 years or more? Does he agree that it is a fundamental right of all citizens that they should have an opportunity, if they are indicted on a serious charge, to appear before a jury, not before the fundamentally unfair system of a judge sitting with no jury and making decisions?

Sir John Wheeler: I refute the suggestion that the Diplock courts are in any way unfair. That is obviously not true. It is equally correct to say that it is the duty of the Government to justify the retention of the emergency legislation, and to keep it firmly under review, which the Government do. The most recent statistics available, for 1993, show that 877 cases were disposed of by the Crown courts in Northern Ireland for indictable offences, of which 256 were scheduled offences dealt with by single-judge courts.

Mr. Trimble: Does the reduction in the number of trials before the single-judge courts show that there has been a reduction in the number of people being apprehended and charged for terrorism? Is that a reflection of the authorities' failure to investigate and pursue terrorist acts that have occurred in the past? Is that not an example of a de facto amnesty, and consequently a breach of the Government's undertaking that terrorist crimes of the past would continue to be pursued?

Sir John Wheeler: I firmly reject any suggestion of an amnesty for terrorist offenders. I can assure the House that the police service will pursue all offences with the utmost vigour under the law. The downturn in violence since 31 August, which the House will welcome, has meant that fewer cases coming to the notice of the police and before the courts are related to terrorist crimes. That is an extremely welcome development.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Gillan: Will my right hon. Friend join me and every other Member of the House in condemning the appalling scenes of violence and vandalism in Dublin last night? Does he agree that those people are a disgrace to the United Kingdom and an affront to football fans? Will he assure the House that he will do everything possible to prevent such behaviour from occurring again either at home or abroad?

The Prime Minister: I agree that the behaviour of a thuggish minority at the match last evening was a disgrace and a great embarrassment. I do not believe that the people involved are sports fans, nor do I believe that they represent the true face of this country or British sport. The Football Association and the Irish Football Association have launched a full inquiry into exactly what happened and will discover what lessons can be learnt for the future. I have said that we will do everything we can to help to identify the people concerned and ensure that they face due punishment.

Mr. Blair: May I, first, associate myself entirely with the Prime Minister's comments about the scenes of violence? Those people are not proper football fans, but criminals and thugs and should be treated as such.

In today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph* the Chancellor of the Exchequer denied that a single currency was a threat to the nation state. Is that the Prime Minister's view: yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman would be wise not to misunderstand what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is saying. If he is so concerned about matters—*[Interruption.]* I note that the shadow Chancellor is chortling, but I must say to the Leader of the Opposition that his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has said:

"I am not a fan of a single currency"

and his right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has said:

"I personally am in favour of a single currency".

I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman would care to adjudicate between the two of them.

Mr. Blair: I am delighted that the Prime Minister keeps asking me questions; it will put him in good practice. Let me make him an offer: instead of the twice weekly Prime Minister's questions, one day a week we will move over to the Government Benches and then the right hon. Gentleman can ask me questions.

Let me just bring the right hon. Gentleman back to my question: it is his Chancellor of the Exchequer who has said in clear terms that a single currency is not a threat to the nation state. Does he agree or not?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I shall answer the right hon. Gentleman in my own way. He would be better advised to address himself to his own party and his own position. The right hon. Gentleman said in his own election address that he was opposed to British membership of the European Union. Then, later, he actually said:

"I wasn't actually opposed to membership"—

and he went on to say—

"I said . . . within the closed doors of the Labour Party, that I disagreed with that policy on Europe."

What is the right hon. Gentleman now saying within the closed doors of the Labour party and why will he not say it in public?

Mr. Blair: I think we can see why the Prime Minister has asked the Cabinet for a vow of silence on this issue. One simple question remains for him to answer: if he cannot trust his Cabinet or his Chancellor on these critical economic and foreign policy issues, why on earth should the people of Britain trust him or the Government to govern the country?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman is not prepared to say in public what he said in private, why should anybody trust the Opposition? The Government have made it clear that we will decide in the light of the prevailing circumstances whether it is appropriate to join a single currency. The Cabinet is utterly united on that point and it reinforced that unity this morning, as the right hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the interests of rail passengers, which were enhanced so much by the Government's recent proposals, will be put at risk by the actions of the rail unions? Does he agree that those very unions are threatening to support clause IV against Opposition reformists, and does he have any confidence that the Leader of the Opposition will renounce those unions?

The Prime Minister: I really do not know what he will do. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) seems very keen to answer questions. I wish that some day he would try it, because if he did, it would be the first time yet in his career. I think that the aim of rail privatisation will undoubtedly be maintained, and it is to improve the quality of rail service. I hope that the need to improve the rail service does not escape the right hon. Gentleman for Kingston upon Hull, East, who has been summoned to his sponsoring union, the National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers, to explain why the Opposition want to scrap clause IV.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Childish.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman says that that is rubbish. He says that they do not want to scrap clause IV. It is no wonder that he is sitting on the Back Benches.

Q2. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Watson: Given the unambiguous statements yesterday by the President of the European Commission on European Union internal passport controls and the creation of a single European currency, does the Prime Minister still hold to the view that he expressed in Brussels last July that Jacques Santer is the right man in the right place at the right time?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman reads what the President of the European Commission said yesterday, he will find a whole range of specifically British issues, where we have made it perfectly clear that we wish change and where he has indicated the need for change. To that extent the President of the Commission will prove far more amenable to the British position than any of the alternatives.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: In the light of the recent fall in unemployment, is my right hon. Friend aware of a recent CBI survey that showed that exports from small manufacturing companies in this country are at their best level for 10 years? As they appear not to be having any problems with exchange control or exchange rate risks, is there not a further argument for saying that what Jacques Santer, the President of the European Commission, says about the need for a European single currency by 1997 is undesirable, unrealistic and unnecessary?

The Prime Minister: I think that, in respect of the first point of my hon. Friend's question, he is quite right to stress the growth in exports. He might have also stressed the extent to which manufacturing exports, in particular, are doing so well, and the fact that manufacturing employment has risen by 37,000 in the quarter to December. That is the fastest quarterly growth in employment in manufacturing at any stage since records began and shows clearly the extent to which manufacturing industry is undergoing a renaissance.

As far as the latter part of my hon. Friend's question is concerned, I have indicated clearly that I do not think that there is any prospect of a single currency in 1996 or 1997. At a later stage we will look at what is in the national interest in light of the circumstances.

Q3. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sutcliffe: This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the end of the second world war, in which many of today's British pensioners were involved. Why do our pensioners lag behind the rest of Europe when it comes to pensions and benefits? Why have the Government never considered providing a veterans' benefit, which has been introduced elsewhere in Europe?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman would do well to look at the reality of what has happened. He would see that, since 1979, benefits to poorer pensioners have risen by 18 per cent. over and above the increase in prices. He would see that benefits to unemployed couples and others in difficulty have risen dramatically above the rate of inflation.

The hon. Gentleman would also see that, among those people to whom he sometimes refers as the "poorest", there has been a dramatic rise in the possession of consumer durables. That suggests that people have more net disposable income and it suggests also that their living standards are improving, which is demonstrated by every dispassionate survey that we have seen.

Q4. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Sir Michael Neubert: When my right hon. Friend is next in touch with Mr. Santer, will he commend him for his words yesterday that, in matters of immigration and asylum, which affect many citizens in their daily lives, the Commission will seek to meet their expectations and to allay their concerns? Will my right hon. Friend tell him that the expectations and concerns of my constituents will best be met by upholding the British border controls that were agreed in Luxembourg 10 years ago?

The Prime Minister: As I indicated to the House on Tuesday, I am entirely determined to maintain our fair but firm immigration policies, and that means that we shall retain our border controls. European Heads of Government endorsed our right to do so in a formal declaration and we intend to see that it is honoured.

I hope that we may have the support of the Opposition in this matter. The shadow Home Secretary has indicated that we will have the support of the Opposition on this issue, although he does not appear to have the support of the leader of Labour Members of the European Parliament.

Q5. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Heppell: Even with the small but welcome fall in unemployment, there are still 20,000 long-term unemployed in the Greater Nottingham area. The proposed budget for Greater Nottingham training and enterprise council is such that only 800 or 900 of those 20,000 long-term unemployed can be assisted. Does the Prime Minister think that that is an adequate response to the problems of long-term unemployment?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that long-term unemployment—whether that is defined as six months, one year or longer—is falling and has been falling for a long time. I look forward to seeing it fall a good deal further.

Unemployment, whether long-term or short-term, has dropped by more than 400,000 in the past 12 months. Britain is well on the way to having the lowest level of unemployment in western Europe. Our unemployment rate is substantially below that of other similar countries.

In France—the country with the most comparative population size to Britain—unemployment is just below 13 per cent. and static; here, it is 8.5 per cent and falling and there is every indication that there will be further job creation. I hope that that will involve those in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, although he may have mentioned—but neglected to do so—that unemployment in his constituency has already fallen by 11 per cent.

Mr. Shersby: Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to read the excellent report of the National Audit Office on grant-maintained schools? If he has, he will have seen that those schools are performing very well indeed. They are providing an excellent standard of education and many thousands of new governors have been drawn into the process of working with teachers and parents to provide good education for our children.

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. There is no doubt about the popularity of grant-maintained schools. There is no doubt about the fact that parents who have chosen grant-maintained status are pleased with the choice that they have made, and I think that that choice is exercised among many people, of all political persuasions.

Q6. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fatchett: Given the widespread concern about corruption and bribery in sport and the rumours that games have been thrown for money, will the Prime Minister confirm that his regular poor performances at the Dispatch Box against my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) are simply a reflection of his ability and that he has not been bribed by the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: The expression on the face of the Leader of the Opposition is as expressive as it needs to be and it expresses his view—as mine—of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Madam Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I have a short statement to make. A ceremony is to be held in Westminster Hall to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of world war two. Both Houses will attend and addresses will be presented to Her Majesty the Queen.

The date and time of the event is Friday 5 May at noon. It is proposed that a short reception be held in the Hall after the ceremony.

It is the wish of the Lord Chancellor and myself that as many Members of both Houses as possible should participate. It is intended that spouses and other family members will be able to accompany them. Representatives of veterans and other organisations will also receive invitations.

In order to assist with the planning of this event, I shall be writing to all Members of the House in the next few days, asking them to indicate whether they themselves will be attending the ceremony and whether they would like members of their families also to be invited. If demand for places is very high, there may have to be a ballot for families. I shall be asking all recipients of my letter to fill in the reply slip and return it to my office quickly. I know that all Members will wish to co-operate in this and to make the ceremony a memorable one for all who participate.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): First, may I say on behalf of the whole House that I am sure that we all welcome your announcement, Madam Speaker, that the House is to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of the second world war?

The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 20 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (7th allotted day). Until about 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "The Continuing Crisis of Healthcare in London", followed by a debate entitled "The Future Ownership, Control and Regulation of Regional Electricity Companies". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

TUESDAY 21 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Health Authorities Bill.

WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY—Until 2.30 pm, debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House, then motions on the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order, the Value Added Tax (Construction of Buildings) Order, the Value Added Tax (Protected Buildings) Order, the Value Added Tax (Input Tax) (Amendment) Order and the Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (Amendment) Order.

Motion on the Avon (Structural Change) order.

Motions relating to the Education (Mandatory Awards) and the Education (Student Loans) regulations.

THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY—Debate on the Army, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet on Wednesday 22 February at 10.30 to consider EC document No. 7854/94 relating to budgetising the European Development Fund.

Hon. Members: "Budgetising"?

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): It says here.

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Gentleman might well comment. I sometimes wonder who makes these words up.

[Wednesday 22 February:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 7854/94 European Development Fund. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 48-xxvi (1993-94).]

In the following week, I expect to provide, on Monday 27 February, for the Second Reading of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, and, as I told the House last week, to have the annual debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment on the Thursday, which I can confirm is 2 March, not 3 March as I inadvertently said last week.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): First, may I associate myself—and my hon. Friends—with the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the appropriateness of our

taking part in the commemoration of the anniversary of the end of world war two? I cannot associate myself with the word "budgetising"; I am sure that the House would like to be told what it really means on some other occasion.

May I ask the Leader of the House three questions? First, has any progress been made in arranging for an Adjournment debate to take place on the last Wednesday morning sitting of each term, to which he will reply? That would be comparable to the arrangements that existed before we embarked on the current experiment. Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Boundary Commission report on parliamentary constituencies, which was due in December, has not yet been submitted to the Home Secretary? When can we expect the final recommendations to be made, and when will the necessary change to regulations in connection with the new constituencies be put before Parliament?

Thirdly and, perhaps, most important, does the Leader of the House accept that there is much regret and anger in the House about the fact that Ministers have chosen not to make a statement today about last night's events at the England-Ireland football match in Dublin? Will the right hon. Gentleman promise a debate as soon as possible, so that those of us who feel that football was the victim can be assured that those who are guilty of having committed offences in Ireland last night will be subject to exclusion orders barring them from all football grounds in Britain? Such a debate would also enable us to discover what the Government intend to do to support those involved in football who are keen to strengthen security arrangements for Euro '96, and in particular to eradicate the menace of right-wing extremism which is in danger of destroying football?

Mr. Newton: I shall take the hon. Lady's questions in reverse order.

Whether a statement is made on such unhappy incidents as occurred at yesterday's football match is obviously a matter of judgment, but the hon. Lady will know that at least one factor in the making of such judgments is whether a statement in the House would add to the publicity that is often the aim of those who act in this way. I note her concern, however. She will have heard what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said a few moments ago at Question Time about the view that the Government take—which I know the Opposition share—on the kind of behaviour about which she is rightly concerned, and the Government's determination to work with the Irish authorities to try to bring those responsible to book. I know that we shall have the hon. Lady's support in that regard. I shall, of course, bear her comments in mind should any similar incident occur in future; obviously, we hope that it will not.

The hon. Lady asked me about the Boundary Commission reports for England. I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has not yet received the final report, and I am afraid that I am not yet in a position to resolve all the uncertainties about timing that the hon. Lady mentioned.

I welcomed the first of the hon. Lady's questions. I thank her—and, indeed, others involved in the usual channels—for the co-operative discussions that have enabled me to say that we propose to table a motion providing for a three-hour debate on the Wednesday morning before each recess, in which hon. Members will be able to raise a variety of issues without having to give notice. That restores an opportunity that used to be provided by the motion fixing the dates of recesses. I would expect to be present to answer such debates, as previous Leaders of the House and indeed I have done in the case of the previous procedure.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, who originally made the suggestion. It is clearly supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): May I ask you, Madam Speaker, through the Leader of the House, whether you would consider extending the invitation that you are sending to all hon. Members to Members of Parliament who served in the House during the second world war? I do not suppose that that would be a large number.

Madam Speaker: Invitations are being sent to them.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I associate my colleagues with the decision to commemorate the second world war ceremonies which you, Madam Speaker, have announced? It is particularly appropriate that we can bring our families to those celebrations. We all appreciate that gesture.

Is the Leader of the House aware of the mounting pressure on the Rail Regulator and rail authorities generally because of the continued uncertainty about a formal consultation process on the proposal to curtail sleeper services to Carlisle and Fort William, and Motorail services north of the border? Given that British Rail is due to publish its spring timetable early in March, will he ask the Secretary of State for Transport to come to the House next week and clear up those matters either in a debate or, more appropriately, a statement announcing a formal consultation process on the proposed closures under the Railways Act 1993?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman and the House will know that there have recently been several opportunities to discuss matters related to railway privatisation, so I shall resist some of the implications of the hon. Gentleman's question. I shall bring his request to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): In the light of the Government's continued commitment to cutting red tape, will my right hon. Friend tell the House the reasons for the delay in setting up the Deregulation Committee, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) and I, and many other Conservative Members, are so anxious? Will he confirm that Opposition Members are causing that delay? May we have a debate on that matter at the earliest opportunity?

Does my right hon. Friend further agree that we should have a debate on the continuing opposition of Labour Members to the tough law and order penalties that are needed to deal with the football thugs who ruined an international match last night?

Mr. Newton: I am well aware that a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend, are anxious to see the Committee under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 set up as soon as possible, as are the Government. He will understand that it is not normal practice to refer at length or in detail to discussions in the

[Mr. Newton]

usual channels, but I hope that the Opposition will soon be able to say who they wish to nominate for that Committee. At the moment, it would not be appropriate to provide time for a debate.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is the Leader of the House aware that we should have an urgent debate on the act of terrorism in Dublin last night, which was carried out by National Front thugs, not football fans, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) said? The football national intelligence unit at Scotland Yard knew the names, addresses, backgrounds and convictions of every thug who was travelling. It knew every item on their records but could not divulge the information because of the Data Protection Act 1988. Will he ask the Home Secretary to come to the House and say why the Data Protection Act stops that information being given to stadiums, clubs and organisers of the game so that they can draw up blacklists? Just as people have their credit cards stopped and are banned from clubs, exclusion orders could be issued against those thugs. Although that information may have been given to the Gardai, it was not given to the people on the ground who could have identified those people with photographs and stopped the trouble at its source. We need a debate to go into those details so that the problem does not arise again.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, to whom I have already referred in this context, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary have, in various ways, made it clear that they want to do anything possible to bring those people to book and stop that kind of violence happening again. I am sure that they will want to look carefully at any constructive suggestion for securing that.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on border controls, so that our European colleagues know that the strength of feeling on the matter is not confined to the Government, that it is found among all parties in the House, that when the Prime Minister says no, he means no, and that he has the backing of all the British people?

Mr. Newton: Again, I can refer to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others have said on a number of occasions about our determination to maintain the controls to which my hon. and learned Friend refers.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If we have a statement or a debate on the events at Lansdowne Road last night, and on the fact that the British police and intelligence authorities were seemingly unable to deal with those right-wing fascists, will the Leader of the House compare that with the fact that in 1984 and 1985, when people were going about their duty in the middle of the pit strike, thousands of police not only collared the pickets, but picked up many people who were in the vicinity? If they could do that in an industrial dispute in 1984 and 1985, when Lady Thatcher called the miners "the enemy within", why could not they deal with those 400 last night?

Mr. Newton: I am slightly puzzled by the hon. Gentleman's point. The incidents took place on the territory of another Government, so his comments seem slightly out of order.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House find time for an urgent early debate on the implications of Labour party policy for regional government in the county of Kent, given that that party proposes to extend the boundaries of a new authority of London to the M25? That would mean that my Dartford constituency would be part of London, which is not what the people want.

Mr. Newton: If I could be assured that such a debate would provide an opportunity for the Opposition's policy on these matters to be clarified, I would look favourably on the suggestion.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Do not a number of events that have occurred nationally and in Europe in the past few weeks point to the need for a national identity card scheme? If so, why do not we have a debate on the matter?

Mr. Newton: It is highly likely that it may be appropriate to arrange for a debate on that subject, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear that he will introduce a Green Paper on the matter. I am sure that the House will wish to discuss it.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the recent comments of Sir Leon Brittan and Geoffrey Garton, the American Secretary of Commerce, and ask for an early debate on trade policy? It appears that those two well-respected gentlemen are opening a dialogue on the possibility of creating a free-trade area between the United States of America and Europe. I am sure that my right hon. Friend would agree that, if we were to decide in such a debate that that initiative should be pursued with the full vigour and support of the House and the country, an opportunity may be turned into a truly historic moment.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point upon which I shall reflect.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for a debate on executive pay, especially as the three directors of MANWEB in the north-west region cashed in £333,000 worth of executive share options yesterday? Values were put up by 54p a share in a day because of speculation in the aftermath of the President of the Board of Trade allowing the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric to go ahead without referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Newton: The motion that the Opposition have tabled for the second half of next Monday would allow the hon. Lady, should she catch your eye, Madam Speaker, to make those points. It would be helpful, however, if she could answer the questions put by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, in replying to the private notice question yesterday. He sought an explanation of the fact that the Labour party is, at one and the same time, complaining about some of the

things that happen in these companies [illegible] seeking to protect them from the ordinary operation of the market in respect of bids, for example.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): It is a shame that we cannot have a debate on deregulation because it is of overwhelming importance to jobs and prosperity in my constituency and many others. Why is the Labour party holding up the Deregulation Committee? Is not it a disgrace that Labour Members complain about joblessness but do nothing about it?

Mr. Newton: With what I will call the beady eye of the Opposition Deputy Chief Whip upon me, I will not go further into the operation of the usual channels. However, I am sure that he will have heard and noted my hon. Friend's plea.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Leader of the House initiate a debate on the prison system, bearing in mind Judge Tumim's report on Leeds, which he described as disgraceful, the report on the Wolds prison where things seem to be breaking down, the riot at Everthorpe and numerous other matters? When the prison population is increasing steadily, the number of people employed is decreasing steadily and trouble is everywhere, is not it time that the House debated the subject?

Mr. Newton: This point was put to me a week or two ago when I said that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made several substantial statements on some of the things to which the hon. Gentleman referred and has commissioned some substantial further investigations. When we have the outcome of all those investigations and reports it might be appropriate to consider a debate.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the strong lead that I have given to ensure that the metropolitan areas in which there is a strong desire for change in the structure of local government should have the opportunity of having their case heard by the Local Government Commission. In view of the assurances given in the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, will my right hon. Friend try to find time for a debate so that we can discuss the matter further and ensure that Southport in particular is referred to the Local Government Commission in 1995?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a further debate in that specific respect. I have announced a debate next week on a local authority structural change order for Avon, but I doubt whether my hon. Friend's concerns would be in order there. My hon. Friend will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is looking carefully at all the representations that he receives and I will ensure that his attention is drawn to this further representation from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Leader of the House will have noted that the House was greatly obliged to you, Madam Speaker, for your statement about the second world war. Since history repeats itself, would not it be a good idea for the date to be changed to a little nearer August, when the second world war ended and a Labour Government were in power?

Mr. Newton: I think that you may feel, Madam Speaker, that I was treading on your territory if I went into too much detail about the considerations that a number of us have given to this. It is obvious that the House will not be sitting in August—at least I hope that it will not be sitting, and that hope will be shared in other parts of the House—and those of us who have given some thought to the matter believed that the most appropriate time to do it was immediately before the national weekend of events connected with VE day, which begins on 6 May.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have another debate next week on the funding of teachers' pay, because we could then highlight the proposal of the Conservatives on Kent county council to fund in full the teachers' pay increase, which has been opposed by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats on that council? In the process, we could say that we bitterly resent teachers being bashed for party political purposes at the expense of our schools.

Mr. Newton: Not for the first time, my hon. Friend, like my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), has made a telling point about the current local governance of Kent.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Leader of the House will have seen early-day motion 466.

[*That this House notes that the second reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill on Friday 10th February 1995 is an historic opportunity to introduce full citizenship rights for the United Kingdom's 6.5 million people with disabilities; further notes that the Bill has the sponsorship of Right honourable and honourable Members from nine political groups in the House; recognises the support the Bill also has from the Rights Now Consortium, the TUC and many other groups and individuals; welcomes the Bill's inclusion of a Disability Rights Commission so that comprehensive anti-discrimination provisions can be activated and advanced on the same basis as those designed to tackle discrimination on the grounds of gender and race; and further welcomes the Bill's measures aimed at increasing accessibility to voting and to polling stations as the vote is the fundamental building block for the operation of democracy and civil rights.*]

A total of 250 hon. Members have signed that motion in support of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which was carried by 175 votes compared with the Government's alternative Bill, which was carried by only 27 votes. In those circumstances should not the Government be acting as a facilitator to allow the House to decide between the two alternative measures rather than as a persuader for their own position?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled people made the Government's position quite clear in the debate on Friday. Although the hon. Gentleman has made his points, he will be well aware that significantly more people voted for the Government's Bill than for his Bill.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Both you in your statement, Madam Speaker, and the Leader of the House have made it clear that the very welcome and timely ceremony on 5 May is to commemorate VE day. Taking up the point made by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who is no longer in his place, will my right hon. Friend confirm that due thought has been or will be given to the role of all those who fought

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

against the Japanese? I must declare an interest as my father fought against the Japanese for four years in the Burmese jungle. My right hon. Friend will know that many people feel that that was a neglected aspect of second world war heroism and campaigns and that some account should be taken of it in the arrangements.

Mr. Newton: I am beginning to think that you should have made the business statement today, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member did not listen to what I said.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I might on your behalf, and subject to correction by you, Madam Speaker, make two points. First, there will be national events to mark VJ day, subsequent to those to mark VE day. Secondly—this is the point that you have in mind, Madam Speaker, and I hope that my hon. Friend will note it when he reads your statement in *Hansard*—you specifically said that the event on 5 May was to commemorate not VE day but the end of world war two. It will certainly be the case that, in addition to those to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) referred—hon. Members who contributed to the war effort—many invitations will be sent to a range of ex-service organisations.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): May I back the proposal made by the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) that we should have a rerun of the debate on the funding of teachers' pay? While we are about it, can we consider what Jonathan Taylor, the Tory education chairman in Trafford, had to say? He said that it was impossible for local authorities to fund teachers' pay and, indeed, called the Chancellor "smug, complacent and stupid"—and he is a Tory.

Mr. Newton: We have already had one extensive debate and a variety of exchanges on these matters. I certainly do not plan to provide another opportunity in the immediate future.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): As a member of the all-party football committee, may I support the call of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) for a full debate on the disgraceful behaviour of the thugs in Dublin last night? But could the debate be extended to cover plans for the European championship next year so that the House and the country might be assured that there are proper safeguards to ensure that that important competition goes ahead? The whole country is looking forward to it and would be very disappointed if, for any reason, it did not happen.

Mr. Newton: I have already made some reference to this matter, but add simply that, as well as trying to ensure that such violence does not happen anywhere, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and, indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, will certainly want to examine ways to ensure that it does not in any way inhibit, or occur during, the European championships being held here.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Confederation of Construction Specialists, which represents some 400 small building firms, is seeking to refer to the Office of Fair Trading the fact that Alfred McAlpine is delaying payment of its bills. May we have an early debate on the quasi-monopoly position of Alfred McAlpine and the fact that the Office of Fair Trading has to refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission whose chairman, until 18 months ago, was the chief executive of Alfred McAlpine? Although Alfred McAlpine has plenty of money for the Conservative party, it has none to pay its sub-contractors for their work. Is not that an example of the sleaze state that is now the hallmark of modern Conservative Britain?

Mr. Newton: The last part of that question is pretty far-fetched. Frankly, it is below the standard that I have come to expect from the hon. Gentleman and it has effectively absolved me from answering the first part of his question.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate about further education on Canvey island? He may be aware that there are no facilities whatsoever for 16 to 18-year-olds on the island, although there are 36,000 residents. The absence of facilities results in an extremely low staying-on rate among young people, which is betraying not only them but local businesses and industry.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I should admit to my hon. Friend that since my part of Essex is quite a distance from his, I was not familiar with that situation on Canvey Island. However, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and, indeed, Essex county council—I hope—will consider carefully what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): In the light of figures recently released by the Department of the Environment which show that the number of construction orders fell by one third in the last three months of 1994 compared with the last three months of 1993, will the Leader of the House ensure that the Secretary of State for the Environment makes a statement on that worrying trend?

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake that my right hon. Friend will make a statement, but I shall ensure that he is aware of the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Leader of the House provide time for an early debate on businesses, especially those in west Yorkshire, which have received rates demands that have increased by between 34 and 40 per cent? The Government have suggested that those businesses should have to pay no more than a 10 per cent. increase in rates. Businesses in west Yorkshire are operating at a competitive disadvantage because they have to pay more rates than businesses in many other parts of the country. Therefore, in fairness to those businesses, especially small businesses, will the Leader of the House arrange an early debate so that we may regularise business rate increases?

Mr. Newton: There seems to be a growing list of points that I need to bring to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. I shall add the hon. Gentleman's question to the list.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Many people outside the House will find it strange that we have not had a statement on the appalling events in Dublin last night. We need to have an early debate on the issue, if

only to send a message to the European football authorities, which may at this very moment be considering excluding England from hosting the European championships. We need a debate so that we may discuss the issue and send a message from the House that such thuggish minority behaviour will not be tolerated.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful for and associate myself with, as I am sure would everybody, the comments in the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. With regard to a statement, I need hardly say that I have noted the many representations that have been made in today's business questions and I shall reflect on them, at the very least, for the future, even if I cannot promise a statement now.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The Leader of the House will be aware of yesterday's lobby of the House by teachers concerned at the proposed reduction in section 11 funding. Could time be found for an early debate on that issue? The threatened cuts impact not only on the education of British children who do not speak English as their first language, but create wider implications of possible social unrest.

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the meetings about section 11 funding to which the hon. Lady refers. She will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is due to answer questions on Tuesday, which may provide an opportunity for raising the matter. However, I shall also bring the hon. Lady's question to the attention of my other right hon. Friends who are concerned with such matters.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): When the Leader of the House has had an opportunity to look at a copy of today's edition of *Today* and the article concerning comments made by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), would he consider arranging an urgent debate on allotments? Even if allotments are not to be the centrepiece of the Government's new economic policies and even though their policies on unemployment have done little more than pour fertiliser over the lives of the unemployed for the past 15 years, many Conservative Members may at least want to dissociate themselves from any suggestion that a solution to poverty would be to encourage the poor and the unemployed to welcome fertiliser and to grow their own vegetables from it.

Mr. Newton: I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham is in his place, and I suspect that he may produce a reply to the hon. Gentleman by way of a question to me. Let us see.

Madam Speaker: It will have to be by way of a question to the Leader of the House.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Does my right hon. Friend accept that I warmly support the suggestion by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) that we should have a debate on the value of growing vegetables, which is beneficial to health, which is healthy exercise, which provides enjoyment and which is economical? The debate should further include reference to the fact that it is utterly ridiculous for Opposition Members to suggest that it is in any way insensitive or insulting to suggest that people who have time on their hands, whether because they are retired or because they are, unfortunately, unemployed, should devote a few hours a week to this worthwhile activity, which should have the support of the whole House.

Mr. Newton: I hope that you will agree, Madam Speaker, that my hon. Friend, with his customary ingenuity, has devised an answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) in the form of a question. The only point that I shall venture is that I know from constituency experience that nothing causes more trouble than a proposal to build houses on allotments.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Has the Leader of the House seen reports in today's editions of *The Independent* and *The Guardian* highlighting the very close connections between ministerial political advisers and lobbying firms such as Lowe Bell and Ian Greer Associates? Will he arrange for his right hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for open government, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to come to the House next week to make a statement about this important matter?

Mr. Newton: First, I have seen the reports. Secondly, as I understand it, the suggestion is that this is another matter that the Nolan committee might wish to take into account. Thirdly, the time for statements and possible debates will be when we know what the Nolan committee recommends.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I join other hon. Members in congratulating you, Madam Speaker, and the other House authorities on the preparations and plans to commemorate the victory in Europe. Will further consideration be given to the possibility of the House, on the Adjournment, going to St. Margaret's Westminster, as is traditional, to give thanks? That would be appropriate, not instead of what has been announced, but in addition to it to mark victory over Japan.

May we have an early debate on health and safety at work? There are 150,000 workplace injuries every year. It is time that the House addressed itself to this acute problem, which should exercise hon. Members on both sides.

Mr. Newton: I shall bear in mind the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question. On the first part, I am sure that you, Madam Speaker, would like to consider the specific suggestion made. I make two points on the matter, one of which, I am afraid, is a repetition. First, the hon. Gentleman described the 5 May event as celebrating the end of the war in Europe. In fact, it is to celebrate the end of world war two, embracing all the events of that war. Secondly, it is expected that the event will include a number of prayers.

Points of Order

4.7 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last week, I tabled a question for written answer to the Secretary of State for Transport in which I asked to be furnished with information about the amounts paid by his Department in consultancy fees to 10 named companies during the process of rail privatisation. A similar question was answered in great detail in July 1994. However, the reply that I received was that individual fees to individual companies were a matter of commercial confidentiality. I was furnished only with the information that the grand total was £17.1 million. This is the second time in as many weeks that the Department of Transport has abdicated its responsibility and accountability not only to the House, but to the British taxpayer as it is spending taxpayers' money. I would be grateful for advice on how I might proceed with this matter. Would it be possible for you, Madam Speaker, to raise the issue with the Ministers concerned?

Madam Speaker: First, I tell the hon. Lady that I have no responsibility or authority to raise the matter with the Ministers concerned. It is not my responsibility. I have no influence on the working of Government Departments; that is a matter for Secretaries of State. However, I understand hon. Members' frustration when Government Departments are inconsistent, as I know this one to be, in the method used to answer questions.

Perhaps I may give a little advice to the hon. Lady. I asked her to try to raise an earlier problem on an Adjournment debate. I know that she attempted to do that, but she did not pursue it. I leave that matter with her for the moment. The hon. Lady may also raise the matter with the Table Office staff, who can often be helpful in such matters.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In Northern Ireland Questions this afternoon, we saw another example of what we consider to be the deliberate tactic of both major parties of loading the Order Paper so that it has the effect of pushing Northern Ireland Members' questions virtually off the Order Paper. I know that that is not something with which you can directly deal, Madam Speaker, but I draw your attention to questions 5 and 6, which are virtually identical. I think that I am right in saying that, as originally tabled, there was also another pair of identical questions in the first 12 questions, although, through the withdrawal of one question, that is no longer the case.

I wonder whether it is possible for the Table Office at least to try to restrain hon. Members who ask virtually the same question, so that there would not be so many non-Northern Ireland Members tabling questions and, consequently, a better chance of Northern Ireland Members putting questions on the Order Paper in the same way as Scottish and Welsh Members have their questions answered.

Madam Speaker: Let me assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no loading of the Order Paper by any party. There is a ballot for the order of questions. The hon. Gentleman can see that ballot taking place. I understand the hon. Gentleman's frustrations, too, but today, out of eight members of his party who were present, seven, including the hon. Gentleman himself, were called. That is not a bad record.

I was extremely disappointed at the lack of progress that we made in Northern Ireland Questions today. It was particularly poor. We reached only question 8. I want brisker questions to Ministers in that Department and I want brisker answers, too. It is totally unfair that we cannot move faster down the Order Paper at Northern Ireland Questions.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You might not be aware of it, because of your position in the Chamber, but a habit seems to be developing at the beginning of Question Time. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) enters the Chamber, a small group of hon. Members hiss as he comes in. Although we accept that there will be some noise and to and fro in debates, that habit is not very pleasant. I hope that you will deprecate it and ask all hon. Members to desist from it.

Madam Speaker: I certainly deprecate such behaviour. I will watch particularly carefully next week. If I see or hear anything untoward happening, I will put a stop to it without delay.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In Northern Ireland Question Time, I tried to raise a point of order and ask for your guidance. It was in relation to the fact that the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) referred to football hooligans starting a riot in Dublin. It would have been perfectly in order for the Prime Minister, during Prime Minister's Question Time, or for the Home Secretary to have referred to that matter, but it surely should not have been raised during Northern Ireland Questions, as no one from Northern Ireland, as far as I know, had responsibility for that riot.

Madam Speaker: There is more than a grain of truth in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. That matter certainly did not relate to Northern Ireland Questions; it was a matter for the Prime Minister or for the Home Secretary. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber a few minutes ago when I deprecated the fact that we do not move sufficiently speedily through Northern Ireland Questions, and that is because such extraneous matters are often raised at Question Time.

Royal Navy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

4.13 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Roger Freeman): It is my privilege today to open our annual debate on the Royal Navy. Since I was last a Defence Minister, the cold war has ended and our armed forces—including the Navy—have necessarily been restructured. By 1995-96, the defence budget will be some 25 per cent. smaller than it was in 1985, and that is a position broadly similar to that of other major western nations.

After the inevitable turbulence that followed "Options For Change" and "Front Line First", our armed forces can now look forward to a period of broad stability in funding. The Royal Navy will remain a formidable fighting force with global responsibilities, manned by professional and dedicated personnel to whom I am happy—I am sure the whole House is also happy—to pay tribute today.

In the uncertain and unpredictable world of today, the ultimate guarantee of our nation's security remains our strategic nuclear deterrent. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 19 December last year that HMS Vanguard was on its first operational patrol. Vanguard's deployment marks a key point in the progressive replacement of Polaris by the Trident system, the capabilities of which will ensure that the UK's strategic deterrent will remain effective well into the next century.

I note that the view of the Labour party is divided on Trident, while the view of all Government Members is entirely in one accord in support of Trident. Early-day motion 29 carries the signatures of 40 Opposition Members, of whom two are in their places this afternoon. Those 40 Members are entirely opposed to the introduction of Trident, and would cancel our nuclear submarine programme.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I am sorry to interrupt the Minister so early, but I must make it plain that, as the Minister knows, the Labour party's policy is that we will deploy the Trident system, but we will limit the number of nuclear warheads to the same number as there are on Polaris. I hope that that is clear to everyone concerned.

Mr. Freeman: It is entirely clear that that is the policy of the hon. Gentleman and the Opposition Front Bench. I put it on record that 40 Opposition Members do not agree with that policy, and I must point out that the Labour party is entirely divided on this crucial aspect of defence policy. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) groans, but it is the truth. That is one reason why, at a general election, the electorate will not trust Labour on defence.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Surely the Minister accepts that even the Government would like to get rid of Trident, on the basis that they would like to have a world where it is not necessary, and therefore the difference is not all that great. It is not a question of whether we should get rid of it, but of how we can get rid of it, particularly as it will cost about £30 billion over its lifetime. Surely everyone would like to remove the need for Trident.

Mr. Freeman: The point is that 40 Opposition Members want to get rid of Trident now. It is difficult for anyone who takes this subject seriously—including those on the Opposition Front Bench—to envisage a scenario in the near future where the withdrawal of our nuclear submarine fleet would be possible. That is not a credible defence policy at present.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Every Conservative Member voted for the statement on the defence estimates, which says that the ultimate aim of the Government is to work towards a nuclear-free world. Can we take it that every Conservative Member wants to see a nuclear-free world? Is that not exactly what Labour Members want to see?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is not the case. The difference between the 40 Labour Members and the majority faction of the Labour party is that those hon. Members who signed the early-day motion are calling for the scrapping of Trident now. We all want to work for the reduction and the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. In the mean time, we believe firmly as a Government—I speak for all my hon. Friends—that we must pursue a sensible and coherent policy to retain the Trident submarine force.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): How many fingers are there are now on nuclear triggers—despite the non-proliferation treaty—as opposed to during the cold war, when there were not very many?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend is right. A capacity is being developed by a number of countries, of which we should be very wary. One of the main tenets of our policy is that we should retain our nuclear deterrent while any other country in a position to threaten our security possesses a nuclear weapon or the ability to construct a nuclear weapon. That is a clear policy, but there is total division of approach on the Opposition Benches.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose—*

Mr. Freeman: I will seek to make progress.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way on Trident?

Mr. Freeman: I shall return to the subject of Trident, and I shall then give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Royal Navy has adapted quickly to the post cold war environment, with its new roles and challenges. Its most visible commitment in the past 12 months has been in the Adriatic. The UK task group, led since August by HMS Invincible, the carrier, has the primary task of supporting the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's Operation Deny Flight, and its Sea Harrier jets help enforce the no-fly zone over Bosnia.

HMS Campbeltown and HMS Cumberland currently contribute to United Nations embargo operations in the Adriatic on Operation Sharp Guard. Sea King helicopters from 845 Naval Air Squadron, based in Split, also continue to provide casualty evacuation and general helicopter support to Commander British Forces.

[Mr. Freeman]

In September 1994, the Royal Navy acted in support of UN resolutions by participating in the United States-led Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti. HMS Lancaster, and subsequently HMS Broadsword, were involved in embargo operations, while RFA Oakleaf replenished ships of the international task force. HMS Exeter is currently contributing to the US-led task group in the operation to withdraw peacekeeping forces from Somalia.

In October 1994, as Saddam Hussein's forces once again threatened peace and stability in the Gulf, HMS Cornwall, with her Lynx helicopter, was diverted from the Armilla patrol, and was quickly in position as the first visible allied presence off the Kuwaiti coast; 45 Commando Group Royal Marines also deployed to Kuwait, as the spearhead battalion, and returned home in early December, leaving behind well-prepared defensive positions for use by Kuwaiti forces and having earned universal respect.

In Northern Ireland, 42 Commando Royal Marines are currently the South Armagh roulement battalion, and they continue to demonstrate great professionalism in tackling the new and delicate challenges presented by the peace process.

Back in the Caribbean, HMS Broadsword is currently undertaking West Indies guardship duties. Part of our operational duties involve working with the United States in the fight to combat drug trafficking in the area, a dangerous trade, which increasingly involves drugs destined for the UK market.

The Royal Navy has also played a full part in the process of developing contacts with Russia and central and eastern Europe. In October, HMS Newcastle and RFA Olna took part in Exercise Co-operative Venture in the North sea and Baltic approaches. That was the first joint maritime exercise under NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative. It is a measure of the Royal Navy's global role that, last Christmas, 26 out of a total of more than 100 Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships were away from their base ports.

I turn now to the equipment programme, and also Trident. To meet those global defence responsibilities, we must ensure that the Royal Navy is properly equipped. We have a major procurement programme for new vessels—one of the largest programmes for many years. We continue to plan for a broad range of capabilities, based around the three core elements of nuclear-powered submarines, aircraft carrier task forces and amphibious forces. We continue to introduce modern, more capable vessels and now have the youngest fleet since the first world war.

I have already mentioned—

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South) *rose—*

Mr. Freeman: Will my hon. Friend forgive me for a second? I want to mention Trident, and then give way to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) first.

I have mentioned the Trident programme. The deployment of HMS Vanguard on her first operational patrol last December met the original in-service date set more than 12 years before. The achievement of such a major and complex project on time is in no small part due to the skills and commitment of VSEL, the builders, and many other companies involved, and the contributions of Ministry of Defence staff at all levels.

Dr. Godman: As the Minister well knows, a goodly number of my constituents work at the Trident base on the other side of the firth of Clyde from my constituency, at Coulport and Faslane. I was pleased to receive a letter from his ministerial colleague, saying that 23 more posts were to be created there, but many people are deeply worried about what they perceive as the threat to their terms and conditions of employment in Coulport and Faslane.

Will the Minister give the House an assurance that he is completely confident of the efficacy of the ship lift on the other side of the Clyde from my constituency? Is he confident that it is able to carry out the programme of lifting those vessels out of the water with no threat of safety hazards to the people who work there?

Mr. Freeman: I am confident about that. If the hon. Gentleman has not witnessed a ship lift lifting one of the boats out of the water, I shall arrange for him to do so. One of the reasons for the increased costs of Trident's works was the extra expense of making sure that that facility was as safe as human beings can possibly make such a complicated mechanism—strong enough to withstand a geological fault shock.

As for the contracts of employment of those who work at Coulport and Faslane, those workers have nothing to fear. I have announced that, over the next two years, we will accept the proposals from the civilian work force—to whom I pay particular tribute for what they have achieved—for improvements in efficiency at Faslane. Coulport is not affected. In due course, but not before 1997, we will introduce some market testing for some of the support functions at Faslane. There is no reason, however, for anyone there to feel either threatened or adversely done by.

Mr. Ottaway: I welcome what my right hon. Friend says about providing the nation with a modern fleet. This autumn, I had the good fortune to spend some time on board HMS Illustrious as she was embarking on sea trials before she was deployed to the Adriatic. Although it is an efficient ship, during my time on board I began to sense that probably, together with HMS Invincible and HMS Ark Royal, it is beginning to age.

Those ships were designed in the 1970s, and they are now about 15 years old. Is it not appropriate now to be thinking about the next generation of aircraft carriers, because the lead time for the introduction of an aircraft carrier is about 10 years, which is when the present generation of ships is likely to be becoming worn out and unserviceable?

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend anticipates me. We plan to retain three aircraft carriers and modernise their aircraft, including upgrading the Sea Harrier and introducing the new Merlin EH101 anti-submarine warfare helicopter. If we are to retain three aircraft carriers, we must plan for their replacement now. Planning is at an early stage, and I anticipate that we shall have another 10 to 15 years minimum service out of those aircraft carriers. One is in extended refit at the moment—

Dr. Reid: Extended service.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for correcting me. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) that planning has begun at an early stage.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Freeman: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall make a little progress. I anticipate what my hon. Friend might be interested in, and I shall give way in a minute.

Development work on Merlin is now largely complete, and it remains on schedule to enter service with the Royal Navy in 1998. I understand that Mr. Alan Jones, the chief executive of Westland, is shortly to move on to BICC. May I say to those who take a close interest in Westland and the current procurement competition for support helicopters, that the move of Mr. Jones and his replacement by Mr. David Wright, for whom I have a high regard, is in no way connected with the continuing negotiations on the support helicopters. I gather that there has been some speculation that there was a connection—there is none.

Mr. Jessel: Apart from the purchase of new ships and the upholding of the best of our existing ships, will the Government give some attention to the preservation of old warships, so that, in 100 years' time, people can see what a ship from the first or second world war looked like? Will my right hon. Friend continue to encourage the work of the Warship Preservation Trust, which was founded and is chaired by our former colleague, Sir Philip Goodhart? Can my right hon. Friend say whether HMS Caroline could be made available for preservation at some suitable location?

Mr. Freeman: I am a supporter of the Warship Preservation Trust, and played some small part almost eight years ago in saving HMS Plymouth. She is now berthed at Birkenhead docks and is a credit to the Royal Navy and its long traditions. HMS Caroline, a light cruiser, is currently berthed in Belfast lough, and I shall certainly consider its future sympathetically. We must preserve and protect the resources of the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Navy, and, sensibly, we will do anything we can to ensure that.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am grateful to the Minister, because I hope to mention HMS Caroline later on. HMS Caroline is a wonderful time capsule, which all of us interested in naval history wish to see preserved. Belfast city council and others, including myself, believe that, after all the years it has been in Belfast lough, there it should stay, to the advantage of the people of Northern Ireland, who could benefit from it becoming a conference and tourist centre. It could be part and parcel of the new enterprises that will develop in Northern Ireland.

Certainly, as a lad from Essex, I suggest that it should not come to England, but should remain in Belfast for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind, rather than give way to some of the bids being put in by people who have no commitment to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Freeman: We continue to plan for a force level of 35 destroyers and frigates from this year, with type 23s having replaced older vessels such as Leanders and type 21s, which we have been able to release for sale overseas. There are currently 10 type 23s with the Royal Navy, with a further three under construction. At the end of last year, we issued an invitation to tender for a further batch of up to three frigates.

We demonstrated our commitment to maintaining a highly capable mine counter-measure flotilla for the Royal Navy last July, by placing an order for a further batch of seven Sandown class single-role minehunters.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the Minister tell the House over what time scale those minehunters will be delivered to the Royal Navy—and, more to the point, could he confirm that the last one of the seven now ordered will not actually be commissioned until well into the next century?

Mr. Freeman: The work is placed with Vosper Thorneycroft in Southampton, and occupies a good deal of its capacity. I cannot recall the exact delivery schedule, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. I am satisfied with the efficiency of the work and the rate of production, and Vosper Thorneycroft is delighted with the order.

The delivery of the last of the batch early in the next century—although I cannot give a precise date—will bring the mine counter-measure force to the 25 vessels announced in the 1993 Defence White Paper. We are also planning a programme of upgrading the 13 dual-role HUNT class minehunters/minesweepers to improve their capability to deal with future threats.

The Royal Navy now operates a 12-boat-strong attack submarine fleet, now entirely nuclear-powered, of the Swiftsure and Trafalgar classes. We issued an invitation to tender last July for the design and build of second batch of the highly successful Trafalgar class SSNs. The batch 2 submarines with which we plan to replace the Swiftsure class will be based closely on the Trafalgar class, and will incorporate the new tactical weapon system which is also being refitted to existing Swiftsure and Trafalgar class boats.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): The Minister was talking about batch 2 Trafalgar class submarine programme. He will know that order is extremely important for the future of VSEL and many thousands of my constituents' jobs. He has confirmed that invitations to tender have been sent out.

Will he also confirm that his right hon. Friend the former Minister for Defence Procurement, now the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, confirmed on 12 May 1992 that the orders for those submarines will be placed in January 1994, and at the earliest that order will not be until the summer of 1996? What is the reason for that two-and-a-half-year delay in ordering the submarines, and what consequences will the delay have for my constituents?

Mr. Freeman: I am conscious of the need to ensure that, in the interests of the nation, warship building yards such as VSEL have a sensible flow of orders, whether placed by the MOD or abroad. That must make economic sense.

One of the reasons for the delay was our desire to create a competition in the design for the new Trafalgar class submarines. I am glad to say that the competition between VSEL and the consortium, including GEC, will proceed, and will be brought to a conclusion.

[Mr. Freeman]

A decision about how to build a nuclear-class patrol submarine is independent from where the bulk of the integration work might take place. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right to point out that VSEL has the only submarine construction facilities in Britain—and they are excellent facilities. Therefore, it would not be inconsistent to select a different method of procurement of design development and yet still build the boats at VSEL's yard at Barrow. I hope that we can bring the competition to a conclusion quickly, and get on with placing the orders.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for displaying his characteristic courtesy. With regard to the construction of type 23 frigates, is he in a position to give to the House the names of the yards which have expressed an interest in seeking that work?

Mr. Freeman: I see no reason why I should not do so, as it is obvious to anyone who is interested in the industry that they would include Yarrow, VSEL and Vosper Thornycroft. I have visited its yard, and I assure the House that Vosper Thornycroft has the capability of building a type 23, although it has not built a frigate or a destroyer for many years.

The capability of our SSNs will be further enhanced by the Spearfish torpedo, the most advanced anti-ship and anti-submarine torpedo in the world, whose speed and endurance enables it to outmanoeuvre the fastest and deepest diving targets. As was announced in last year's Defence White Paper, an initial batch of Spearfish torpedoes entered service with the Royal Navy in March 1994.

Following improvements to the weapon's reliability, a main production order for the remainder to be supplied, and for the in-service support of that weapon system, was placed with GEC-Marconi Naval Systems in December. A large measure of the work on Spearfish will take place at the Royal Naval Armament Depot, Beith. The Spearfish torpedo will replace the Tigerfish in all Royal Navy submarines.

We plan to retain a substantial amphibious capability. The "Front Line First" announcement confirmed that we intended to replace the assault ships, HMS Intrepid and HMS Fearless, and an invitation to tender for their replacement was issued last August. I expect orders to be placed around the end of this year, and I am sure that that news will be welcomed by all hon. Members on both sides of the House. Good progress continues to be made on the design and construction of the new helicopter carrier, which was ordered in 1993, and which will form the cornerstone of our future amphibious capability.

We recognise the importance of specialist hydrographic vessels and personnel. We continue to plan for the upgrading of the capability of the hydrographic service by procuring four new vessels—including a new-build ocean survey vessel, an order for which was placed last month.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My right hon. Friend knows of my interest in the hydrographic service whose offices have been located at Taunton for more than 50 years. In its bicentenary year, will he send his congratulations and best wishes to all those who work in that service on their excellent quality work, which I believe is still unparalleled throughout the world—not only in the area of military and naval surveying and research, but in a growing amount of civil research which will be extremely valuable to this country in the future. Will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to ensure that that work is continued and bettered in the future?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me about the bicentenary, and I send my best wishes to all of those who are involved in that vital work. I will be grateful if my hon. Friend will convey that message to his constituents, and, indeed, to all of those who work at the centre. We have decided to name the new ocean survey vessel after the great Antarctic explorer, Scott, and that vessel will do valuable work for the hydrographic service, as will the other vessels that we intend to order in due course.

We also recognise the importance of modern, capable support ships. Since last year's Royal Navy debate, two auxiliary oilers, Fort George and Fort Victoria, have entered service with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. As part of the defence costs study, we announced in July last year that we are exploring the possibility of fitting our submarines with conventionally armed Tomahawk land attack missiles procured from the United States. Feasibility studies were launched in the autumn.

Mr. Mackinlay: How long was HMS Fort Victoria under construction? How much overspend was involved in that construction, and how late was the vessel delivered?

Mr. Freeman: I try to carry as much information as I can in my head, but I do not know the answers to the hon. Gentleman's questions. I will write to him, and put a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

To enable us to maintain and enhance the fighting capabilities of the front line, we have sought major efficiency savings in the support area—not least in the recent defence costs study "Front Line First". Naval support has been largely a civilian operation since Samuel Pepys was secretary of the admiralty. "Front Line First" has successfully identified ways in which administrative and support functions could be carried out more cost-effectively, and I acknowledge the significant impact that those plans will have for a very loyal civilian work force.

A number of decisions have been taken in recent weeks that affect naval infrastructure. I announced last December our intention to redeploy minor war vessels from Rosyth. Work is proceeding to schedule and, when achieved, will represent a significant step towards eliminating excess capacity in our naval support facilities and will save some £20 million annually. The human cost of closure is, of course, a matter of regret, and I pay tribute to the work force at Rosyth for their admirable record in serving the Royal Navy for most of this century.

I am personally committed to ensuring that the future redevelopment of the parts of the base that are no longer required by the Royal Navy takes place as quickly as possible, and in a manner in which enhances the economic and particularly the employment prospects of the region. I look forward to receiving proposals next month from the Rosyth 2000 consortium for the whole Rosyth complex. We will carefully consider those and any other approaches to take over surplus facilities, so long as they assume responsibility for the whole rather than only part of the facility.

Proposals to streamline Royal Navy armament depots have also been announced, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has also announced in recent days the Government's intention to rationalise the naval stores depots, leading to the closure by April 1997 of three main depots—at Exeter, Eaglescliffe and Wrangaton—and reductions elsewhere, particularly at Devonport. Those measures are intended to maximise the utilisation of the modern facilities we have, eliminate the overheads associated with excess capacity in the system and, most importantly, meet the operational requirements of the Royal Navy.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will my right hon. Friend assure me that every effort will be made to try to find alternative employment within the Ministry of Defence for the people, particularly in Plymouth, who will be made redundant by the recent announcement, and that outplacement consultants will be engaged to give them every ounce of active advice possible?

Mr. Freeman: Of course my hon. Friend is concerned about his constituency, but the point is of general interest, wherever changes are made.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State and I are jointly responsible for a number of decisions affecting service men, service women and civilians. First, we take very seriously the need to co-ordinate within the public sector to ensure that other Departments deploy their skills and experience in helping those people to find alternative employment; secondly—I cited Rosyth as an example—central Government have a role to ensure that we take the initiative now, before the depot or naval base closes, and without unnecessary delay to find an alternative use.

I am quite determined not to fall into the trap of piecemeal closure and piecemeal sale. The people who work at Rosyth, for example, and many other locations, deserve our help now, not simply, when the depot or garrison closes, our thanks at the end. I therefore hope that my hon. Friend is suitably impressed.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Will the Minister tell the House how, by closing the supply stores at Exeter and Wrangaton, and by the partial closure of Devonport, the Royal Navy is best served by having those supplies sent from Portsmouth, which is 170 miles away? Is there some hidden agenda whereby he intends to run down or close the naval base at Devonport?

Mr. Freeman: No, absolutely none at all. The hon. Gentleman, I am sure, appreciates the difference between slow-moving stores—those that are required perhaps at a week or even a month's notice when a ship comes in for a planned refit, in which case they should be held in a centralised location—and the stores that are needed when a ship comes in, for example, after sea training off Portland, which may need a new generator and needs it now. If it comes in to Devonport, the Navy will have the available stores at the dockside. Therefore, the items that are fast moving, in urgent need, will be available at the ports.

Mr. Jamieson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but I can assure him that the Navy take an even greater interest than I do in ensuring that the spares and stores are available for the ships when they are needed.

Plans to move the Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland and his non-operational staff from Pitreavie to Faslane by April 1996 were announced last year, and I have announced today, in the form of a written answer, that the Government also intend to relocate FOSNNI's operational headquarters to Faslane in the same time frame. Consultation on those proposals have been under way for several months, but having weighed all the representations most carefully, it has been decided to proceed with the relocation, which will save some £22 million over the next 10 years.

I am pleased to be able to say that we have already reached agreement with Fife Enterprise to release a small area of the Pitreavie site for inward investment purposes, and the rest of the site will be similarly disposed of after April next year. In that way, the economic impact of the decision will be substantially offset, to the benefit of the local community and the Ministry of Defence employees affected.

I now outline the key principles that affect our procurement policy. It is time that we put on the record the elements of a modern procurement policy, which faces very different circumstances from the ones which Sir Peter Levene, as Chief of Defence Procurement, found almost 10 years ago when he revolutionised the way in which we acquire equipment. To maintain our Navy in the years ahead, we need a fully appropriate procurement policy, to which I now turn.

The first policy objective is for the United Kingdom to retain a capability to build warship hulls and to retain as far as possible a choice of yard for each class of vessel. But there is, understandably, more warship building capacity in the United Kingdom than can be sustained by Ministry of Defence requirements alone. That means that yards must now turn to new markets if they are to survive in their present form, and it remains our aim to secure the opening of the European market for warship building on a fair and equitable basis.

Winning export orders will not get easier. In general, a reduction in the perceived threat and universal pressure on defence spending has resulted in declining opportunities to supply new build warship hulls, and a greater number of naval hulls may ultimately be built in the yards of previous customers.

The over-capacity among warship builders has, of course, had its casualties, as in the case of Swan Hunter. Swans had a strong tradition of supplying the Royal Navy with quality ships, and, in keeping with its excellent track record, completed the type 23 frigates Westminster, Northumberland and Richmond to a very high standard in what were difficult circumstances. That excellent record is testimony to the work force's commitment, and will no doubt assist the receivers in their future drive to find a buyer for the yard's main shipbuilding facility at Wallsend.

I am confident that sufficient capacity still remains for the Ministry of Defence in warship building. Our competition policy has been successful and our latest ships represent excellent value for money. As in the rest of the equipment programme, if competition proves impracticable, we would continue to seek value for money, through pursuing what we call "no acceptable

[Mr. Freeman]

price, no contract" arrangements, pricing non-competitive contracts at the outset and in such a way as to promote efficiency.

Mr. Hutton: The Minister said that it would be the Government's policy to retain a capability to build hulls. What about fitting out? Is it the Government's policy that the fitting out of vessels will also be retained in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, when I conclude I will deal with project Horizon and answer that question specifically, because I draw a distinction between hulls and equipment. The hull accounts for perhaps 10 to 15 per cent. of the total cost of a warship. The equipment that goes in is the expensive part. Even for a Royal Air Force modern fighter, 50 per cent. of the cost is in the avionics alone.

The second policy objective is to ensure that warship building and refitting are in the private rather than the public sector. The royal dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth continue to benefit from the refitting arrangements announced in June 1993 by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Both dockyards continue to receive a regular allocation of work from the naval refitting programme, and additionally, both have been successful in securing work from the unallocated programme, in competition with other ship repair companies. In that way, Devonport Management Ltd. has secured contracts for the refits of HMS Cornwall and HMS Birmingham, and Babcock Rosyth Defence Ltd. has recently won the competition to extend the life of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel Sir Bedivere.

Following the announcement in October 1993 of the Government's intention to seek tenders from the private sector for the sale of the royal dockyards as separate and independent commercial entities, invitations to submit initial tenders were issued in July last year. As I announced on 23 November last year, we have received initial tenders from Devonport Management Ltd. for Devonport dockyard, and from Babcock International Group for Rosyth dockyard.

Those initial proposals have been evaluated, and invitations to single tender to those companies have now been issued, with final tenders due before Easter. I cannot rule out at this stage other options for future dockyard management, but we continue to believe that privatisation on the right terms will give value for money, and for the taxpayer within the future framework of fleet support. These are complex undertakings, which will involve detailed contractual negotiations, but we expect to be in a position to make final decisions by the summer.

Our third policy objective is to meet the operational requirements of the armed forces in a way that achieves the best value for money for the taxpayer. As a result of the Government's competition and open procurement policies, the UK defence industry is strong and highly competitive at home and overseas. It would soon lose its place in world markets that have generated an average of £5,000 million-worth of export orders a year over the past five years—that is the average rate of orders—if we resorted to protectionism, or abandoned the principle of value for money for the customer.

When assessing the available options, however, Ministers must take account of the wider implications that procurement decisions will have. Some decisions may have consequences for the future availability of competition, and could in extreme cases even bring into question the continued existence of a viable industrial sector, with consequential effects on employment in the United Kingdom. Defence Ministers therefore give due consideration to the possible consequences of any procurement decision for the defence industrial base.

Fourthly, we need to consider security of supply; but that need not imply production in the United Kingdom. It is difficult to envisage future circumstances in which Britain would act militarily without the support of allies, or when all overseas supplies were unavailable. British and French companies are currently discussing a possible link in ammunition production. We shall need to take a view in due course on whatever proposals may emerge, but in principle we would not consider production-sharing in an Anglo-French industrial collaboration a fundamental threat to our security of supply.

Fifthly, we are alert to the possibility that a militarily important technology might be put at risk as a result of a procurement decision, but we have not found that to be a problem so far. There has undoubtedly been a significant reduction in the capacity of the UK defence industry, but that has not led to any significant loss of capability. It is not essential to retain a domestic capability in every area of defence technology, but in a number of instances—for military reasons—we would not be prepared to buy from overseas, provided that an indigenous capability could be sustained at an acceptable cost.

Before a Front-Bench spokesman asks me to name those key technologies, let me say that, if I did so, we should be at a disadvantage in terms of retaining procurement value for money for the taxpayer.

Sixthly and finally—I apologise for going into the subject at such length, but I consider it important—we need to accept and pursue collaboration in defence research and procurement with our allies in Europe and the United States, for sound economic reasons. Some restructuring of industry is inevitable, given declining defence budgets, the increasing costs of high-technology development programmes and the competition from a rationalised United States defence industry.

If UK companies are thinking about alliances and mergers—as, of course, many are—they would do well not to confine their attention to other UK companies alone. I am pleased to note that many are entering into joint ventures and co-operative arrangements with companies in both Europe and the United States.

There is no doubt that such cross-border alliances will be a vital component in meeting our future defence needs. Collaboration is an economic necessity, and as a result of our efforts to promote wider armaments co-operation with other nations, we are currently collaborating on some 45 projects at various stages of the procurement cycle—the largest being the European fighter and Project Horizon. The keys to successful collaboration in the future must lie in the agreement of a standard requirement, a sensible industrial structure and maximum use of competition within the collaborating countries, at the very least.

I want to make special reference to Project Horizon, on which the United Kingdom is currently collaborating with France and Italy. The programme will provide the Royal Navy with a new anti-air warfare warship in the early

years of the next century to replace our 12 type 42 destroyers. The programme memorandum of understanding for the ship was signed on 11 July 1994. The principal anti-air missile system will be subject to a separate memorandum of understanding when the three partners have reached an agreement with industry on a compliant, cost-effective solution; I expect that to happen soon.

The Horizon trinational project office is based in London, and staff there from the three nations have already embarked on important preliminary steps that include the issuing of invitations to tender for the design definition of the ship and its combat management system. An international joint venture company comprising companies from all three nations will act as prime contractor for design and build of the three firsts of class—one for each nation. That involves the hull of the ship.

The Horizon project combines the essential ingredients for effective collaborative procurement. The three nations have agreed a common requirement, with only minor national exceptions; the industrial structure is sound; and—here I refer to the point made by the hon. Member for Barrow in Furness (Mr. Hutton)—the components of the warship will be ordered following international competition. I do not limit that competition to the three participating nations. All that benefits both the Royal Navy and the taxpayer.

It has been a busy and challenging 12 months for our senior service, but I know that I carry the House with me when I say that, once again, the men and women of the Royal Navy, and the civilians who support them, have acquitted themselves superbly. They have been a credit to themselves and, indeed, to the nation as a whole.

4.55 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Unlike the Minister of State, I have not returned to this annual debate as almost a recidivist; I am here in my present capacity for the first time.

I welcomed some of the Minister's comments, and the way in which he set out the roles performed by the Royal Navy. It is always interesting to hear them set out, and their extensive nature described. The Minister did that in his opening remarks, and he was right to suggest that the Navy's important functions in the Adriatic and Somalia, for instance—and its other United Nations functions—are making an important contribution to both peacemaking and peacekeeping throughout the world.

I am sure that every Opposition Member wishes to be associated with the Minister's closing thanks to all in the services who have made those tasks possible, and fulfilled them so effectively.

I particularly welcomed what the Minister said about procurement. I shall deal with some of it later in my speech.

Reading reports of Royal Navy debates held in previous years, I was struck by the fact that—regardless of the political position that hon. Members may adopt on a number of other issues—there seems to be a genuine consensus on the specific theme of defence debates, whether it is the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force or the Army. That is largely understandable, because defence debates are part of the national and international debate about what is happening to our forces—and those of other countries—in the post-cold war period.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who chairs the Defence Select Committee so effectively, will be very familiar with the remarks that I am about to quote. In his contribution to last year's debate and in his Select Committee's 1993 report, he summed up the anxiety felt by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the future shape, activities and functions of the Royal Navy. He seems to have the ability to write in language that I suspect will attract one or two newspaper headlines. I do not object to that; I think that it does not do a bad job in warming up what may sometimes be seen as rather a tedious issue. The hon. Gentleman has brought to the Select Committee the same sort of approach that Judge Tumim has brought to the Prison Service: I mean that as a compliment.

In the Select Committee report, the hon. Gentleman concluded:

"It appears self-evident to us that matching resources to tasks is becoming increasingly fraught, stretching both crews and vessels to unwise levels even during peacetime. It is evident that, in the event of full-scale war, the Royal Navy would be incapable of defending our sea-routes on which we depend for both trade and the movement of our Armed Forces. It is our view that this shortcoming poses a serious, and potentially fatal, threat to the long term security of this country."

That view, expressed by an all-party Committee, has been reflected in debates both before and after the report's publication.

The hon. Gentleman used different language to make exactly the same point in the closing words of his contribution to last year's Royal Navy debate. He said:

"We must look to the long-term future with a possibility that we shall need a strong united Nato and a British contributory force in the Army, the Navy and the Air Force capable of carrying out a role in an all-out war against us. It is the finding of the Defence Select Committee that our Navy is not strong enough properly to fulfil such a role."—[*Official Report*, 17 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. 1105.]

That has been the backcloth, and I shall return to those key arguments later in my speech. There has been broad agreement across the House that resources must match commitments and that we must engage in a broad debate on how we bring those two sides of the equation together.

At the end of his speech, the Minister mentioned the need for teamwork and co-operation. He pointed out that, like good industry, all our forces depend on developing teamwork. It is an essential part of the esprit de corps of the services' efficiency. The Navy is no exception in that respect. We are concerned about the extent to which the management of the Ministry of Defence can undermine the armed forces' confidence and sense of purpose. The Ministry is about leadership and a sense of direction and, if those are lacking, morale can fall, if not collapse, in certain circumstances.

The National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee and my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) have all drawn attention to the important issue of waste and inefficiency in the Ministry of Defence. *[Interruption.]* I know that parliamentary private secretaries take a Trappist vow, but the word that the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West has just uttered is absolutely correct: that waste is "disgraceful".

The catalogue is substantial, and includes the fact that £1 billion was spent on Upholder submarines. No function was defined for those submarines, which are now for sale. A further £7.2 million was spent on the Government's

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favourite friends—consultants—who were brought in at Rosyth and Devonport. That money was wasted because the consultants could find only one horse to run in the race.

Dr. Reid: That is not bad for £7.2 million.

Mr. Fatchett: As my hon. Friend says, that is not bad for £7.2 million.

Other problems have emerged. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) has come up with a lovely Spanish practice that seems to exist in the Ministry of Defence. At one time, trade union practices were criticised, but we have found such a practice in the Ministry of Defence.

It concerns the housing trust which the Ministry was to establish. I suspect that many of my constituents would love such a job—all the freedom and a salary to go with it. In response to my hon. Friend's questions, replies from the Minister of State for the Armed Services show that the chief executive of that housing trust, which does nothing because it has no role, is on a three-year contract worth £240,000. In addition, he has an efficiency bonus totalling £600,000. I presume that, if one starts with no houses, one cannot mismanage the housing stock, so he will qualify for that bonus.

The Royal Naval engineering college at Manadon in Plymouth is now up for sale, and I have before me the glossy brochure produced by the estate agent. If anyone is looking for a cheap property, this may be the answer. It has a number of bedrooms and a range of facilities. We know that it is up to date because, in recent years, the Ministry of Defence spent nearly £3 million on modernising it. In line with the new traditions in the Ministry, I understand that, in the ward room, £20,000 was spent on carpets. We have no figure yet for the amount spent on curtains, but I am sure that they are up to traditional Ministry of Defence standards. There are many other examples of that process of waste in the Ministry of Defence.

Significantly, a statement made last week about the air vice-marshal was not made in this Chamber by the Secretary of State, and no ministerial or civil service responsibility was taken for the waste and inefficiency in that Department. Is it not time that a sense of values returned to our public life, and people responsible for decisions carried the can when those went wrong?

Mr. Mackinlay: If it had happened in a Labour-controlled council, we would have heard about it.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but he knows that no Labour-controlled council could waste money on that scale, even if it tried.

Morale is damaged as a result of that wastefulness.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not having heard his whole speech but, on the latter point, may I point out that, for two years, I was a councillor on Hammersmith and Fulham council, which is Labour-controlled. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong, because it was wasting money like it was going out of fashion.

Mr. Fatchett: I am delighted with that intervention, as I note that the hon. Gentleman does not try to support the Ministry of Defence. Clearly, that was beyond even his substantial talents.

I noticed that, in opening the debate, the Minister did not refer to the pay, conditions and job losses of those who work in the Navy. It is worth while putting on record what has happened over recent years.

Numbers have dropped substantially, but that drop appears to have taken place differentially. In 1979, the last year of the last Labour Government, 72,500 people were employed in the Navy. The figure is now 54,000—a loss of 18,000. During that period, the number of officers has dropped by 8.4 per cent., and the number of ratings by 25 per cent. So when the burden of redundancy has been divided in the Royal Navy, as in other services, those at the bottom have, yet again, taken the brunt. We now have an officer:ratings ratio that is substantially less efficient than it was 15 years ago.

What has happened on pay? One might think that the Royal Navy is based on esprit de corps, the principle of equality which even the Prime Minister in last week's Question Time said he accepts. That principle of equality may be shown in terms of pay. The figures, which the Minister did not defend, show that, in the period 1978-94, the top two ranks in the Navy have enjoyed pay increases of 15 to 18 per cent., while the bottom two ranks have suffered pay cuts in real terms of 13 to 14 per cent. The gap has widened not just in society as a whole but within our armed forces, and it is simply not acceptable.

The Minister discussed the importance of civilian forces, and how the Ministry of Defence civil service backs up the role performed by our armed forces. He was right to make those comments, and, at one stage, he related them to this week's decision to close the naval stores at Eaglescliffe, Exeter and Wrangaton, with 1,000 job losses.

When the Minister said that everything would be done to provide jobs for those people, I thought that, if that were said to the 1,000 people whose jobs are now at stake, their response would be cynical, given the Government's record. They have heard it before, it never happens, and there is no reason to believe that it will happen on this occasion.

A recent report produced by the hon. Member for Upminster on the Ministry of Defence naval stores was a damning indictment on the process of management within the Ministry of Defence. The first page sets out a catalogue of failed consultations and the inability of the Ministry of Defence to talk to its trade unions and civil servants, or listen to others.

The Select Committee yet again damned the Government's proposals in strong language. The conclusion of that all-party, Conservative-dominated Select Committee was critical of the way in which the MOD handled these matters. It stated:

> "The procedure by which the conclusion was reached was fundamentally flawed".

Does not that describe the Government, not just in defence policy but in a whole range of issues? They do not understand the word "consultation". If ever it passes their lips, its application is fundamentally flawed. When the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) feels that he has a promise that he can take to the bank in relation to the 1,000 people who have lost their jobs, he should think again of the fundamental flaw in that consultation process.

Mr. Streeter: Is it still the Labour party's policy to reduce so-called waste in the armed forces by decreasing the defence budget by 30 per cent.?

Mr. Fatchett: I thought that that intervention would come up. I am delighted that it has, because I have with me yet further evidence of the great inefficiency of Conservative central office—a brief that it prepared on 5 October 1994. The hon. Gentleman probably does not read everything that comes out of central office. I can understand that; it is perfectly acceptable. I confess to the hon. Gentleman that I do not read everything that comes out of Walworth road. If that damages my future promotion chances, I shall put it on the record and just put my hand up.

The document, which no doubt the hon. Gentleman used with enthusiasm—I can imagine the press releases going off to radio stations in Devon and newspapers in Plymouth—sets out a series of Labour's new expenditure commitments, so I read it with interest. Central office always accuses Labour of taking money out of the defence budget, so I assumed that there would be a minus figure for defence, and that the hon. Gentleman would be right.

I know that central office likes to do its research on an accurate, honest and fair basis. Its document does not show a minus figure; it states that Labour will increase its defence expenditure. It has got Labour adding to its defence commitment. I am an innocent man in this respect. I believe what comes out of central office. It says that expenditure is going up.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman made a bit of a hash of answering my question. Will he please tell us what Labour's policy is? Will it cut defence expenditure by 30 per cent.—yes or no?

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman should read the central office record. Labour's position is simply the position at the 1992 election.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): What about the 30 per cent. reduction, and the Labour party conference vote?

Mr. Fatchett: Our manifesto is very clear. During the excitement of the next election, I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives a copy of the manifesto, which will clearly show him and the country that Labour will commit the resources that are necessary to maintain this country's defence.

The hon. Member for Sutton was so myopic in his intervention. He failed to recall the comments of the Minister at the beginning of his speech, when he said that, since 1989, this Conservative Government had cut 25 per cent. out of the defence budget. The hon. Gentleman should get the facts and listen to his own Minister.

Mr. Colvin: Will the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to acknowledge that the 25 per cent. reduction is entirely consistent with the expenditure of our North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies?

Mr. Fatchett: I have no reason to say otherwise. The only exception—I am not advocating this as a policy, or the hon. Member for Sutton would get too excited and read it in another way—is France, which has gone in the other direction and made some increases in defence expenditure. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) was correct about the general trend among our NATO allies.

I have spent some time considering MOD mismanagement. It is right to do so. That wasted money should be available for our troops and for our front-line functions. It is not available, simply because of the Government's mismanagement.

I should like to discuss an important issue that the Minister raised. He is right to say that, without an efficient industrial base, we cannot support our defence requirements. The two go hand in glove. I was delighted to hear him say that Britain's industrial future will be taken into account when procurement decisions are taken. I congratulate him on that. He has shifted the Government's ground. We welcome that. They are going much more in the direction that we have been advocating for some time. It would be churlish of us not to congratulate the Minister now that he is moving towards our ground.

I welcome the decision taken in the past 12 months—not by the MOD, but by the Department of Trade and Industry—to refer the British Aerospace and GEC bids for VSEL to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. That is the right decision. Again, we asked for it. It is crucial that national and defence interests should be taken into account by the MMC. The Government should recognise, as they did on that occasion, that leaving everything to the market is not the best way of securing Britain's defence interests and its industry.

In the past few years under this Conservative Government, a significant shift and decline has taken place in our manufacturing base. Highly skilled jobs that are important for our industrial future have been lost in our defence-related industries. There has been a significant decline. We need to recognise that, and to fit that into procurement policy.

When the Minister talked about the three requirements of procurement policy, he raised questions as well as provided answers. He talked about a need for a standard requirement in terms of procurement and of the item under question. He talked about the need for an industrial base and for competition. He also referred to an industrial dimension. He will recognise—perhaps the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will comment on this in winding up—that a substantial restructuring of defence industries is taking place in Europe and in the United States of America. We must decide to what extent that restructuring will be assisted in any way by Government, or whether it will be left to the market.

We must also decide whether that restructuring will be undertaken on a UK-Atlantic basis, on a UK-only basis, or as part of broader European integration. If so, are we moving into common European procurement? What does that mean in terms of the Government's wish for competition? Does it mean substantial restructuring of the defence industries, with only one capability in each European Union country—Germany undertaking one function, the UK another, and France another? Is that the Government's objective? A common procurement policy poses real and substantial dangers to Britain's industry. We need to discuss them.

In winding up, the Minister should make abundantly clear the Government's intentions in relation to Britain's industry and, in particular, to the relationship with Europe. I know that it is difficult for Conservative Members to

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raise the issue of Europe without getting into great difficulties, but key issues exist here and they must be dealt with for the sake of British jobs, British industry and British companies. We need to hear what Ministers are thinking. They should not be frightened of their own Back Benchers: they need to face up to those issues.

Mr. Freeman: I hope that I did not confuse the hon. Gentleman. I tried to set out clearly our present procurement policies. Collaboration within Europe is a separate issue from Government funding of restructuring or diversification—call it what you will—within the United Kingdom industrial base.

Our policy is clear: that is a matter for industry, and not for the taxpayer. We have no intention of funding a diversification agency, as is being tried in the United States, because we do not believe that that is the most efficient way forward. It is for industry to make its own decisions about either looking for more exports or rationalising production, and it has been successful in doing that.

Will the hon. Gentleman set out clearly whether any future Labour Government would commit additional funds, separate from Konver—the European Union funding programme, with which the hon. Gentleman will be familiar—for conversion of the defence manufacturing base? If so, how much?

Mr. Fatchett: The right hon. Gentleman has raised an interesting point about diversification, and I will answer it. However, I should like to tease out of the Minister the view that he expressed in the early part of that intervention.

I believe that the Minister said that it is not the Government's responsibility to use taxpayers' money to help restructure industry—I would not want to misquote him. I understand that: the Government may have a role, but not in terms of making available taxpayers' money. The Government have accepted that, because of their decision to refer the VSEL case to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

I want to tease from the Minister the extent to which the Government see themselves as having a responsibility to restructure Britain's defence industries, either in line with some European process or in another way which sees Britain standing alone, or perhaps in some alliances across the Atlantic with United States companies. That is the important issue. In that way, the Government would be using not taxpayers' money but their own good offices. I want to know what the Government's direction is.

Mr. Freeman: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. Clearly the Government are involved in the restructuring of British industry, not in terms of directing what GEC, British Aerospace or Rolls-Royce should do—that must be for industry—but as the procurer and the spender of upwards of £10 billion of research, development and procurement moneys. Clearly, the Government's procurement policies must have an effect on the industrial base.

The hon. Gentleman will wish to read my comments at his leisure, but I did say that, if Governments—the procurers—collaborate on a European basis, they can require competition at the industrial level. That competition on a European scale will lead inevitably to the restructuring of the European defence manufacturing base.

Mr. Fatchett: We have opened up an interesting area of debate, and I suspect that the Minister and I could spend some time discussing it. I am delighted that the Minister has pushed the Government's policy along substantially towards a recognition that there might be a need for something called an industrial policy. I wish that we could transfer this Minister to the Department of Trade and Industry, where his comments are much needed and could be important for the future.

I am sure that the Minister would not wish me to avoid reference to diversification. I recognise that there is an important responsibility to assist the process of change. It can be played out in different ways. The Government have had a minimal role in that process, and have left most of it to the market. They could play a more active role in terms of dual-use technology and looking for ways in which the process of change could be helped.

That is why we have talked about the need for a defence diversification agency. We have always recognised that it would be a slim body, and that its funding would not be substantial, but it would change the climate and culture, and try to ensure that companies that have had a long-standing relationship with the Ministry of Defence could look for new markets and operate in new ways. It would be a culture-changing agency, and it is crucial.

The Merchant Navy is crucial to the success of the Royal Navy. It is often overlooked in these debates. In 1982, talking about the Falklands, Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse said:

> "I cannot state often enough or too clearly how important has been the Merchant Navy's contribution to our efforts. Without the ships taken up from trade the operation could not have been undertaken and I hope that this message is clearly understood by the British nation."

It might have been understood by the British nation, but I wonder whether it has been understood by the Government. Since 1980, the level of tonnage on merchant shipping for the United Kingdom has fallen to a third of the level 15 years ago. That is a substantial decline. There are those on both sides of the House who raise serious questions about whether the Merchant Navy could fulfil again the functions that it has fulfilled in the Gulf—at substantial cost—and in the Falklands.

In last year's debate, the then Minister, now the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said, with all the dynamic nature of his market approach to politics, that the Government would keep an eye on the Merchant Navy. If he did that, he would see that it has declined both in size and in the contribution that it could make.

The Minister who opened the debate today is more active, more of an interventionist. I look to him to make sure not just that he keeps an eye on the Merchant Navy but that he recognises the contribution that it has made, and could make in the future. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said that, with that reference, the Minister could be the new Chief Secretary.

When looking at last year's debate, I noticed that the winding-up speech was made by the present Chief Secretary, and the debate was opened by the current chairman of the Conservative party. I do not know

whether that is seen as promotion within the Conservative party nowadays. However, I must tell both the current Ministers that one great possibility is open to them if they join the Cabinet—they no longer seem to be bound by collective responsibility. They will be able to speak freely on all the issues that are important to them.

Some of the broader arguments have run through all these debates over the years. They include the questions of commitment and resources. As politicians—the Government in particular, because they have a greater responsibility—we have missed an opportunity to engage in an important debate for Britain in terms of a cold war world. We have seen a clear threat disappear, but we have not clearly defined our new roles. I must tell the Defence Ministers that "Options for Change" and "Front Line First" have not engaged in that exercise.

There is a strong criticism that the conclusions of those studies were Treasury-led rather than foreign policy-led, and we need to ensure that we work out our foreign policy options and requirements. Defence is the support of those requirements and options. That is why the Opposition have been arguing consistently for a full defence review.

That argument has a great deal of intellectual weight and merit. Our view is supported by people in the services, those who used to be in the services and academics who understand the issues. All those individuals understand that we need to put together three crucial aspects—our future foreign policy role, the defence requirements to fulfil that role, and the industrial base to ensure that we can do it. A future Labour Government will engage in that full defence review, because that is the way for the future.

There is an element of cheek in the Secretary of State and his Ministers—the salami Ministers from the Ministry of Defence—saying that Labour would mean uncertainty for our armed forces. I think that everyone in the armed forces agrees that if, in the desperate months in the run-up to the next election, the Government are faced with the choice of cutting public expenditure on defence and offering tax cuts, they will go for tax cuts. That is the greatest uncertainty for our defence forces. Only Labour offers a clear policy.

Our defence forces—the Royal Navy and others—would benefit from a stable Government with a clear majority and a sense of purpose. Only Labour can offer that on defence. The Chief Secretary, whom I quoted earlier, said that, if defence was not safe in the hands of a Tory Government, that Government were nothing. I think that he was right on both counts: defence is not safe in the hands of this Government, and the Government are nothing. The electorate know that, and the Government will be out of office soon.

5.30 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I welcome the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) to his new post on the Opposition Front Bench. We shall enjoy his contributions enormously over what I hope will be a prolonged period: I trust that he will stay on the Opposition Front Bench for many years to come. I thank him for his kind remarks about the Select Committee on Defence and my contribution to its work. What they did for my popularity with my colleagues I am not sure, but, none the less, it was very kind of him to draw attention to the Committee's work.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central quoted the Select Committee's report. I think that it was wrong to cut 25 per cent. from our defence expenditure. Since 1985, the world has become a significantly more dangerous place. I say that for two reasons, and I think that it is worth outlining them briefly.

The first is that Russia is not a lesser threat to security than the Soviet Union was. In the 50 years or so since the last world war, we have had what in retrospect we can clearly see to have been a prolonged period of peace because of the nuclear stand-off between the Soviet Union and the west. The Soviet Union was not really going to attack western Europe and we certainly were not going to attack the Soviet Union, but there is now a grey area in central Europe. However, we shall stand by it and not allow it to be taken back into a communist regime. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia can rely, and should be able to rely, on western intervention if Russia were to reinvade them. Under Mr. Yeltsin that will, one hopes, not occur, but Mr. Yeltsin's regime is not secure.

Members of the Select Committee went to Russia last year. The most depressing part of our trip was to discover that not even senior members of the current regime in Russia were prepared to tell us that they thought that they were secure. Usually when one goes to a foreign country, even if it is on the brink of revolution, the people in power will not admit to a foreigner that they are not secure. However, every Russian to whom I spoke in the current Administration said that they did not think that their positions were secure. They were extremely fearful of being overthrown by a Zhirinovsky-type regime, not necessarily by Mr. Zhirinovsky himself but by someone who shares his ideals—perhaps "ideals" is not the right word to describe his wish to recreate a Russian empire and reoccupy the areas which Russia once ruled.

I do not think that we can safely allow our defences to stay at a level that might not allow us to face the possibility—I hope to God that is only a faint possibility—that the west and Russia will confront one another in the foreseeable future over democratic government in the central European countries that have now turned their faces to the west. We cannot safely ignore that danger.

Nor can we safely ignore the possibility of something happening in the middle east, where fundamentalist Islamic regimes are expanding their power base and moving into Egypt and Algeria and along the north African coast in what looks like an inexorable advance of that philosophy.

That philosophy is hostile to the west and must pose the danger of a major war or a possible one-off attack by a lunatic such as, for example, Colonel Gaddafi unleashing a missile or two on Europe.

They are the two main dangers facing our country and our allies in the next 10 years or so, and our defences must be sufficient to deal with them. I regret the cuts introduced under "Options for Change" but I shall not dwell on that because the case has already been well made. We must and will now begin to re-establish the strength of our military forces.

I deal now with specific matters in which the Select Committee has been interested and on which it reported to the House. We raised several issues arising from the report in a debate on the defence estimates last October. I am delighted that in many instances the Government

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

responded to our anxieties and dealt with the shortcomings that we outlined. For example, I am very pleased with the order for the Sandown class mine counter measure vessels. We have 18; the Ministry has identified a minimum of 25 as necessary and we are now tackling the shortfall. I am a little disappointed about the time scale but hope that Ministers will be able to speed up progress and ensure that we reach the required number earlier rather than later in the first decade of the next century.

I welcome the fact that the Trafalgar class will get Spearfish torpedoes and welcome the continuing programme for building and equipping our submarine fleet. Last year, the Russians built and commissioned as many submarines as we have in our entire fleet. They also commissioned the most powerful cruiser in the world, so we must not take our eyes off the potential threat with which the Royal Navy might have to deal.

We welcomed the amphibious replacement programme, especially the HMS Ocean helicopter landing platform. We also welcome what my right hon. Friend the Minister said today about the two assault ships. I am pleased that we now have a firm programme for the replacement of HMS Fearless and Intrepid. I am a little concerned about the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. I know that the "O" class tankers are to be replaced but I am not absolutely clear about when. They are old, and I hope that we can formulate a programme quickly.

We have three Rovers and three Leaf class support ships, which are also getting old. As far as I know, there are no plans to replace them, but I hope that they can be added to the programme of new shipping.

The Merchant Navy is, of course, a vital part of our defence strategy. It is extremely important that it is always able to carry our troops wherever they are needed and that it could, if necessary, once again launch a Falkland-type operation. The Select Committee took evidence on the Merchant Navy yesterday and was assured that the Ministry of Defence is confident that it could do so. We examined in detail the facts put to us and will report fully to the House in due course.

At this stage, I am still concerned about the number of people in the Merchant Navy reserve and the number of ships available. A paper exercise is being carried out in the next week or two to ascertain whether we could launch a Falkland-type operation. The Chamber of Shipping has been asking for such an exercise for a long time, and I welcome the fact that it is at last being undertaken.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman refers to the fact that we now have insufficient merchant ships to launch a Falklands-type campaign. Does he agree that we now have insufficient dockyard capacity to launch a Falklands-type campaign?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is no, I would not accept that. We probably could launch such a campaign. Our dockyard capacity certainly has shrunk, but it has not been suggested to me that we could not launch a Falklands-type campaign for that reason. I shall ensure that we address the hon. Gentleman's point, but at the moment I do not think that his fears are justified.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central said that the Select Committee has been highly critical—as, indeed, it has—about the way in which the decision to close Eaglescliff and the other naval stores and to centralise them in Portsmouth was undertaken. Committee members were not, however, critical about the conclusion. We were critical about the way in which it was undertaken, and justifiably so. The Ministry has accepted most of our criticisms and in its reply to us, which is in the Library, it has accepted that the way in which that decision was taken was flawed. I hope that it will not happen again.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): The Select Committee made some important criticisms and, as my hon. Friend said, we took them on board. I should like my hon. Friend to know that we remain determined to handle such matters better in future and I like to think that, as a result of that report and the actions that we have taken, we shall do so.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I welcome his statement and I am sure that what happened will not be repeated. To be fair to him, most of the front-line study reports submitted to the Defence Select Committee were very full and had clearly been very well thought through. Naval stores were the exception not the rule. *[Laughter.]* The way in which that particular decision on naval stores was taken was the exception not the rule. Most of the reports are extremely full and I do not think that the Ministry should be criticised on the generality. As my hon. Friend said, there certainly was a flaw in the way in which the Ministry went about the decision on naval stores.

I very much welcome the fact that training will become the responsibility of a defence agency. I hope that there will be a vigorous programme of market testing, as the Ministry has promised, that it will begin soon and that we shall be able to see its results.

The Committee regretted the closure of Manadon. I understand the reasons for it and that it was—possibly—inevitable. None the less, it is a great loss to the Royal Navy and the way in which we train our engineering officers. It is a great pity that the opportunity was missed to join with Shrivenham and put the engineering forces into that university. The Select Committee visited Shrivenham last year and saw that there was no doubt that it had the capacity to undertake such an additional course. It would have enhanced Shrivenham and would have fitted very much better into royal naval training than sending the potential royal engineer officers to Southampton, which is what will happen.

We hope that the Southampton university course will be a success and will turn out engineering officers who will stay in the Royal Navy. The Committee will watch closely how that situation develops, but I would be less than honest with my hon. Friend and the House if I did not express fears that it is not an adequate or satisfactory long-term solution to the way in which we train our engineering officers.

The Committee was concerned that, despite the assurances that we were given, there were excessive funding constraints on ships' exercises. We concluded that the failure to give adequate exercise to our royal naval vessels could lead, in time, to measurable deterioration in our operational standards. The Ministry's reply to the Committee observes that exercise cancellations are often the results of programming pressures and changing priorities in operational commitments. I accept that. In fact, it is another way of saying precisely what we are saying—that there are not enough ships and that they have

too much to do. At the moment, we cannot put our Royal Navy ships into the areas where they are needed and give them adequate exercise time in major warfare preparation, and that should be addressed.

I am very sad that we do not have a type 23 combined tactical trainer stage five simulator at HMS Dryad, or, indeed, anywhere else. That means that people who are training either for the new type 23 ships, or for the upgraded older ships that have been fitted with the same equipment, undergo training at sea during live operations, which is a great pity. It is a waste of resources and it must be very difficult for those conducting the training. Indeed, to have to run as a training base as well must be very difficult for ships' ordinary operations. It is unsatisfactory and I very much hope that my hon. Friend will address that in his winding-up speech and will be able to assure the House that when we order the Horizon frigate we shall ensure that we also order a training simulator. We are due to get a type 23 simulator, but not for at least another three years. That is three wasted years, which could have been avoided with a little foresight.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who, unfortunately, is not in his place, on the way in which he has handled the difficult issue of our industrial base. There will always be a stand-off between our defence needs—in other words, the need to give to our troops and our armed services the best available current equipment—and our need to ensure that we have a defence industrial base capable of meeting our needs in the longer term. An obvious example of that is the European fighter aircraft. It would have been very much cheaper and easier for us to have ordered the American aircraft, which are probably very nearly as good, but the view was taken, correctly, that Europe, and especially Great Britain, could not afford to lose the technical capability that we shall need in the longer term to ensure that we can equip ourselves with such aircraft.

There is a trade-off between what we need for our defence purposes and the industrial base that we need to preserve. My right hon. Friend set out clearly and very well the Government's approach to that. I welcome it and look forward to seeing what comes out of it in due course.

5.46 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). I entirely agree with his comments on the European fighter aircraft and I share some of his concerns about the developments in the former Soviet Union and the middle east over our security and foreign policy.

While another year has passed since the previous debate on the Royal Navy, the Navy has certainly dominated my agenda as a Member of Parliament. For instance, I am just about to complete the armed forces parliamentary scheme with the Navy, along with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves). I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that it has been an interesting, informative and invaluable programme. I am sure that we would both welcome the earlier announcement of the four new vessels for the hydrographic service, with which we spent an interesting day, during which we were greatly impressed by that excellent, world-class service. I am pleased to mention that service because we often tend to forget the invaluable role that it plays.

The armed forces parliamentary scheme has certainly introduced me to people and taken me to places I would never have thought possible. I have had meetings with admirals, I have been winched into helicopters and I have been saluted by men in uniform. I have had many memorable experiences, but probably the most memorable of all was my visit to HMS Nottingham with the hon. Member for Hall Green, when the ship was out in the Adriatic enforcing the arms embargo against the former Yugoslavia. There I found myself undertaking a jackstay transfer between HMS Nottingham and another vessel. It was quite an experience to find oneself dangling on a rope, buffeted by the wind, and with no secure, firm deck underneath one's feet.

More seriously, when I thought back on that jackstay transfer, which lasted for no more than five minutes, I realised that it has been the experience of Rosyth for the past five years. The base has felt itself to be dangling on a Treasury rope which is becoming ever slacker, with no firm deck of security underneath. The stress and strain of that insecurity has had many effects, not least on people's health. It is not entirely surprising that earlier this week, Walter Strachan, the industrial convenor at Rosyth naval base, was taken into hospital with chest pains. I am sure that the whole House wishes Walter a full and speedy recovery. While I was inquiring about his progress at Queen Margaret hospital in Dunfermline, I also inquired about another strong supporter of Rosyth, Lord Ewing. Again, I am sure that Members on both sides of the House wish him a full and speedy recovery.

During last year's Navy debate, I talked about the strategic and operational importance of Rosyth naval base. It is clear that my words fell on deaf ears, as did the words of many others. When we were assured last February that Rosyth's future was safe and that no decision had been taken, we did not believe that assurance and we certainly do not believe it now. Rosyth's experience of uncertainty and insecurity has lasted for five years. Two days before Christmas 1989, the first rumour came out that the closure of Rosyth naval base was firmly on the agenda for certain people within the Ministry of Defence. The campaign at that time was effective in preventing the closure. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that the intention to close Rosyth did not disappear. The campaign did, however, force the Government to adopt a salami-slicing approach rather than wielding a big axe. The decision to reduce the base to a minor war vessel operating base clearly weakened its position in the defence establishment and resulted in the loss of 800 civilian jobs and the transfer of 1,100 service personnel.

I protest about the manner in which the effective closure of the naval base and the decision on the naval stores were announced. To make the announcements in written answers was a way out for the Government. I accept that this week, at least, we have the opportunity, two days after the written answer, to have a proper debate about the decision on the naval stores. However, to confirm the decision on the effective closure of Rosyth naval base in a written answer not long before Christmas was unacceptable. It would have been far more honest for the Government at least to have made a statement on the Floor of the House which would have allowed questions to be asked immediately.

I return to the history of Rosyth's campaign. When the defence costs study was announced in November 1993, it was once again clear that Rosyth was a target for closure.

[Ms Rachel Squire]

Sure enough, despite the denials given, that was the recommendation made in July 1994. The decision was then confirmed. The Minister may be thinking, "What is new? We have heard all about Rosyth before." I can only repeat that there has been blow after blow for the loyal, dedicated and committed work force of Rosyth naval base who feel that their loyalty has been repaid with betrayal and broken promises. Moreover, they feel strongly that public money has been wasted. Some £63 million has been spent on improving facilities at the base. Substantial savings were made by the work force which have apparently been ignored.

Some 10,000 defence-related jobs are going in Fife between 1991 and 1996. That estimate was produced not by some Labour research team, but by the Fraser of Allander institute and McKay Consultants. Their report says clearly that Fife is an area where 30 per cent. of gross domestic product is defence-dependent. The unemployment rate is already 24 per cent. more than it is in the rest of Scotland. I would welcome the Minister telling us where those people can go to find alternative work and whether all of them will be offered jobs on the quangos referred to earlier.

I am well aware that defence-related job losses have not been confined to Rosyth and that the latest announcement on the naval support infrastructure affects areas all over the country. I especially mention Exeter, Devonport, Wrangaton and Eaglescliffe. I condemn the way in which the decisions were reached and announced. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) referred to the report by the Select Committee on Defence and to its criticism of the conduct of the defence costs study. I take this opportunity to quote paragraphs 9 and 12 of the report because they have widespread relevance and are not only relevant to naval stores.

The report says:

"The absence of any appraisal of alternative options from the naval support stores consultation documents means that they failed to provide for the proper degree of public accountability: and that the impression was given that the proposals were ill thought out and unlikely to withstand intensive scrutiny . . . Without the results of that investment appraisal it was unsafe for MoD to have reached a conclusion. MoD's view is that the confirmation in broad measure of its favoured option provided by the investment appraisals means that the work was 'nugatory'. We utterly reject that view. In matters of such significance, public and parliamentary accountability demands the production and publication of proper financial and operational appraisals, so that justice can be seen to have been done".

That point applies not only to the defence costs study on the naval support infrastructure, but to Rosyth naval base and, indeed, to Pitreavie. I hope that the Minister will listen to the concerns being expressed about the decisions on the naval support infrastructure, not just by Opposition Members, but by senior naval personnel who are concerned about the centralisation of the stores.

As I mentioned, the criticisms made by the Select Committee also referred to what has happened over Pitreavie. Yet again, this afternoon I had the dubious pleasure of finding on the notice board a letter with the Ministry of Defence insignia on it. I have learnt to dread such letters, as they always mean bad news and jobs lost, as my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) knows only too well.

Pitreavie thought that it had a secure future. Again, in the past two years, money has been spent on improving the facilities there. Less than two years ago, the Secretary of State for Defence announced that the rescue co-ordination centre for the United Kingdom would be at Pitreavie. In July, it was announced that the flag officer for Scotland, northern England and Northern Ireland would be moving to Faslane, as part of the effective closure of Rosyth naval base. That meant that the Government decided that Pitreavie was too costly for the RAF to stay there. Last year, the Secretary of State announced that the rescue co-ordination centre and the air officer would be transferred to Leuchars.

That was welcome news to Fife Members at that time, in particular to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). It was regarded as recognition that the people of Fife should be assured that their contribution to the defence of the realm and, in particular, their contribution to rescue co-ordination work were valued and would be retained. Rumours then started—of course, they were denied by the Ministry of Defence—that the rescue co-ordination centre was to go elsewhere, probably Kinloss. I hope that the Minister will confirm today that the RCC is to stay at Leuchars rather than at Kinloss. I would welcome an end to insecurity about Pitreavie and Leuchars.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way and, in particular, for the objective way in which she has put the case for the rescue co-ordination centre to be relocated from Pitreavie to RAF Leuchars in my constituency. Is she aware that, last week, the Royal Air Force in Scotland confirmed that the centre was to move to Kinloss, whereas the Ministry of Defence in London declined to give any confirmation whatever, and said that no decision had yet been reached?

Ms Squire: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his intervention. What he has recounted does not surprise me in the slightest. It is all too characteristic of the conduct of the Ministry of Defence. It also relates to crucial lessons that I urge the Ministry of Defence and the Government to learn in respect of the defence of this country and their treatment of those on whom we depend for the defence of the realm.

The Pitreavie saga and the future of the rescue co-ordination centre cause one to wonder who will lose most. Will it be the people whom the service is committed to rescuing or will it be the Government? Once again, we have a Government shambles masquerading as a defence review that involves more broken promises and more money leaving the Fife economy.

The removal of the operational facilities from Pitreavie undermines the future of a naval presence at Rosyth and fuels the widespread view that, however the Ministry of Defence might like to dress it up and talk about a Royal Navy support establishment, in effect it is severing the Navy's links with Rosyth, which will lead to complete closure. It is also characteristic of the Government's defence policy that we in Fife are to be left with holes in the ground. We already have the infamous RD57, and it now looks as though we will have the reinforced concrete bunker at Pitreavie.

Reference to RD57 leads me to Rosyth dockyard. It is not only naval base personnel who have been involved in that permanent jackstay transfer of uncertainty and

insecurity; so, too, have the dockyards. In the mid-1980s, Rosyth and Devonport had to deal with partial privatisation. The dockyards then had the fierce argument about where submarine and surface ship refitting work would be allocated. Both dockyards now face full privatisation. When the major customer will always be the Ministry of Defence, when the Ministry of Defence will always have a major interest in those workplaces, and when there is only one bidder for each yard, it is a waste of time and money to proceed with privatisation.

I will give the Minister credit for visiting the dockyard recently. His interest and his personal attention were much appreciated by the work force and the management at the dockyard. I hope that there will be a continuing improvement in direct communication between the upper echelons of the Ministry of Defence and those on the ground who are working for the defence of the country day in, day out. Privatisation, if it proceeds, will make it even more important that the dockyards are treated equally and receive contractual guarantees of the work that is allocated to them in future. I ask the Minister to give me such a guarantee tonight.

I seek further assurances from the Minister. First, I seek an assurance that all decommissioned submarines will be removed from Rosyth, following the welcome assurance that RD57 would not be turned into a graveyard for decommissioned hulks. Secondly, I ask the Minister to repeat that the allocated programme of surface ship work for Rosyth will include aircraft carriers. Thirdly, I seek an assurance that the work force at both dockyards will have their pension arrangements honoured and their redundancy entitlements met.

I should like clarification of the Minister's statement concerning other options. Perhaps I am paranoid and suspicious about such phrases.

I now refer to other immediate action that the Government should take in respect of Rosyth and Pitreavie and to some of the overall lessons that are to be learnt. If the Government are serious about offering the Rosyth complex a future and security, we need a positive, co-ordinated approach that will assist employment creation and economic regeneration in an area that is heavily dependent on defence. Nearly 80 per cent. of the naval bases' work force are resident in the Dunfermline district, and approximately 85 per cent. of commercial defence-related output emanates from the Dunfermline district. Economic activity must be stepped up a gear if the Fife economy is to have a chance of staying afloat.

I welcome previous statements about the need for a central Government initiative, but I should like the Minister to answer some questions. First, what resources will the Government allocate to Fife to deal with such high unemployment? In particular, what hard cash will be made available? Secondly, will the Minister update us on what the Scottish Office task force is doing? Thirdly, what is happening about the disposal of land and assets at the Rosyth complex? Will the Ministry of Defence undertake all necessary work to ensure that contaminated land, premises and facilities are properly treated? What was meant by an earlier statement about the responsibility for the whole site and not just a part, and a rejection of the piecemeal approach? Is the MOD now trying to walk away completely from the whole Rosyth site, or will it be realistic and accept that it will always have interests and responsibility?

Fourthly, what arrangements are being made to provide the men and women who are facing redundancy with an integrated package which offers proper training and the realistic hope of a job at the end of it? Will the Minister establish an integrated training initiative? What will the Minister do to encourage companies to come to the area and provide real and decently paid permanent jobs, and not casual, short-term and low-paid work?

I draw attention to some general lessons which the Government need to learn from the way in which they have dealt with the Rosyth and Pitreavie work forces. They should reward the loyalty, commitment and dedication of the naval personnel and civilian work forces by providing them at least with some relatively secure decks on which to stand.

I shall quote from the Royal Navy's "Broadsheet" article on the defence costs study, which states:

> "It was recognised that, following the changes that have occurred in recent years culminating with "Front Line First", there is a need for stability . . . Change is likely to be a continuing theme but everything will be done to minimize its many effects on those who serve in the Navy and especially upon their morale . . . We have to recognise that change is endemic and strategic uncertainty probably as great as ever before in our history. Nevertheless the Navy Board will be aiming for stability in the fundamental structure of the Service."

If the Government and the Navy are serious about those statements, I suggest they do a number of things.

First, I should like to pick up on a comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) that the Government should conduct a full defence review, rather than one led by Treasury demands. That view is not just confined to myself or to Opposition Members. I have had contact with naval personnel and civilian work forces all over the country as a result of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. One of the constant themes—whatever the ship, base or facility that I visited—has been the strong feeling of insecurity and uncertainty at a Treasury-led defence policy, where decisions are determined by the Chancellor rather than by the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Lady's call for a full defence review seems to be a shroud behind which she can hide a non-existent defence policy. Through "Options For Change" and the defence costs study we have had what amounts to a full-scale defence review. What more can the Labour party offer?

Ms Squire: There is a widespread view, not only among naval personnel but among all sections of the armed forces—including retired members—and among academics that the questions posed by the end of the cold war which require difficult issues to be debated have not been adequately dealt with by the Government. There is a feeling that defence reductions have been initiated by Treasury demands for savings. An overall review would outline the strategic and operational requirements for the next five years, and would take us into the 21st century. We will decide on the basis of those decisions what level of defence expenditure will be necessary.

Mr. Colvin: It seems to be inconsistent of the hon. Lady to, on the one hand, report to the House that the

[Mr. Colvin]

armed forces are calling for stability while, on the other, reporting that they are calling for a further defence review with all the instability and uncertainty that that engenders?

Ms Squire: Naval personnel are looking for some stability and certainty, but they are criticising what has happened to them in the past few years. They feel that the Government's defence policy has lurched from one Treasury-determined objective to another. My impression, from my contact with members of the Royal Navy and the civilian work force, is that the person who they would nominate to put out on a permanent jackstay transfer—or, even better, to walk the plank—is none other than the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Some Conservative Members may feel that it might be an attraction if, at the next election, the Chancellor of the Exchequer offered to walk the plank.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): Like my hon. Friend, I was one of the first Members to have the benefit of taking part in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, and I spent some considerable time with the Royal Navy. In addition to the well-made points which she has put to the House, does she feel that one of the fundamental difficulties which the major leaders in the armed forces—the First Sea Lord, the Air Marshal and the head of the Army—find is that they are put in an unstable position because they plainly do not know what the Government want them to do?

Ms Squire: I entirely agree with the excellent points made by my hon. Friend.

There are other lessons which the Government must learn. There was widespread agreement among naval personnel that the Navy can take no further cuts. The feeling is that it has been cut to the bone, and there is no spare flesh. There is also a widespread view that the defence procurement policy of the Government is still unsatisfactory, and that there is a waste of money because of the overpricing of both basic items, such as telephones, and complex equipment. There is a strong feeling that the time that people are being asked to spend away from their families is being unfairly increased.

I return to the argument that was made earlier about people saying that they need some stability and feel uncertain and insecure. I hope that the Government will find ways of listening more closely to what is being said by those who daily serve in the defence of the country.

The third specific lesson that I would ask the Government to take on board is the one that was reflected earlier in the comments of the Second Report of the Defence Select Committee concerning the naval infrastructure—the need for openness, for full consultation and for a complete review of the process of managing and proposing change.

I think that we all agree that the country's defence depends on people. However high-tech and expensive the equipment that is available to us, loyal, dedicated and skilled people are needed to make it, maintain it and use it. The Government must start to demonstrate far more clearly their appreciation of the loyalty, commitment and dedication of defence personnel, the civilian work forces and their families. An invaluable way of doing so would be to provide more accurate information and proper consultation and to give those people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central said, a sense of values.

The fourth lesson that I urge the Government to learn from the process of the defence costs study is one that has already been mentioned: the whole business of taking into account industrial procurement. I welcome the hints that have been given about that. I have a special interest in respect of the future of our warship building capacity, and I feel compelled to express again my dismay at the tragic loss and closure of Swan Hunter and the waste of such valuable skills.

It appears that the future of what is left of our warship building capacity is insecure, and I look to the Minister to give an assurance that the long-term procurement plans of the Navy are sufficient to maintain the remaining warship building capacity in this country.

I quote the Defence Select Committee again, which said in its Fifth Report of Session 1993-94, at paragraph 96:

"The United Kingdom industrial base is a strategic asset and must be safeguarded accordingly. We believe that it would be unwise to rely entirely on even our closest Allies to provide surge capacity as they have their own priorities and their industry may wish to supply their own national forces first."

In conclusion, I am determined, as are my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and other Opposition Members, that the lessons to be learnt from Rosyth's experience should be neither forgotten nor repeated. I would not wish any other group of naval personnel or civilian work forces to be treated in the way that I think that the Rosyth work force have been treated by the Government.

I trust that, in his reply, the Minister will demonstrate that lessons have indeed been learnt, that the Government are committed to the best traditions of the Royal Navy and the defence of the realm, and that they intend to provide some security for all those who serve our country so well.

6.23 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I am especially grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and especially pleased to follow the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), because we are just completing our attachment to the Royal Navy under the armed forces parliamentary scheme, and I should like to say what a pleasure it was to accompany her on the various visits; some of those visits were slightly more hairy than others, notably the jackstay transfer.

We were both enormously impressed by the way in which the scheme was organised. We should like to thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and ask him to pass on our thanks for the way in which it was organised and for the value that was attached to the scheme.

I also wish to put on record our appreciation of the immense professionalism and cheerfulness of all ranks—officers and other ranks—and the positive attitude, despite some difficult circumstances and change, of all those in the Royal Navy whom we met. It impressed us and we are very pleased to note it for the House.

In a previous debate, I and other hon. Members questioned the concept that the world had become a safer place than it was during the cold war, and therefore the logic that lay behind the massive reductions that have

taken place in our defence budgets since "Options for Change". In that, I wish to identify my remarks specifically with those of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor).

Indeed, if anything, the contrary is now true, in that the world is a less stable place and we are more likely rather than less likely to need our armed forces to protect British or western or European interests. For that, we perhaps need a different balance of forces. The recent exercise of defence costs studies made some progress in trying to solve that problem, and I pay tribute to the Ministers and their predecessors on the Front Bench for the way in which they approached that exercise.

However, if one is to consider, as perhaps we should, the role that we might foresee for our armed forces in the next five or six years, one thing is absolutely for sure—the Royal Navy is crucial and pivotal to the type of force projection that one might imagine to be necessary, especially where there are likely to be extremely sensitive political considerations.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West referred to our participation on board one of Her Majesty's ships in the Adriatic as part of Operation Sharp Guard. That is only one type of activity that exemplifies the way in which the Royal Navy is pivotal to the ability to project a force in an extremely difficult area.

The Royal Navy and any navy like it, but especially the Royal Navy, possesses certain advantages for this purpose. They are: the ability to maintain a self-sustained presence for long periods; a self-sufficiency even where there are no friendly bases in the vicinity; controlled increase or decrease in the scale of force projection required and the possibility of temporary or complete commitment, or indeed withdrawal, as for example might be the case from Bosnia; the choice of highly visible or covert operations; and the advantage of using the same tools, perhaps with the possible exception of SSBNs, as would be used in total war. The Royal Navy therefore affords an extraordinarily potent stand-off capability, or stand-to capability, while using exactly the same investment that the taxpayer has already made for full-scale engagement as might be envisaged during a war.

However, if one believes that that type of force projection is necessary—as it may well be—to defend British interests, or to act for humanitarian purposes, in the next five or six years, one needs to consider the assets that the Royal Navy might need. I wish to single out the role of the aircraft carrier. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement mentioned HMS Invincible, which is shortly to be replaced in deployment in the Adriatic by HMS Illustrious.

I joined the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West on board an aircraft carrier. We were impressed because, in many ways, such a vessel is the only unit that can provide for a task group a platform capable of two essential ingredients of any military effectiveness. It has the broad spectrum of capabilities in one ship, ranging from organic self-defence or external defence and land attack, through surface warfare, to a highly potent anti-submarine warfare capability, which allows it to carry out composite war commander's duties, whatever those might be in that area. It can also move on along the high seas almost anywhere in the world, where it can poise in international waters without commitment or the need for any host nation to support it.

The naval aircraft launched from that vessel might be the first on the scene in any particular situation, which would therefore grant politicians or military commanders alike a number of variable options not otherwise available, at immediate notice.

With that in mind, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who raised with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement the need to start thinking now about replacing one or two of our aircraft carriers, which, in 10 years, will almost certainly be beyond refit capability. HMS Ark Royal is the oldest and would probably be the first to fit the bill. I hope that Ministers will consider seriously now what to do about those extremely important and capable assets in the future, because the cost of replacing or refitting a number of extremely expensive items of defence expenditure could be lumped together rather dangerously in 10 years' time.

The need for any task group force must be considered in conjunction with the need for submarine capability and frigate or destroyer escort. My right hon. Friend the Minister has already mentioned the extremely welcome news about the order for more type 23 frigates. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will be able to confirm that the communications systems on those frigates have been improved. I understand from Royal Navy personnel that the existing system posed some problems, so I look forward to my hon. Friend's confirmation that they have been resolved satisfactorily. It would be a great pity to have ship which could not be used in the type of operations we are currently running, for example Operation Sharp Guard. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to offer me good news.

On submarine warfare, I was pleased to hear about the likely orders for batch 22 Trafalgar class submarines. I was also extremely pleased to hear at the time of the defence costs study about the possibility of fitting Tomahawk cruise missiles on those submarines in due course. That would give the Royal Navy an even greater stand-off capability to poise and to deliver a potent threat where necessary. That would enormously improve the way in which we could subtly escalate or de-escalate, if necessary, a military commitment or threat. Those weapons offer a huge advantage because they can be fired from a position unknown to any possible enemy. Those submarines are therefore able to operate from a cloaked position, perhaps well away from any other task group that might be deployed in the area.

One of the most important subjects about which Ministers have spoken and which has been referred to recently in Navy journals, is amphibiosity. In any discussions about the role of the Royal Navy in the next six years, amphibiosity must be the key to our ability to deliver or extricate forces in any given situation. The order for the landing platform docks is therefore good news.

I am also pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister has been able to put a time, finally, on the order for the replacement of Fearless and Intrepid. I hope that it will not be subject to any delay, because it has been flagged up on a number of occasions. I hope that that promise is crystallised into reality.

At the time of the defence costs study the excellent idea of a joint rapid defence force was mentioned, but things have gone rather quiet since then. From the discussions

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that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West and I had with members of the armed services during our attachment, we know that they are keen on that idea. They were rather disappointed that they had not heard more about it.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend has raised the most important matter of a JRDF. I am glad that he is excited by that prospect. He will understand that that concept requires a great deal of work to get the operations and strategy deployment correct. I can assure him that a great deal of work is going on and we hope to be able to make a detailed announcement, certainly not in the near future, but in the medium future. We are anxious to complete that work as soon as we can.

Dr. Reid: It has been crystallised.

Mr. Hargreaves: Yes, it has.

I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for that announcement, which will be widely welcomed in the Royal Navy and by the other forces.

I also welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement about the new hydrographic vessel. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West and I were extraordinarily impressed by the professionalism of the service operated under the command of Captain H at the hydrographic squadron. I am sure that the hon. Lady shares my pleasure that the new vessel is considerably larger than the existing one. It will be a great extension to the squadron's capability, because it has long argued for a longer hull to improve its sea-keeping capabilities so that it can put to sea, irrespective of the weather, in whichever section it is asked to operate. The members of the squadron will be able to keep going on-station, without having to dive because of storms and so forth. The squadron will be delighted by the announcement.

There is a slight question mark over that vessel, however, because I read somewhere that it might have a maximum speed capability of not more than 17 knots. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will prick up his ears at that, because, given our aim to have ships that are flexible in terms of investment, whether they are used in a Falklands operation or anywhere else, we should consider whether there is a cheap way to improve that speed should the need arise. That would be in the interests of joint force operability at a later stage.

A number of concerns became apparent to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West and I during our various visits to ships and ships' companies. I had intended to allude to them, but they have already been mentioned by the hon. Lady. My hon. Friend the Minister knows, however, about my concern about the pressure on family life when ships' crews are at sea, whether on Operation Sharp Guard or elsewhere, and away from the home port for seven months or more. Everything that we can do to reduce that time spent at sea would be greatly appreciated.

I cannot resist mentioning morale. Despite the tribulations which have been experienced by the Royal Navy and the other services as the result of several changes, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West and I found that morale in the Royal Navy is remarkably good, all things considered. I do not feel that it will be enormously improved by the comments by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), who could not resist his classist, socialist revanchism by pointing out the differentials between the pay of officers and other ranks. It would have been interesting to hear whether the Labour party intended to change that. The First Sea Lord happened to be in the Gallery at that time and I am sure that he was interested in those comments as well. Such remarks will not help him as he tries to attract quality graduates to become officers in the Royal Navy. It will not help those graduates, nor those chief petty officers and others who aspire to be officers if the politics of envy are introduced even on matters of pay into debates here.

Dr. Reid: Far be it for any of us to introduce the politics of envy, but we cannot accept the hon. Member's proposition that it is not a fall of 15 per cent. in real terms in the wages of ratings and squaddies that is wrong, but the fact that the Labour party should remark upon it. Is it not essential, especially at a time of instability and rapid change, that the esprit de corps, comradeship and unity in the armed forces should be strengthened and increased by equality of treatment and fairness rather than that the differential that existed in 1979 should be increased by a huge percentage?

Mr. Hargreaves: The House is better informed for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I can assure him that one thing that we did not encounter on our visit to the Royal Navy was serious unhappiness about pay. The unhappiness that we mentioned came from instability rather than pay.

The other unhappiness that is worth mentioning, if I can call it that—and I am sure the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West will agree—had more to do with the internal differentiation of jobs within the Royal Navy than with almost anything else. That was a key factor in the ward rooms. It did not involve the relative earnings of officers and junior ranks. I shall pass over that as it was not a helpful contribution from the hon. Member for Leeds, Central.

Finally, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West and I were enormously impressed by the job that the Royal Navy does. I hope that one message we send back from these debates is that we appreciate those who serve in the Royal Navy and we support them, no matter what strictures are imposed by budgets from the Treasury or the requirements of Foreign Office inspired commitments that we cannot always control, although we would like to do so—and that does not always make their lives easier. We appreciate that they do an extraordinarily good job, in sometimes extremely difficult circumstances.

6.41 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): These single service debates allow the opportunity for concentration on the particular service with which they are concerned, but they also give us a chance to debate some of the wider strategic issues and to apply our minds to the strategic context in which the Royal Navy has to operate.

Looking round the House, since approximately six and a half years ago when I first spoke in a defence debate in the House, I do not remember an occasion when the House was quite so thinly populated. That is a pity because the importance of all three services—and today's debate emphasises the importance of the Royal Navy—certainly cannot be underestimated.

Had he still been present, I would have liked to welcome the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), who opened the debate on behalf of the Opposition, to the first defence debate he has addressed from the Opposition Front Bench. He made an extremely competent and quite combative speech. Not surprisingly, like others who have spoken from the Labour Front Bench in recent times, he laid some stress on the policy of what is sometimes called, "a fundamental defence review", "a full-scale defence review" and "a far-ranging defence review", and I shall return to that in a moment.

The message which is transmitted to any of us who have spoken to commanders at all levels of the armed forces is that the one thing that they desperately require is a period of stability and calm. We tend to forget that the political decisions about "Options for Change" and "Front Line First" have been taken and announced, but that those decisions have not yet been fully implemented and there is a period of disruption yet to come. Only yesterday, there was an announcement in the newspapers about further redundancies at senior levels in the Army.

I am one who in the past has argued vehemently for a full-scale defence review. There was a time, particularly in the period immediately after the announcement of "Options for Change" when the strategic context was changing so rapidly and fundamentally, when a full-scale defence review would have been entirely appropriate, but I am now of the view that that time may have passed.

Those of us who argue for a full-scale defence review, or have done so in the past, should now be arguing that the conduct of defence policy should depend on a number of principles. First, foreign policy should dictate defence policy. Secondly, resources should match commitment and, thirdly, we should accept the overwhelming presumption that the stability that senior commanders require is best met for the time being and for the foreseeable future by no further reductions in the defence budget.

I understand the intellectual case of those who argue vehemently for a full-scale defence review, but we cannot instigate such a review with an entirely open mind unless we are willing to consider increasing defence expenditure. I do not know of any defence review, fundamental or otherwise, ever carried out in the United Kingdom containing a resolution that defence expenditure should be increased, with the possible exception of the rather fraught circumstances of the 1930s, when after a period of total lack of resolution, investment in defence became necessary as a matter of survival.

Dr. Reid: I have listened carefully to the hon. and learned Gentleman, who speaks with great authority in these matters and I understand the point he makes and the requirement and desire for a period of stability in the armed forces. However, the three principles that he Gentleman set out contain an inherent contradiction.

The hon. and learned Gentleman's first point was that foreign and defence policies should match, his second requirement was that resources and commitments should be matched, and his third and vital one was the presumption that the status quo fulfils the first and second requirements. The status quo patently does not fulfil a match of resource and commitments of foreign policy and defence which is precisely why we need to bring them into alignment and one can not do that in a rational fashion without a defence review.

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman had listened he would have heard me say that there should be a presumption for the foreseeable future that there will be no more raids on the defence budget. I am one of those who argues strongly that if a political settlement is achieved in Northern Ireland, that should not be seen as an excuse for a further raid on the defence budget by the Treasury. There is a full range of tasks which the United Kingdom land Army could perform in furtherance of the United Nations and for which it has special skills; we should be making our forces available for that purpose.

If on 14 October 1997, or perhaps rather earlier, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends march up the steps of the Ministry of Defence, call the chiefs of staff together and say, "The first thing we want is a full-scale defence review", if "Options for Change" and the defence costs study have not yet been implemented, those who contend that morale is fragile may be entirely justified by the response that they will get. We have to get way from what is essentially an absolutist position, and say that we will conduct our policy in accordance with certain principles.

It is a reasonable principle to say that the starting point should be that there is a presumption for the foreseeable future of no further cuts in the defence budget and that, in accordance with that presumption, we shall apply the principle that foreign policies should dictate defence policy and that resources should match commitments. I see nothing illogical in that, and it carries with it the benefits of that stability and period of calm for which I understand senior commanders are almost desperate because of the difficulties of morale which they identify in the conduct of their responsibilities as the head of their respective services.

We could not conduct a debate on defence without some reference to the debate on Europe which is taking place in the House and, perhaps more robustly, within the Cabinet Room in No.10 Downing street. In Luxembourg on Tuesday, 10 May 1994, when nine eastern European countries became associate members of the Western European Union, the Secretary of State was quoted as saying—I do not think that he has denied the accuracy of the quotation—that the evolution of a European Community defence policy was an "inevitable consequence" of the Maastricht treaty.

If that remark were widely publicised among some of the Secretary of State's hon. Friends, I think that it would cause considerable anxiety even now. I think that the Secretary of State is right, but I do not think that we will wake up one morning to find that a common European foreign and security policy has been declared. I think that such a policy will develop organically.

Elements of that development are already in place. There is extensive nuclear co-operation between France and the United Kingdom. It is not publicised very well, but it has been going on for 18 months to two years. The co-ordination of air resources between the two countries was announced some four or five months ago. The evolution of Eurocorps was first thought to pose some sort of threat to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the allied rapid reaction corps. However, it is now viewed

[Mr. Campbell]

as being rather more friendly to existing defence structures. The United Kingdom-Dutch amphibious force has existed for a considerable time.

The NATO summit of January 1994 recognised the opportunity for what were described as "combined joint task forces", whereby NATO's entire resources may be made available to European members of NATO for operations in which the United States would not expect to take part. Those existing components, which are of varying strength, will lead inevitably to the evolution of a far greater degree of integration in defence matters in Europe.

Another equally, if not more, compelling factor for integration is economics. Because defence inflation always runs ahead of what may be described as "ordinary" inflation, there will be continued economic pressure for force specialisation, for interoperability and for common procurement. I do not underestimate for a moment the difficulties of achieving those aims, but I believe that they will be driven by economic necessity.

The Navy is currently contributing to the force in the Adriatic which is enforcing the arms embargo in the former Yugoslavia. Hon. Members have already paid tribute to the professionalism of those who are engaged in that task, and I had the good fortune to see it at first hand when I visited HMS Ark Royal.

The force's presence in the Adriatic depends on the continuance of the embargo. I am implacably opposed to any lifting of the arms embargo, either unilaterally or multilaterally. I think that there will be general agreement about that matter in the House. How could we continue the remarkable humanitarian effort if the arms embargo were lifted? How could our forces and those of other countries remain in the former Yugoslavia in safety if the arms embargo were lifted? How could we withdraw without undue risk from the difficult circumstances—including terrain and other factors—in the former Yugoslavia as we would inevitably have to do if the arms embargo were lifted?

Would the no fly zone be maintained? What air assets would be available for that operation and from whom would they come? For example, once we have withdrawn and the arms embargo has been lifted, would we continue to provide air resources in order to police the no fly zone?

I suspect that what is described in the Untied States as the "lift and strike" policy—lifting the arms embargo and then using air strikes—would soon become a reality. Once that had happened, what some have long suspected to be the principal objective of the Bosnian Muslims—to draw the United States and perhaps others into the war on their behalf—might be achieved.

What consequences would that action have for NATO? Some say that NATO would be finished for ever. I do not think that the consequences would be apocalyptic; however, I think that they would be severely damaging for NATO.

In practical terms, an announcement that the arms embargo will be lifted is hardly likely to be met by a totally unresponsive Bosnian-Serb Government. They would be bound to take maximum advantage of the inevitable gap between the announcement of the end of the embargo and the arrival of weapons, or the gap between the announcement, the arrival of weapons and the training of people in their use, and act upon their present military superiority. I hope that, even now, we will be able to persuade our friends in the United States—it is clear that we have persuaded the United States Administration, but I hope that we will be able to persuade others also—that that policy would be extremely damaging and dangerous.

Like other armed services, the Navy has faced the difficult transition from a capability which was based on a clear threat—which had existed for 40 years—to a capability that is now based on anticipated tasks. As many hon. Members have already pointed out in the debate, it is extremely difficult to anticipate what those tasks might be. Therefore, we must return to principles.

The first principle must be a balanced fleet, within which there may be a change of emphasis. For a long time the United Kingdom's anti-submarine warfare capability was deep water in nature because our task was to ensure that the reinforcement of NATO forces across the Atlantic would not be prejudiced by Soviet submarines breaking out from the north Norwegian sea. I am sure that hon. Members will recall our policy of forward maritime defence. That is no longer relevant in the changed strategic situation.

However, we still need anti-submarine warfare capability in order to counter the proliferation of diesel-powered submarines. Russia's readiness to sell Kilo class submarines to anyone who is willing to buy them gives rise to the possibility that our forces may be required to exercise their anti-submarine warfare capability against such submarines.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) asked the Minister many questions, but I would like to ask him only one. If he cannot answer it tonight, I will happily accept a written answer in due course. The Merlin programme is a very important part of the all-round capability of the type 23. Can the Minister tell me, either tonight or at a later stage, when the Ministry of Defence expects that the Merlin helicopter will be fully deployed?

Mr. Alan Jones of Westland announced today that he intends to relinquish the post of chief executive of that company. Mr. Jones has made a remarkable contribution to the fortunes of Westland and, in so doing, he has assisted in maintaining a very important industrial and military capability for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Colvin: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman think that an announcement from the Front Bench confirming the order for 25 Westland EH101 support helicopters would be a very nice parting gift for Mr. Alan Jones? We have been waiting for that commitment for nearly five years and it is about time that the Government gave it.

Mr. Campbell: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the first commitment was made in 1987 by the then hon. Member for Ayr, who is now Lord Younger of Prestwick in the other place. I think that Alan Jones would be well rewarded for his time at Westland if the Minister were able to make that announcement which hon. Members would welcome also. Apart from anything else, it would ensure the continuance of Westland as an important part of the United Kingdom's military and industrial base.

I suspect that some of the tasks and important roles that the Navy will be required to fulfil in future may be of a rather lower intensity than many of those for which we

have prepared in the past. Under the auspices of the United Nations and in co-operation with others I suspect that the Royal Navy may be called on to take part in arms and trade embargoes authorised by United Nations Security Council resolutions. It is important to make the point that, although carrying out low-intensity operations can be a valuable contribution to security, it is equally clear that we must, in the Royal Navy, maintain a capacity for high-intensity warfare if it becomes necessary. Many people are concerned that if we become so committed to low-intensity United Nations-sponsored deployments, it might prejudice our ability to conduct high-intensity warfare. I know that the Minister is seized of that apprehension—indeed, I was able to discuss it with him when I went to see him at the Ministry of Defence a little while ago.

The nuclear deterrent remains the responsibility of the Royal Navy. We are committed to a minimum deterrent and to nuclear weapons as weapons of last resort. I do not believe that we fulfil those principles unless we take a conscious decision not to deploy any more warheads on Trident than on the Polaris system that it is to replace. In that regard, it is right to remind the Government of their obligations under article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty, which, of course, is currently under active consideration.

Important though the nuclear deterrent may be, we should remember that the most flexible asset that the Navy possesses—one that is capable of performing a wide variety of tasks—is the fleet of frigates and destroyers. I was pleased to hear the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who opened the debate, say that we have 35, instead of that awful word "about" which, for years, bedeviled the Defence Committee's taking of evidence from Ministry of Defence officials, who would only ever say "about" 50, "about" 40 or "about" 35. The Minister was unequivocal, and for that he deserves the congratulation of the House.

I suspect that 35 is pretty well the minimum number at which the Navy could continue to perform the tasks that they are obliged to perform at the moment or may be called on to perform in the future. I remind the House that it is the frigates and destroyers from which we provide the West Indian guardship and part of our presence in the Adriatic. As has already been pointed out, it is from the fleet of frigates and destroyers that we were able to make such a swift deployment against a further threat to Kuwait only a few months ago.

There will be only 12 submarines. The four Upholder class are to be sold, leased or in some way disposed of. There will be a loss of capability, although that is substantially discounted by hon. Members who know more about submarine warfare than I do. It will mean that the remaining submarines will be very heavily worked and deployed. Therefore, refit schedules and their maintenance at a proper level of readiness will be extremely important.

I support the proposal to obtain cruise missiles. I believe that the opportunity for force projection, which that will give, will be a considerable enhancement of capability.

On mine counter-measure vessels, to which reference has been made, I believe that it is a capability in which we lead the world. It is vital that we do not sacrifice that lead. I get the impression that Ministers on the Treasury Bench recognise that it is important that that capability be preserved.

The importance of the Royal Marines cannot be understated. At a time when we are looking for flexibility, what is more flexible and valuable in an unstable and unpredictable environment than an amphibious capability?

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West spoke at great length, with great sincerity and to great point with regard to Rosyth. I certainly do not wish to do anything other than endorse what she had to say about the way in which Rosyth was treated and the experience of the loyal workers who worked there for many years. I would just embellish—if I may put it that way—what she said by making the comment that the position of both royal dockyards is still uncertain until the whole question of privatisation is resolved. It now appears that there has been only one bid for each, from the incumbent. I have not seen the bids and am not in a position to make any judgment about their commercial acceptability or otherwise, but I believe that it is incumbent upon the Government to resolve the issue as soon as they can, and if it is necessary, to ensure that those bids are effective, that there be some kind of contractual arrangement with regard to the provision of work to the two dockyards. I would support moves towards that end.

We are, notwithstanding the channel tunnel, still a maritime nation. We have traditionally been a naval power, but that tradition has been bedded in the practical necessity of ensuring that we were able to defend our shores at all times. Geographical and physical considerations will continue. The traditions of the Navy—service, commitment and professionalism—will be maintained. It is to those traditions that we should pay proper tribute this evening.

7.6 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): I am pleased to follow the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who speaks with great authority on the subject. I certainly wish him well with his leadership campaign.

I am also proud to represent a region that has had a distinguished record of service to the armed forces over the years, particularly the Royal Navy and Royal Marines. In Plymouth, there has been a naval base and dockyard for many centuries, and we have been the home of the Royal Marines for many generations. I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are extremely familiar with all those establishments, and are well loved by those who serve therein.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will be replying to the debate, because he made a recent and highly successful visit to Plymouth and, as usual, was extremely popular wherever he went.

In recent times—as you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will know—we have experienced the dreadful trend of downsizing our defence establishments, caused, quite understandably, by the ending of the cold war and the break-up of the Warsaw pact. I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who made a telling argument about why it is more vital than ever that we keep our defences up.

The so-called peace dividend that we have enjoyed these past few years has hit us particularly hard in the west country. Since 1985, the number of employees at the

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dockyard has reduced from 13,500 to only 4,000 some 10 years later. It is generally recognised in the west country that, had the Labour party won the previous election, with its commitment to defence cuts of 30 per cent. or so from 1992—not from 1985, which deals with the point made earlier by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, representing the Liberal Democrats, who pledged to reduce defence spending by a staggering 50 per cent.—we would have been even harder hit. I will take no lectures on defence cuts from Opposition Members.

None the less, times have been hard in Devon and Cornwall, and we have experienced considerable job losses. As you will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, anxieties about job losses have not entirely gone away. They come from a variety of sources. The maintenance of the Trident submarine, and its refits, will secure and guarantee 4,000 jobs in Devonport dockyard for the next 20 years.

That is very welcome, but people in Devon and Cornwall worry about Labour's commitment to Trident if it formed the next Government—which we know is highly unlikely. They worry about Labour's record on defence. They worry about the 60 or more Labour Members who signed an early-day motion late last year calling on the Government to scrap Trident, and they worry about the fact that the leader of the Labour party, and indeed Labour's entire defence team, used to belong to the parliamentary branch of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Dr. Reid: Would the hon. Gentleman care to amend that last statement, as in making it he was inadvertently misleading the House?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman has not given me the detailed information that would allow me to amend it, but if he wishes to make a statement about his own position, I shall be delighted to hear it.

Dr. Reid: I have never been a member of the parliamentary branch of CND.

Mr. Streeter: The statement that I made about the leader of the Labour party none the less stands. Many hon. Members wonder how a Member of Parliament could decide that we should not have a nuclear deterrent when the cold war was at its height and the Warsaw pact constituted such a threat, and then decide in 1990—when the cold war was winding down and the Soviet bloc was breaking up—that such a deterrent was appropriate for this country after all. Many of us feel that that conversion was extremely superficial, and would melt in the heat of battle.

Mr. Jamieson: Labour's commitment to Trident is certain. The hon. Gentleman knows that, because our Front Benchers have made it clear on many occasions. His own Front Benchers, however, may be interested to know that I have a photograph in my pocket—I will show it around the House if the hon. Gentleman wishes me to—taken in 1987, which shows the hon. Gentleman, then an SDP councillor standing with the SDP Alliance in Plymouth. In the photograph, the hon. Gentleman is sharing a platform with a leading member of the local branch of CND.

Mr. Streeter: That is a rather feeble point, for two reasons. First, the purpose of that debate was for me to put the case for a nuclear deterrent, against which the CND member was arguing. Secondly, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) has an old skeleton in his cupboard in the form of his past membership of CND. How ironic that he should now represent Devonport, whose dockyard is to maintain the Trident submarine.

Mr. Jamieson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw that comment? I have never been a member of CND.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): That is not a point of order for the Chair. It is a point on which the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) might wish to intervene, and that is how I shall treat what he has said.

Mr. Colvin *rose—*

Mr. Menzies Campbell: He has not accused you yet.

Mr. Colvin: He probably will.

Sharing a political platform with someone does not necessarily involve sharing that person's views. I have shared a platform with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) many times, but that does not mean that I shared his political views on those occasions.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Indeed, as I said, the purpose of my being on that platform was to contradict the CND argument. I have always supported the independent nuclear deterrent. Will the hon. Member for Devonport reflect on this point? I think that it is better for an hon. Member to maintain his principles while changing his party than to stay in his party and abandon all his principles, as so many Opposition Members have done.

Let me continue with my thoughtful speech. People in Plymouth are also worried about talk of a further defence review. I have spent a good deal of time talking to members of the armed forces, and I know that the last thing they require is another defence review. They want a period of stability and certainty, and the ability to plan within a given framework; the possibility of a further defence review terrifies them. I agree with what my hon. Friends have said about the desirability of such a review.

People in Plymouth are also concerned about the fact that the implications of "Front Line First"—albeit a masterly exercise in support for our front line—are still trickling through. Only this week, we heard the sad announcement of 427 job losses in Devonport as a result of the rationalisation of naval stores.

I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces handled the matter as sensitively as it could have been handled, but he will appreciate that this constitutes a further blow to economy and morale in a region that has already been hit by many job cuts over the years. Moreover, the review of the Royal Marines and their location is still taking place. I know that my hon. Friend will understand my concern, and will note my call for a period of stability and security for Devon and Cornwall.

I welcome the clear assurance by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that there will be no further defence cuts under the present Government. That gives us confidence for the future; how it contrasts with what has been said by Opposition Members.

May I raise three specific local issues? I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with them, either when he winds up or later in the year. I seek assurances about the future of vital defence establishments in our region.

From time to time, we have debated the future of the naval base at Devonport. I entirely accept the assurance that the Ministry of Defence believes that we need a strong naval base there, and that the base has a strong and vibrant future; but concerns remain about the onward drift to Portsmouth and the amount of base-porting in Devonport. We in Devon and Cornwall seek a positive commitment to the naval base. We were pleased to learn of the commitment to replace HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid with two new landing platform docks and a new amphibious craft for the landing of helicopters.

I suggest to my hon. Friend that there is a happy marriage between the base-porting of amphibious craft and the location of the Royal Marines. I understand that the base-porting of amphibious craft has not yet been settled; will my hon. Friend give a commitment to base-port those vessels in Devonport, so that they can enjoy collocation with the Royal Marines—our strike force in Devon—that will be of great strategic and economic benefit to the Navy and our region? I am prepared to wage a long campaign until Devon receives the answers to which I believe it is entitled.

It is not part of my brief today to be in any way derogatory about Portsmouth, the city in which I was born. I fear, however, that, as ferry traffic from Portsmouth increases—the channel tunnel may affect some ports in Kent in the same way—it may not be the right place in which to base-port new naval ships.

My next point concerns the location of the Royal Marines. They are currently based at the Citadel and Stonehouse, with a logistic division at Seaton and Coypool and a 42 Commando at Bickleigh. They have been part of our history for as long as anyone can remember. We know that the Ministry of Defence is currently considering the relocation of some Royal Marines at RAF Chivenor; that option is clearly attractive, given that it is a level, single site with newer facilities than Plymouth can offer in some instances.

I realise that my hon. Friend is examining the possibility of the move very carefully. He is taking his time to get it right, and I respect and support that. We are grateful that the Citadel and Stonehouse are not even under consideration. We know that the Royal Marines will remain in those locations.

I would understand it if the Logistics Division were to relocate from Seaton and Coypool, which are not ideal sites. I could understand the argument if it were in the interests of the Royal Marines to move that to RAF Chivenor in north Devon. However, if 42 Commando is moved from Bickleigh, particularly if it were for purely financial reasons, it would be seen as a major blow to our region, and the final straw that broke the camel's back. So I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider carefully before going further down that route. We must retain 42 Commando in Bickleigh.

If the Logistics Division relocates from Seaton and Coypool—I do not concede that point—will the Minister do everything possible to ensure an early release of those sites into the private sector, so that new jobs are generated from those valuable sites in the centre and on the edge of Plymouth?

Will he reassure me that, if those relocations take place, those sites will be actively put on to the marketplace for economic regeneration? The release of surplus Ministry of Defence sites in Plymouth has a mixed history. We welcome the excellent investment of £45 million in the site of the Plymouth Development Corporation, but are concerned about how long it is taking to deal with the redundant Manadon site.

The third issue that I wish to raise with my hon. Friend the Minister is competition in defence procurement. I welcome my hon. Friend's remarks about the Royal Navy's secure future. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends would like even more ships to be ordered and built than those referred to in last year's "Statement on the Defence Estimates", but with replacements planned for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, the batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines and up to three type 23 class frigates, significant work will be provided for our warship building yards and, importantly, the naval equipment supply industry?

I declare a further constituency interest. A company with many employees based in my constituency—British Aerospace Systems and Equipment Ltd.—is one of the equipment supply companies that will benefit from that work. I recently received a brochure from British Aerospace Systems and Equipment Ltd. which recalls the substantial naval work carried out within British Aerospace.

Most of us probably regard British Aerospace as the nation's premier supplier of aircraft, and I confess that, until I saw that brochure, I had only limited knowledge of the company's significant presence in naval prime contracting and systems. Hon. Members will be surprised to learn that, in 1993, British Aerospace's naval business turned over some £365 million.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that it will continue to be the Government's policy to encourage competition between British Aerospace, GEC and other major prime contractors, as the best means of ensuring value for money in naval, whole ship and systems procurements? It has been our consistent line to insist on competition in the refitting and maintenance of our ships by maintaining two dockyards. I hope that similar principles apply in relation to major defence procurement elsewhere.

In conclusion, I seek assurances about the future of Devonport naval base, and would like a response on the specific suggestion that I put to my hon. Friend the Minister. I also seek assurances on the retention of a substantial Royal Marine presence in south Devon and that the world of defence procurement will continue to be a competitive environment.

7.23 pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), having listened to his speech, which was so carefully crafted in the few minutes before he rose. Is it not refreshing that a Conservative Back Bencher should be so close to the ear of the Prime Minister? He comes to the Chamber tonight to tell us facts about the Government's policy on defence that we have not heard from the Minister. He said that there will be no further cuts in defence, but I understood that the Government's

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policy was to make a succession of cuts in defence during the rest of this Parliament. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman has the ear of the Prime Minister on those matters.

Mr. Freeman: I hope that there is no misunderstanding. In my opening speech, I made it clear that we sought stability in funding in real terms from 1 April this year for the next three financial years. That is the period for which the Government plan and the Chancellor made that clear in his statement. Decisions made under "Options for Change" and "Front Line First" will take a number of years to implement. I made that plain in my speech and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) has been consistent with what I said. It is as plain as a pikestaff that that is what will happen.

Mr. Jamieson: That was a revelation. I am pleased that the Minister has confirmed that cuts will continue for the next four years. What the Prime Minister meant in the private moment that he spent with the hon. Member for Sutton was that there will be a succession of cuts in the next four years, which have already been agreed by the Government. I am glad that the Minister has reaffirmed that view.

The hon. Member for Sutton said that I was scaremongering when I mentioned the Marines leaving Plymouth. I am glad that he has now come to the view that the Government may take the Marines away from the city.

Like some of my hon. Friends I declare an interest. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), who made an excellent speech on behalf of her constituency in Scotland and the Royal Navy, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) are both on the armed services parliamentary scheme. I, too, have been on the armed services parliamentary scheme, with the Royal Marines. If I am allowed to mention the Royal Marines in a Royal Navy debate, may I say that I admire their work and pay special tribute to the work that they contribute to our armed services' effort. On one occasion, for the brief moment in which the hon. Member for Sutton was also on the scheme, he and I were sped around Poole harbour on a landing craft. Having heard his speech tonight, I wish that I had pushed him in.

Before I clear up the matter of the photograph, will the hon. Member for Sutton withdraw the comment that he made about my having been a member of CND? I have never been a member of CND but he has put it on the record that I have.

Mr. Streeter: I am always willing to accept the hon. Gentleman's word. I therefore withdraw the remark if he assures me that it was inaccurate.

Mr. Jamieson: Anyone listening to the hon. Gentleman will realise that his ungracious apology will not be well received.

Let me clear up the matter of the photograph. The hon. Gentleman said that he shared a platform with, but was in opposition to, a member of CND. That is not true. The photograph in my possession shows that when the hon. Gentleman was a member of the SDP and shared a political platform with the alliance, and therefore the Liberals, he was photographed for election material put out on his behalf standing next to the leading member of the CND in Plymouth. We are, however, glad of the hon. Gentleman's conversion to sense. Now that other Conservative Members have discovered that, long may he remain on the Back Benches.

Dr. Reid: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is now clear that my hon. Friend and I were never members of CND but that the person who accused us was on a platform supporting, and publishing literature proclaiming his association with, the CND?

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend is correct.

Mr. Streeter: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. How can I place it on the record that I have never, at any stage in my life, espoused the principles of CND, and that I have always supported an independent nuclear deterrent? The hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) is misleading the House and he should be careful.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Matters of fact are not something on which the occupant of the Chair can rule. Of course I expect hon. Members to be careful in what they say. I am sure that, if they are found to have made inaccurate comments, gracious withdrawals would be the order of the day, but I cannot adjudicate on such matters.

Mr. Jamieson: If we want some clarification, I shall say it again. A photograph of the hon. Member for Sutton standing next to the chairman of CND appeared on election materials. At that time, he was in the SDP and sharing the same political platform as the Liberal Democrats. I am pleased that he has come to the House to make the position clear. We welcome his change of view over that period.

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I shall give way in a moment. We have heard enough from the hon. Gentleman. I am glad that he has clarified his position on the matter. If he wants to put out a public statement to make absolutely certain that everyone in the House understands that he never shared a platform with people who espoused CND views, I would be happy to read that statement.

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jamieson: Not at this moment.

Mr. Streeter: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This debate on the Royal Navy is of great importance. I deprecate what appear to be personal comments being made across the Floor of the House. It would be for the good of the debate if no more references were made, and if any differences were settled privately outside the Chamber.

Mr. Jamieson: As always, I shall be guided by your words, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. Having been guided by your words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall not give way again to the hon. Member for Sutton.

Mr. Streeter: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to make a scurrilous accusation, and then not to give way so that it can be corrected?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I regard that not as a point of order, but as a point of fact. I have given my advice on how the matter might be handled. I hope that that advice will be heeded by both hon. Gentlemen.

Mr. Jamieson: I will again follow your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I shall not respond further to the hon. Member for Sutton, as I have made clear my views on the matter.

The debate is of great importance to the Royal Navy, to Plymouth and to the south-west region. The south-west economy relies heavily on defence spending and defence-related work. Plymouth, in particular, and Devonport are totally committed to the defence of the country, but how committed is the Navy to Devonport? In particular, how committed are the Government to Devonport, and to the men and women who have given many years of loyal service to the Navy, in both military and civilian capacities?

In recent years, cuts have been made in services generally, but naval cuts and closures, in particular, have had serious effects on Plymouth. As promises to maintain jobs in the dockyard and the supply depots have been cynically broken, a feeling of betrayal pervades the work force and the local people, not only because of the cuts and those broken promises, but because there is no support and no planning. The Minister made it clear that the Government have no aspiration to find new employment for the people who have lost their jobs, many of whom have skills in that sector.

The Ministry of Defence has consistently failed to provide help for redundant workers, and support for service personnel. Only recently, following considerable pressure from me and from others, it started working with the local authority in my area and with other bodies to secure the best use of redundant land.

Mr. Soames: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would wish to clarify his comment that the Government have done nothing for service personnel. The Government's resettlement programme for service personnel is unmatched by any other institution in this land. It is widely regarded as the most effective organisation of its type. The hon. Gentleman should clarify what he said.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank the Minister for that and I will tell him exactly what I mean. The Minister must bear some responsibility for the thousands of people who have lost their jobs in Her Majesty's royal dockyard over the years. Most of them have not found alternative employment, and the Government have failed them by not helping to find them new employment. The Minister may be interested to know that the unemployment figures rose this week in the south-west region and in Plymouth, in particular. The main reason for the increase is the cut in defence, over which he is presiding.

Workers in the dockyard in Plymouth are justifiably disappointed by job losses, but they become angry when they see massive waste and injustice in the system. The MOD justifies redundancies by saying that they will save money, but then wastes millions of pounds on the refurbishment of official residences, on consultancy fees, and on gross inefficiency of breathtaking proportions.

Recently, Tory Members have been trying to blame local authorities for cuts in education, saying that the authorities were wasteful, yet when it comes to waste and inefficiency, the MOD has cornered the market. In the past three years, £55 million has been written off in lost rent on empty homes alone. Only four years before HMS Andromeda was offered for sale, £27 million was spent on its refit, and we hear that the asking price may be as little as £1 million. Those are just are two examples of waste.

Usually, the debate on the Royal Navy rightly concentrates on weapons, hardware and logistics, but I want to examine some of the issues that are important to the people who keep the Navy going, either by serving on ships or on shore, or by working in a civilian capacity to ensure that the Navy is fit to respond to any situation. The MOD is guilty of paying too little attention to the welfare of its employees in relation to housing, jobs and education. On Tuesday, the Minister announced the loss of jobs in Royal Navy supply depots at Devonport, Exeter and Wrangaton, all in my part of the country. The total loss amounted to 734 jobs, 427 of them in my Devonport constituency. That constitutes a further dismantling of Europe's most efficient naval supply network. Those decisions defy logic and common sense.

How can it be sensible to dismantle the supply stores for naval ships based in Devonport so that they are to be supplied from Portsmouth, 170 miles away, and through the narrow roads of Hampshire, Dorset and South Devon? What sort of logic states that having three depots close at hand in Devon to supply ships in Devonport is, as the Minister said,

"fragmented by nature and difficult to manage"

but that supplying them from somewhere 170 miles away will be more efficient, despite the fact that £9.5 million will be spent on "modernised infrastructure" at Portsmouth? How can the Minister claim in his letter to me that

"Devonport is and will continue to be the principal Naval base on the South Coast"

when he admits that the current situation of more ships being based at Plymouth than at Portsmouth will change as the 4th Frigate Squadron builds up at Portsmouth, and as the type 22 frigates are paid off?

Under "Options for Change", and as recommended by the defence costs study, the total reduction in stockholdings will be in excess of 50 per cent. over five years. That is disproportionate to the reduction in the size of the Royal Navy and does not reconcile with the perceived work load. I can conclude only that there is a hidden agenda of further cuts in the size of our Navy, and a threat to the very existence of Devonport as a major naval base.

Mr. Soames: So that the hon. Gentleman does not wander off down that fantastic lane, may I assure him that no further cuts are planned to the front line of the Royal Navy and to Devonport?

Mr. Jamieson: I am pleased that the Minister has been able to reassure me. However, he must realise that those who have been in Plymouth for a long time know that similar Ministers have given similar assurances over the past 10 years. In 1983, when we said that there would be massive job losses at Devonport, we were told that we were scaremongering and that there would be no cuts.

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Nearly 14,000 people were employed at the dockyard at that time. We were told the same in 1987 and 1992. No doubt at the next election we will be told the same again. However, I am pleased that the Minister has given me that assurance, and I promise that I will repeat it many times, which I am sure will bring him pleasure.

The Government recently offered for sale the royal dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth for total privatisation. The Government have made the dockyards so unattractive that, even after spending £7.2 million on consultants to help sell off the dockyards, there was only one bidder for Devonport and one for Rosyth. The Government spent £7.2 million to tell Devonport Management Ltd. and the Babcock International Group about the dockyards that they already occupied. That money could have been better used to help the many thousands of people in Devonport and in Scotland who have lost their jobs in the past few years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West asked who will underwrite the redundancy payments. I ask the Minister again. Will it be the Government or will the private company that takes over be expected to do that? The total redundancy estimate for Devonport is £140 million.

Quite rightly, workers want to be reassured about their rights and their conditions of work. The Government have previously given assurances that those would not change after privatisation. Will the Minister confirm what legal rights the workers will have after privatisation? Can he categorically assure workers that their loyal service over many years will be rewarded by the continuance of the contracts that they have enjoyed in the past and that they will still enjoy the same pension and redundancy rights?

The privatisation threatens the economy of Plymouth and the surrounding areas partly because it creates uncertainty about employment. Already, many people in the Devonport dockyard receive redundancy one week and are taken on a week after on short-term contracts and reduced pay. Privatisation will not bring any benefits for the work force at Devonport and it is hard to see what benefits it will bring for the Royal Navy. Only the Treasury will benefit. It is a defence policy run from planet Portillo or asteroid Aitken. The Ministry of Defence now offers better career prospects and job security to merchant bankers and financial consultants than to those serving and supplying the Royal Navy in defence of the realm.

Another matter that is of great concern to my constituents, and to people throughout the country, is naval housing. While my constituents who have loyally served their country lose their jobs, inefficiency and waste run riot throughout the Ministry of Defence. Let us examine the running of the naval living quarters. The Ministry of Defence owns, as at 31 December 1994, 12,408 vacant properties—15 per cent. of its stock of houses. Some 236 of those are in my constituency of Devonport. Those 12,408 houses would be the equivalent of a town such as Canterbury, Banbury or Taunton.

The Ministry of Defence housing policy is disastrous. It lacks planning and is riddled with incompetent management. The number of empty homes is increasing almost daily. The empty homes have resulted in loss of rent of £55 million in the past three years. There is also the loss of council tax to local authorities as well as the cost of security and maintenance, which, by the Minister's admission to me in a written answer, has been £355,000 in the past two years. Is the Minister aware that 118 former wives of naval personnel were evicted from their homes in the past five years? Last year, Plymouth city council had to rehouse 77 ex-service families who had been declared homeless and evicted by their former employers, the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will my hon. Friend recognise that there is a similar problem at Deal, where the properties of the Royal Marines are deserted and where there is temporary housing? It is appalling and the Royal Navy and the Admiralty must do something with those properties.

Mr. Jamieson: I agree with my hon. Friend. They must be part of the 12,408 homes to which I had referred, or perhaps they will be added to that figure in the next few months. Perhaps the Minister will clarify that.

Is the Minister aware of the case of my constituent, Sharon Terrell, who lives in Barne Barton in St. Budeaux in Plymouth? She separated from her naval husband after being assaulted. She is facing eviction from naval quarters despite the fact that she can see 15 empty Ministry of Defence properties on her estate from the window of her kitchen. She is still paying rent. In the next few weeks the Minister's Department will evict that woman and her former home will lie empty. Would it not make more sense to allow her to continue to live in the property, paying the rent and looking after it on behalf of the Royal Navy rather than having another empty house and a homeless young woman?

The evictions, inefficiency and failure to act continue despite the devastating criticism of Ministry of Defence housing management by the Government's own task force, set up by the Department of the Environment. It published its report in July 1994. It may be instructive to hear what that task force said about the Ministry of Defence. The report states:

"Between £30 million and £100 million is lost by the taxpayer each year by 10,000 homes remaining empty."

It goes on:

"The MoD, as the largest holder of empty homes, has not been amenable to influence."

It also said:

"Effective action by Defence Ministers is urgently needed and should not be further delayed."

Most tellingly it said:

"For more than two years, frequent and energetic efforts have been made to persuade the MoD to reduce their vacancies . . . Regrettably our assessment is that the Ministry of Defence appears to have been unwilling to accept many of these suggestions."

Is that not a major condemnation of the Ministry of Defence by another Government Department?

On the evictions of former wives of service personnel, the report accused the Ministry of Defence of "shortsighted, anti-social activity". Will the Minister comment on those matters?

The Government responded to the report in July 1994. They said:

"Since the Task Force report was written, vacancies have now started to fall."

That is blatantly untrue. The number of vacant homes increased by 2,000 between January and December 1994. They then said:

"The Government proposes to set annual targets and to publish the Department's achievements at the end of each year."

Will the Minister tell us whether the Royal Navy achieved its targets for empty homes last year, and tell us when this year's figures be published? Will he freeze all evictions of naval families from their quarters until the scandal of empty properties has been resolved? He could make inroads into the mass of empty properties by releasing the 94 married quarters on the Furse Park estate in Barne Barton in my constituency to either a housing association or to Plymouth city council, which is desperate for family accommodation.

The Government's response to the increase in the number of empty naval homes was to set up the Crown housing trust, yet another Tory quango gravy train. We are told that the chief executive was given a salary of £80,000 a year and even offered £20,000 performance-related pay. I look forward to the Minister telling us how much performance-related pay that man will get because the number of empty properties has increased since he got the job.

The "new arrangements" for service housing have cost £5 million since 1991 and, of course, consultants were paid £3.3 million for the failed project. The Secretary of State for Defence said that the trust "encountered difficulties"; then it was scrapped and replaced by the Defence housing executive, an agency—so-called—with responsibility for privatising the whole MOD estate. In other words, the MOD continues to set up quangos and agencies while the number of empty home grows.

Is the Minister aware that a report published last year by Crisis said that 25 per cent. of all the single homeless had previously served in the armed forces and that the advice and help given to those coming out of the services was not adequate? I stand by my earlier comments.

Negotiations are currently under way in Plymouth about a matter in which the MOD might be able to help. It is an example of how the Ministry could assist my constituents and the health service at the same time. The Ministry of Defence must become more responsive to the needs of the community that surround it and should be helpful rather than obstructive. There is the opportunity for the Ministry to act positively in Plymouth and to help the health service and the taxpayer instead of considering only the narrow remit of its own balance sheet. I am referring to the negotiations about the Cumberland house site in Devonport.

The Plymouth Community Services NHS trust—trusts are one of the Government's favourite creations—has been attempting to purchase MOD land and property for the development of a much-needed health facility for the local community in Devonport. However, the Ministry is setting higher hurdles and costs for the purchase of the site and adjoining property, which will restrict the trust's ability to fund the project. Unless the deal can be struck by the end of March this year, the project is likely to founder, thus denying a deprived area of Plymouth of a much-needed local health facility. It appears that the Ministry's desire to gain as much profit as possible from the trust could put the deal in jeopardy. I ask the Minister in all sincerity to intervene personally in the negotiations between the Defence Land Agents and the trust to ensure that the negotiations are completed successfully and without delay for the benefit of the local community, the MOD and the taxpayer.

Another issue connected with naval establishments, and one which is giving rise to great concern, is hunting. As I discovered after tabling a number of written questions, the taxpayer is underwriting the cost of paying for service men to go hunting during duty hours. Some of the costs for the maintenance and upkeep of kennels are also paid by the MOD.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Why not?

Mr. Jamieson: I can tell the hon. Gentleman why not. The vast majority of decent people in this country are affronted not only by hunting but by a Department that underwrites and encourages it.

Mr. Colvin: I have never seen a sailor on a horse, and this debate is supposed to be about the Royal Navy. Let us remember that this year we are talking about VE day celebrations. I recall, when I was very small, watching the victory parade in 1945. There was great difficulty in finding four admirals to get on the four grey horses for the parade, so I really do not understand what connection there is between hunting and the Royal Navy.

Mr. Jamieson: I can assist the hon. Gentleman. Naval personnel are riding to hounds from military establishments across the country. He may be interested to know that the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who was previously the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and is now the chairman of the Conservative party, said that hunting promotes "good tactical ground appreciation" and that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) recently said that hunting "developed character" and that there was

"nothing cruel in the great and glorious death of a fox in the field".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1995; Vol. 253, c.836.]

Like the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), I do not know where they are keeping the horses on the submarines and ships.

Mr. Pike: The Royal Navy has as one of its sections the Royal Marines. When I did my national service in the Royal Marines, the adjutant always used to ride his horse during inspections.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend for that information.

Will the Minister deny rumours that bell-bottomed trousers are to be phased out by the Navy as a cost-cutting exercise? Will he be supplying the men with jodhpurs and red coats instead? Has the MOD hatched a new strategy to introduce men riding into battle on horseback? Will the Minister be replacing the battleships and nuclear submarines with sailors in red coats on hunters patrolling our shorelines and shouting "tally-ho" and blasting bugles at unwanted intruders?

Dr. Reid: I am fascinated by my hon. Friend's detailed examination of expenditure cuts. Has he come across any reports that the Ministry of Defence is to cut the cavalry to one spur on the basis that, once one side of the horse is moving, the other is likely to follow?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The cavalry is not part of the Navy.

Dr. Reid: But the marines are.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The cavalry is not the marines.

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[Mr. Jamieson]

Unfortunately, hunting and riding on horseback are part of naval expenditure and my point is that they should not be. Why does the Ministry of Defence support the continuance of cruel and barbaric hobbies? Will the Minister give an assurance that not one single penny of taxpayers' money will be spent on hunting, either directly or indirectly?

I shall now deal with the education of service children, especially children whose parents are serving in the Navy. Last year, £133 million was spent on the Ministry of Defence boarding school allowance. I accept that service children need stable education and agree that the Government should provide assistance, but the whole system lacks accountability. Accountability is especially important in this instance as so many parents are abroad and unable to monitor their children's education.

I have written to the Ministry many times, so the Minister will know that many of the private independent schools benefiting from the scheme have poor examination results. We are not sure how most of the schools are performing because only nine HMI/Ofsted reports have been published on schools that receive the Ministry's boarding school allowance.

Finborough school in Suffolk and Rodney school in Nottingham both had mediocre reports from HMI and Ofsted but continue to receive hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money through the boarding school allowance scheme. Why is the Ministry supporting such low standards in private schools? A constituent of mine, who is a serving member of the Royal Navy, has children at Finborough school. The principal at the school refused to send out the Ofsted report to parents, even after repeated requests. Eventually, those reports had to be sent out by the Minister's Department. Why does not the Minister use more local education authority boarding schools? The Service Childrens Education Association admits that the results in those schools are often better than those in the private, independent sector, and, of course, they are always cheaper, because the non-boarding costs are met by local education authorities.

I also ask the Minister to look carefully at the role of the Service Childrens Education Association. How does it monitor the schools which it has on its admissible schools list? Does it have the resources to carry out checks and inspections or does it use only word of mouth? Many service children are being short-changed by some of those schools. Moreover, the taxpayer is being short-changed. Will the Minister consider introducing more accountability to the system? Will the Government look at ways in which to check the standards of those schools, which receive millions of pounds of taxpayers' money?

I ask the Minister to make a firm commitment to Devonport as the major dockyard and naval base. Will he give the assurances, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West asked and for which I am now asking, that when or if those dockyards are privatised, the work force will retain the pension and other rights that they currently enjoy? Will he examine carefully the inefficiency and waste that is destroying jobs in my constituency and is burning the heart out of our naval capacity?

8.1 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): It was a good thing that my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Dame Janet Fookes) was presiding over our debate earlier, as the exchanges between the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) became quite heated. I very much hope that the two gentlemen can join together for a game of bowls at Plymouth this weekend and that my hon. Friend the Member for Drake is around to umpire the game—otherwise that, too, might come to a sticky end.

We are debating the Royal Navy five years after the collapse of communism, the withdrawal of the iron curtain and the end of the cold war. It is time to assess the peace dividend, if there is such a dividend. Hon. Members have referred to the new world order. I would call it disorder, with 15 conflicts now in progress around the world, many of them involving United Nations forces on deployment, and with another 15 or so situations almost at flash point, where hostilities could break out at any time. It is a very uncertain world in which we now live, following the certainty that persisted during the cold war.

In that respect, we need to think carefully about our defence role three, which is to contribute to promoting the United Kingdom's wider security interests through the maintenance of international peace and stability. I have long maintained that there are insufficient resources—in fact, hardly any resources—set aside specifically to honour that commitment to role three. Her Majesty's Government can meet their commitments on those international obligations to assist the United Nations in its peacemaking and peacekeeping roles only by taking resources from roles one and two. Role one is the defence of the United Kingdom and its dependent territories and role two is the resisting of threats to the United Kingdom and our allies such as NATO.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) referred to the matching of resources with commitments, which is quite right. One has to ask what are our commitments under role three, as set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence? Obviously, in this day and age, maximum flexibility is a very important principle of war. However, it is difficult to determine precisely Britain's national interests in the international scene. What are our interests in places such as Cambodia, east Africa or Kashmir? Should we be involved in such operations?

I argue that no other country in the world has a wider interest in free and uninterrupted trade. Britannia may no longer rule the waves, but she has tremendous interest in world peace and stability. Our overseas investments are huge. I suspect that, as a percentage of our overall investments—internationally and domestically—our overseas investments are probably as large as that of any other country. It is against that background that we debate the state and the role of the Royal Navy.

I shall concentrate on three specific aspects, because many of the points that I would have otherwise made have already been covered by hon. Members. Defence is bedevilled with acronyms and I shall try a few on the House. I shall talk about DIB, ACP, STUFT and the TSCS. To enlighten hon. Members, those acronyms stand

for the defence industrial base, the arms conversion project, ships taken up from trade and the tri-service chaplains school.

I welcome the emphasis of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement on preserving the viability of our defence industrial base and on the importance of keeping a watchful eye on the reliability of our overseas partners in collaborative defence projects, from a political as well as from an industrial point of view. He referred to 45 different collaborative armaments projects which are proceeding at the moment. It is important in international collaboration that the United Kingdom has a proper share in the development of the projects and not only in their manufacture, because if we forfeit the development aspects of our armament projects we throw away the seed corn that keeps industry going and enables Britain to maintain the essential leading edge in technological advance.

Hon. Members have referred to the importance of value for money in defence procurement. No one would question the importance of buying the best possible equipment for our armed forces. However, there is also a case for taking into account what I would call the social cost of not buying British. If one buys from overseas, one may end up with a very good product at a unit cost slightly less than that on the home market, simply because some of the production runs of equipment in big overseas manufacturers such as those in the United States enable unit costs to be reduced. So, one must bear in mind the importance of maintaining Britain's industrial defence capability and ensure that it grows.

A case in point is the Westland EH101 helicopter and the order for 25 support helicopters to which several hon. Members have referred. At the moment, we hope that that order will be confirmed. However, it is important that the order is confirmed for the full 25 and not fewer because of the importance of sales to third countries. There is no doubt that that helicopter, which is in the forefront of technology and available in a number of different versions, is attractive to many potential overseas buyers. But those buyers will be looking at how many Her Majesty's Government order. If the order is for any fewer than 25, they will ask why the British Government are buying fewer of those aircraft than they had originally said they would. I want there to be a full order for 25 and I think that that view is shared by all hon. Members.

It is important to consider carefully the value of so-called offsets when we buy from overseas. There has been a big debate about heavy transports for the Royal Air Force. I know that I am digressing slightly from the Royal Navy, but I believe that this point is applicable to naval projects as well. It is important that when we have to buy from overseas, the offsets that we obtain for British industry to compensate for those purchases contain proper development work and are not just what is called tin-bashing. The work must have real technological value to maintain the viability of our industry.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central also referred to the decline in our defence industrial base. He spoke of the restructuring taking place world wide and he raised the question of a possible European common procurement policy, which he suggested would be damaging to British industry. To some extent, that is true, but it is important that we collaborate with our European partners to spread the capital and development costs of new projects and that we do not, when looking for overseas partners, always look across the Atlantic to the United States. The United States seems to get the best of most deals. I remember that when the Conservative Government took office in 1979, the so-called two-way street across the Atlantic was 15:1 in favour of the United States. It is now about 2:1 and diminishing. It is important that the two-way street, if it is to be maintained, is balanced. We must, however, have partners in Europe as well as partners across the Atlantic.

Mr. Fatchett: There is a danger in the European argument of expressing our position in absolute terms. That was not my intention. There are substantial benefits from European co-operation. My point is that we should work out the extent of that co-operation both in procurement and production. At a certain point, there is a potential downside. I am not saying that I am against European co-operation. I would encourage it, but we must be aware of the downside when it occurs.

Mr. Colvin: I concur with that point of view.

Opposition Members have referred to Labour's pledge for a diversification agency; I wonder how it would be funded. If it was not funded straight from taxpayers' money, from where could it get funds other than those available from the Konver fund within the European Union? Would the agency be an interventionist board, such as the National Enterprise Board of which we do not have good memories in terms of what it fulfilled during its existence?

Mr. Bennett: It did very well.

Mr. Colvin: It did not.

The questions raised about the importance of our defence industrial base almost anticipated what has already been decided by the Select Committees on Trade and Industry and on Defence. In our wisdom, we too felt that this was a matter that needed to be addressed. That is why the two Select Committees have combined to set up a joint Sub-Committee to investigate this precise matter with a fairly broad brief. The intention is to report before the summer recess. I very much hope that the Sub-Committee, which is a hybrid, will produce the vigour that one usually sees in hybrids; I speak as a farmer with some knowledge of genetics and breeding.

We are all concerned about the risk to our defence industrial base because another important principle of war is defence in depth. In view of the importance of maintaining supplies for our armed forces and of providing them with equipment that will be supreme, we must ensure that the defence industrial base is sound. In the defence costs estimates, much is said about our stores set-up. The Select Committee's report on the naval stores proposals, which have been addressed by a number of hon. Members today, is valid. With the reduction of stores, which is intended to save money, one cuts the output required from Britain's factories. That, again, is bad news for our defence industries and makes it even more important that we address the problem.

I was interested to see a pamphlet, which most hon. Members have probably received, entitled "Networker". It comes from the arms conversion project which was set up to look at the whole question of diversification and conversion. It seems to be almost a blueprint of the Labour party's diversification and conversion programme. Under the objectives for the project—which I shall not

[Mr. Colvin]

bother to read out—there is nothing about reacting to closures, nor about how to deal with the mobility of those made redundant. There has been much more scope for labour to move around the country since the Government introduced shorthold and assured tenancies which have breathed new life into the private rented sector. People who lose their jobs are no longer stuck; they can move around the country to find jobs where they are available.

Nor does the arms conversion project deal with retraining. Although my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has stressed the importance of the Government's resettlement programme, more could be done to retrain those made redundant from the armed forces. Here I pay tribute to the Royal British Legion and the establishment of its training company at Tidworth which is doing a great deal in this respect.

The second acronym I mentioned was STUFT, which stands for ships taken up from trade. An important principle of war is mobility. All hon. Members have drawn attention to the rundown of our merchant fleet, which has been torpedoed more effectively by the Treasury than by any Exocet missile. There is no doubt that the scrapping of the 100 per cent. investment allowances which were available to shipowners did a great deal to reduce the size of our merchant fleet. It is important, therefore, in terms of the importance of maintaining international United Nations operations, that we have adequate merchant ships so that we can fulfil such requirements.

I recall that during the Falklands operation, in addition to 43 Royal Navy ships, 44 merchant ships were involved. We could not have mounted that operation or our operation in the Gulf without the support of the merchant fleet or the crews to man the ships. It is all very well chartering ships from overseas, but if one does not have the crews to man them, one is in considerable difficulty.

I know that the Ministry of Defence has said that it will carry out a paper exercise, which it calls a scenario-led discussion, some time in the coming month. That is not good enough. I would prefer, on an irregular basis, perhaps once a year, the Secretary of State for Defence to blow the whistle and say, "We are off tomorrow." He could say exactly what he wanted by way of tonnage and he could then see whether the Baltic Exchange and the merchant navy could respond and produce the ships. That would be quite a simple desk exercise which should be carried out irregularly without notice to test the ability of the merchant fleet to respond to what is required.

I am also concerned that the Ministry of Defence may not have adequate powers to requisition ships. In the case of national mobilisation or a threat to the security of the realm, it probably has adequate powers under existing legislation. However, that may not be the case with overseas operations in support of the UN, such as supplying humanitarian aid. Such operations may not be covered by the legislation giving the Government the power to requisition ships. I should like to know whether the powers are adequate for that purpose or whether the Government merely have to rely on normal charter operations for additional shipping if they have to mount such international operations for the United Nations.

One passing thought is that the former Soviet Union countries desperately need foreign currency. If we want proof that it is important from a defence strategic point of view to have a strong merchant fleet, one has only to consider the size of the fleet that the former Soviet Union had in the days of the cold war. It was massive, and it was not just to earn the Soviet Union foreign currency; it was because the Soviet Union took the view that it was an essential resource in what might become a hot war.

Most of the former Soviet Union's ships are still around. Many of them are sitting in dock doing nothing. When we see the former Soviet Union and its economic plight, there is scope for considering an arrangement with countries in the former Soviet Union which have joined the partnership for peace under NATO to make their hulls available to western powers, if they need them, in order to provide resources to carry out international operations for the United Nations.

There has been some debate about the tri-service chaplains school. I am aware that the chaplains school which, at the moment, is at Amport near Andover, is already a combination of Royal Navy and RAF chaplains. Army chaplains, who are moving out of Bagshot park, will amalgamate with them. Several alternatives have been put forward for consideration, including Eltham, Guildford, the Royal Naval college at Greenwich and Amport house. Eltham and Guildford have now been eliminated from the contest, so it is a straightforward choice between Amport and the Royal Naval college at Greenwich.

Many rumours have been going around. The matter is local to my constituency, so I am concerned about the future of Amport house. Building consultants have looked at Amport house and considered how it could be extended to provide facilities for a tri-service chaplains school. I believe that the cost of the extension to Amport is about £600,000. One must compare that with the £15 million or more that would be involved if the tri-service chaplains school were to go to the Royal Naval college at Greenwich.

It is important also to consider the cost per student day. Amport has now succeeded in bringing down its costs from £79 to £73 per student day. If the amalgamation can go forward and there is a tri-service chaplains school at Amport, the cost could go down to about £56 per student day. That seems to be economical. It gives rise to two questions: first, which would be the best base for the tri-service chaplains school? Secondly, what should be done about the Royal Naval college at Greenwich? It is a very important listed building of great historic and architectural importance.

The time has come for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to shed responsibility for historic buildings. We now have a Department of National Heritage. It should be a simple bookkeeping transaction to transfer those buildings into the responsibility of the Secretary of State for National Heritage. That would remove from the Ministry of Defence what could be a very burdensome liability in the future.

I applaud hon. Members' support for our Royal Navy and their calls for stability. That is what our armed forces and the country want. We may no longer be able to boast the biggest Navy in the world, but I am certain that hon. Members will agree that we can still say that we have the best Navy.

8.23 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I hope that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) will

forgive me if I do not follow his wide-ranging comments on a variety of issues, although I will pick up some of his comments on the tri-service chaplaincy. I intend to focus narrowly on issues relating to the future of the Royal Naval college and the Joint Service Defence college, currently located in the historic former Royal hospital buildings in Greenwich.

In a previous debate—I think that it two years ago—I spoke about the Royal Naval college, and I paid tribute to its impressive record and excellent work. My view is shared by hon. Members, particularly those who are familiar with the college's work and have visited it.

In last year's defence costs study, the Secretary of State set out proposals for merging the existing separate service colleges into a new joint service command and staff college. That proposal, I believe, was widely agreed as a sensible response to changing needs for staff training that allowed economies to be made in current spending. There is no dispute about the recommended merger of the existing separate colleges into a combined tri-service college.

There is, however, a very serious question about the subsequent process of determining where the new tri-service college should be located. In the defence costs study, it was confirmed that a review was being conducted to determine whether the Army staff college site at Camberley or the Royal Naval college site in Greenwich would be the best location. On 8 December 1994, the Secretary of State announced the Government's decision in favour of Camberley, claiming that Camberley is

"by far the most appropriate and cost-effective site".—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. *303*.]

The statement concluded that staff training at Bracknell and Greenwich should cease.

Following that announcement, I corresponded with the Secretary of State and the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, seeking further clarification of the basis on which the decision had been reached, in particular requesting sight of the relevant papers and costings. In reply, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces wrote to me on 22 December, promising early publication of a consultation document which

"will contain all relevant information including costings."

The consultation paper was issued last month. On a superficial reading, the decision in favour of Camberley appears to be clearly justified on financial grounds. The table of comparative costs showed costings for Greenwich coming out at about £40 million more over a 10-year period, discounted to net present values. A more detailed analysis of the accompanying tables showed that the great bulk of that additional cost was accounted for by the capital costs of works to convert the existing buildings at Greenwich. Those tables showed the cost of capital works during 1995-96 to 2001-02 at more than £60 million, compared with costs of about £30 million at Camberley. They are broad figures because, in each case, there were two separate options for a different size of college.

The consultation paper did not demonstrate how those costs were made up, but it indicated that they were based on a report by the firm Building Design Partnership, which had been commissioned by the Ministry of Defence to conduct a study of the matter. I therefore asked that a copy of that report should be placed in the Library. The Minister, in his reply to me on 26 January, declined to do so on the grounds that the report contained information that was classified and that it comprised advice to Ministers.

I have to say that I was surprised by that response on two counts. First, the suggestion that a report on the conversion of 300-year-old historic buildings to provide lecture theatres, offices and residential accommodation constitutes a classifiable military secret seems to stretch the bounds of credibility rather far. Secondly, the refusal to make the information available on the ground that it constitutes advice to Ministers clearly flies in the face of the pledge that I had previously been given by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, to which I have already referred, that all relevant information, including costings, would be made available.

Not surprisingly, I challenged the Minister on that, and, after further correspondence with him, he agreed on 10 February to release to me the executive summary of the Building Design Partnership's report. Although that was a welcome step in the right direction, it did not provide very much more information than was already in the public arena, and in particular it did not demonstrate how the various additional capital costs, which made the Greenwich option appear twice as expensive as Camberley, were made up. In his covering letter, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces commented:

"you are right to conclude that the principal reason for the difference in cost between the Greenwich and Camberley options is the need for significantly greater capital expenditure in the early years at Greenwich. This difference is almost entirely due to the fact that the Greenwich site is a Grade 1 listed building and scheduled Ancient Monument and the costs of meeting this substantially larger JSCSC requirement within the statutory constraints associated with that status not surprisingly are high."

Were the Minister here, I would thank him for the care that he put into his lengthy letter, even if he did not provide the information that I requested. The letter continued by identifying specific issues, including

"difficulties of installing networked IT systems; the problems of floor loading (since the upper floors are of a wooden construction); Health and Safety and fire requirements arising from the change of use: and engineering services, in particular the need to double the output of the electoral supply system."

All those points would appear entirely reasonable and plausible, but for the revelation towards the end of the letter that similar costings are unlikely to be applied in respect of the proposed alternative use of the historic buildings at Greenwich, which it is now suggested might house the defence school of languages, or possibly the tri-service chaplaincy.

Clearly there will be some differences in specification for different users, but if it transpires that the cost of adapting the grade 1 listed building at Greenwich to house the defence school of languages can be reduced substantially below the costings assumed necessary for the JSCSC, that raises automatically the question of whether similar economies might have been achieved in the JSCSC specifications.

Before leaving the issue of the suggested alternative uses for the Greenwich site, I have to say that I see no evidence that any financial provision has been made for the costs of transferring alternative Ministry of Defence uses to Greenwich. Unlike the site at Camberley, which could be disposed of if it is not used for the JSCSC, the historic buildings at Greenwich are held in trust by the Greenwich hospital estate, of which the Secretary of State is the sole trustee.

If the Greenwich site is no longer used as a naval or joint service college, the Secretary of State cannot just dispose of it, despite the suggestions of the hon. Member

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

for Romsey and Waterside. The Secretary of State has a responsibility and he is clearly seeking to discharge that by trying to find an alternative use. No financial provision for that alternative use appears to have been included in the costs of the location of the JSCSC, either at Greenwich or at Camberley.

There is an element of doubt not only about whether the costs of the Greenwich option may have been unduly inflated, but about whether some additional costs which, of necessity, flow from a decision to locate the tri-service college at Camberley have been taken into account.

That is not the end of the story. The consultation paper recognises that if the army staff college site at Camberley were no longer required—that would presumably be so if Greenwich was the preferred option—it could be sold. Yet no allowance appears to have been included in the table of comparative costs for the disposal of the Camberley site.

In parliamentary questions to and correspondence with the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, I have sought further clarification of the point. You can imagine my surprise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was told that the information could not be made available for reasons of commercial confidentiality. I am grateful that, on this occasion, the Minister did not try to pretend that the sale value of the Camberley site was a classifiable military secret. Nevertheless, his answer had exactly the same effect of denying the information.

Further correspondence and another parliamentary question established that of the 883 acres of MOD land at Camberley, 70 acres were solely occupied by the Army staff college. Inquiries to local estate agents have suggested that the current value of the land suitable for residential development in the Camberley area would be between £400,000 and £500,000 an acre. On that basis, a rough estimate of the potential value of the site would be somewhere between £28 million and £35 million.

The significance of the figures will not be lost on anyone looking carefully at the issue, for that is roughly the same sum as the difference between the costs of the building work at Greenwich and the building work at Camberley, according to the Building Design Partnership report and consultation paper.

From the information that I have been able to extract from a clearly secretive Ministry of Defence, I suspect that there is no allowance in the table of costings for the disposal of the Camberley site. I have written to the Minister on this, but I have not yet had a reply. In fairness to him, he has probably only received my letter within the last two days. If I am wrong on this matter, I shall happily withdraw my claim, and I hope that the Minister will tell the House whether such provision has been made and what the provision amounts to in total. However, if I am not wrong, it is clear that the figures on which we are invited to agree that Camberley is, in the words of the Secretary of State

"by far the most cost-effective option"

are a serious distortion of the respective costs of the two sites.

Unless the Minister is able to give a clear, categorical and specific assurance and the information that I am requesting, the only conclusion that we shall draw is that the figures set out in the consultation paper are highly misleading and do not accurately represent the respective costs of the Camberley and Greenwich options. The consultation paper should therefore be withdrawn and new costings prepared, taking account of the various elements which I have highlighted—savings on the conversion cost of the historic buildings at Greenwich, the additional costs of relocating other Ministry of Defence functions in Greenwich and the savings attributable to land sales at Camberley.

If the Ministry of Defence is not prepared to do that, it is only right that the Public Accounts Committee should look into the way in which the exercise has been undertaken and also the validity of the estimates being advanced by the Ministry of Defence.

Finally, I shall say a brief word about other elements in the consultation paper. It is not, I fear, only in respect of the figures that the odds have been stacked against Greenwich in this consultation exercise. The paper contains passages that reveal an inherent bias against Greenwich—for example, the section headed "Domestic Considerations", which states:

"Camberley is well served by local schools and medical care is easily accessible. Also the local community in Camberley and Surrey Heath is excellently placed to provide sponsorship to overseas students and their families, giving them a favourable view of Britain and the British way of life, and acting in concert with the college to help them overcome the difficulties of moving in and out. The shopping facilities in the Camberley area are excellent."

Hon. Members must compare that with the tone of a paragraph in the same paper on Greenwich, which states:

"Greenwich has good access to the facilities of London but is less well served locally. Historically the majority of staff and students at RNSC and JSC are unaccompanied by their families and so domestic considerations have played a lesser role in the development of the college than at Camberley".

That is all. There is no reference to local schools or medical care, leaving the implication—no one has the guts to put it in writing, of course—that local schools and medical care are inferior. There is no reference to the shopping facilities in London, but I find it difficult to believe that they do not compare with Camberley.

There is no reference to the historical location and the exceptional cultural facilities in Greenwich and London. Nor is there a reference to the ability of the local community in Greenwich to make overseas students welcome. It says something about the sense of values of the person responsible for penning that paragraph that he or she clearly assumes that overseas visitors and their families will form a more favourable view of the British way of life in suburban Camberley than in historic Greenwich, where they would be studying in a complex of buildings designed by the greatest names in British architecture—Inigo Jones, Christopher Wren, Webb, Hawksmore and Vanbrugh—and eating their meals in a building as splendid as the Painted hall.

That blatant prejudice sadly distorts the consultation document, and is another reason why the recommendation should be reconsidered. The Royal Naval college and the Joint Service Defence college at Greenwich have, over the years, performed an outstanding service. The site they occupy is one of the jewels in Britain's crown. Greenwich deserves better than the shabby treatment it is being given by this biased and flawed consultation exercise.

8.38 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Debates in the House on the Royal Navy are always important

occasions, and tonight's debate has been given special significance by some of the comments made by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement about the future of Britain's defence industries and the Government's newly emerging policy on defence procurement. The debates are also important because the Royal Navy is the senior service, and as a country, and as Members, we should pay tribute to the men and women who serve, and who have served, in the Royal Navy. We owe them an enormous debt.

A theme which has concerned me consistently during my time in the House is the way in which the Government handle the principle procurement issue within the Ministry of Defence.

There has been much discussion during the debate about the extent to which defence expenditure has been reduced, where the cuts have fallen and the resultant implications for our defence industrial base. I believe that the Government, in reducing defence expenditure, have hit systematically at procurement, which has therefore taken the brunt of the Government's reductions in defence spending. I am not sure that that is the best course of action to take. If our fighting forces are to retain their maximum capability, by definition they must also have the most effective equipment.

Between 1990, the year of the"Options for Change" review, and 1994-95, expenditure on sea equipment fell by more than expenditure on land and air equipment. In real terms, the decline in that period in purchasing new sea equipment was 27.5 per cent. In the same period, the defence budget increased in cash terms from £21,709 million in 1990-91 to £22.51 million in 1994-95, which, in real terms, represents a decrease of 17.4 per cent. Those are two interesting figures; the defence budget has fallen by 17.4 per cent. in that period but expenditure on new sea equipment has fallen by 27.5 per cent. If those figures come as a surprise to Ministers, let me tell them that the figures were produced by the House of Commons Library.

That is a significant issue, because we all understand, and we accept on both sides of the House, that in the post cold war climate there is a reduced need for defence expenditure. That is common ground between us. The way in which the Government manage that process of reduced defence expenditure causes concern, not only to me, but to my constituents who bear the brunt of those cuts in procurement. In my constituency, that has a special resonance because of our long association with the Royal Navy.

There is a disturbing trend in the way that the Government are handling the country's defence budget. I think especially that the bulk of that economy in terms of new equipment has affected the Royal Navy more than forces on land and in the air. I have a simple question to ask Ministers—"why?" Why have the Government chosen to inflict those economies on new sea equipment? What is the rationale for that? What is the defence justification?

In my constituency, the direct consequence of the Government's reduced expenditure on sea equipment is the loss of 8,000 jobs at VSEL with, I am sorry to say, the probability of even more job losses to come. It has also meant the end of apprentice training.

In my constituency, the Vickers shipyard has been the heart of the local economy ever since the town was established. For the hundreds of young men and women who have acquired valuable engineering skills in my constituency, that prospect has ended. There is no apprentice training, and there has been no recruitment since 1990-91. The consequence is catastrophic. VSEL used to recruit about 400 men and women to their apprentice training programme every year. I am no mathematician, but that means approaching 2,000 lost engineering apprentices in a community that is 40 miles from a motorway and more than 100 miles from any other approximate centre of population.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) said that people can simply move to find work, but in this case they cannot. I know that the hon. Gentleman is about to leave the Chamber and I do not wish to embarrass him, but let me tell him that in my constituency it is almost impossible for a young couple, one of whom or both have lost their job at VSEL, to sell their home and move, because the housing market in Barrow-in-Furness has been in the doldrums for many years. There is a substantial problem of negative equity. It is extremely difficult for skilled workers in my constituency to move to find new jobs. That is not on the realistic agenda.

The probability of extra redundancies continues to hang over us. Many of the men and women who currently work in VSEL, and their families who depend on the wages that they earn, live constantly under the threat of their principal wage earner losing his or her job. That is unacceptable.

I contend that the Government have added to the burden of redundancy unnecessarily by delays in key procurement decisions. The principal example that I give to the House and Ministers is the decision to delay procurement of batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines. The Minister of State for Defence Procurement was gracious in allowing me to intervene on his opening speech, but if one examines the records of parliamentary proceedings on earlier occasions, one finds that in 1992 the following answer was given to a written question by the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement, now the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He said:

> "Studies into the design of a batch 2 Trafalgar class are in progress . . . we expect to invite tenders for design and build of the first submarine during the course of next year"—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1992; Vol. 208, c. 258.]

That was 1994. It is now 1995. I understand, from what the Minister said today, that it no decision is likely to be made before summer 1996 to order any of those batch 2 Trafalgars. That is a delay of two and a half years. The Minister must understand the consequences that the delay has had, and will have, on employment at VSEL.

The Minister gave the House a possible explanation for the delay. Unless I am misquoting him, which I do not wish to do, the delay was due to the fact that the Government wanted to create competition for the batch 2 Trafalgars. We know what that means—the Government paying money to GEC to put together a rival bid to construct the batch 2 Trafalgars.

The Minister has admitted to the House, which he is right to do because it is correct, that only one shipyard in Britain is licensed to construct nuclear submarines—VSEL. What on earth have the Government been doing, spending what may be as much as £20 million constructing a bogus and fabricated competition for the new batch 2 Trafalgars? There is no doubt, in my opinion, that those submarines will be built at VSEL. I very much hope that that is so.

[Mr. John Hutton]

On the Trident programme, VSEL has an established record of producing value for money, and of producing vessels to quality, to standard and to time. The Trident contract is a perfect example of the ability of VSEL to produce high quality equipment that provides value for money for the taxpayer. I do not believe that that would have been any different with the contract for the batch 2 Trafalgars. So I am worried about the Government's policy on that issue and the way that they have handled the ordering of the batch 2 Trafalgars.

My final concern relates to the Government's stated policy, with which I agree, of maintaining 12 operational SSNs. I hope that the Minister is able to answer the following question: will the delays in ordering the batch 2 Trafalgars affect in any way the ability of the Royal Navy to maintain and deploy 12 operational SSNs? The programme for constructing the batch 2 Trafalgars is now two and a half years behind schedule, and that will necessarily, I understand, require the continued operation of now aging vessels for that extra two and a half years if we are to maintain an operational fleet of 12 SSNs. I am very worried about the way that the Government have mishandled the issue.

I am also worried about the length of time that the Government appear to spend on processing some of those tenders. I understand that the landing platform dock tenders, which will be submitted in March 1995, are expected to take as much as nine months to be assessed by the Ministry of Defence. Batch 2 tenders are likely to take at least 12 months to assess.

I fully appreciate, and am happy to concede, that the tender documents will be very technical and will require proper assessment to ensure, not only that the Navy obtains the equipment that it wants, but that the taxpayer obtains value for money. However, the longer that the Minister takes to assess those tenders, the greater the consequences that there might be for employment at VSEL. I hope that he will reconsider the length of time that he proposes to take to investigate the merits or otherwise of those tenders.

I also hope that the Minister might be able to say something to the House tonight, because other hon. Members have mentioned the subject, about what is happening to the Upholder class submarines that are currently in my constituency waiting for sale. What progress has been made on the sale of the Upholders? Are the Government in a position to say something more concrete about their future?

I am happy to support the Government in their decision to invite tenders for the replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. I support that completely and I hope that the Government will say that they intend to order two vessels to replace Fearless and Intrepid. From an operational point of view, if those amphibious ships are to be deployable, I imagine we would need a bare minimum of two, and I hope that the Government will confirm that that is their intention.

I want to say one or two words about the reductions in the Royal Naval Reserve and the decision to disband the Royal Navy Auxiliary Reserve. I am sure that the Minister is aware that a new organisation, the Maritime Voluntary Service, has been set up. It has recruited up to 1,500 volunteers in a uniformed, disciplined service to provide some continuity now that the RNR has been reduced and the RNAS has been disbanded. Because of those reductions, there is a danger that the nation could lose key maritime skills and traditions that are vital to the security of the nation and fulfilling our NATO commitments. The Government should be considering what steps they can take to encourage the retention of that maritime tradition. Ministers have a particular responsibility in that respect, given the continued popularity of the Sea Cadet Corps and the great difficulty that many of those who emerge from it at 18 will have in pursuing a career in the Royal Navy. Those people want to continue to develop their maritime skills so that they are available to the nation in times of emergency.

The Maritime Voluntary Service can provide a useful service to the nation and it deserves the support of the Ministry of Defence. I am interested to know what consideration the MOD has given or is giving to allowing that newly formed service the first option to buy some surplus craft, such as inland minesweepers and fleet tenders, which are now lying idle around the country. It would be a positive step if the Ministry could say that it planned to make those vessels available at a competitive and reasonable price, of course, for the taxpayer. I emphasise that that service is not asking for taxpayers' money to support its work, but it is looking for some sign from the Government that they are interested in retaining traditional maritime and naval skills.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement mentioned important industrial defence issues to do with procurement and stabilising our industrial base. It is common knowledge that defence industries around the world are undergoing major structural change. The GEC—British Aerospace bid for VSEL is simply part of that wider process of change. I am glad that the Government have referred that bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I am particularly glad that one aspect of that reference includes consideration of the public interest in addition to the traditional concern about ensuring competition and avoiding monopolies. I hope that that reference and the MMC's report will include an assessment of employment prospects in our naval shipyards and what needs to be done by Government and industry in partnership to ensure the continuation of those vital engineering skills.

The bid for VSEL raises a number of important questions. First, it highlights the importance of export markets in terms of securing employment in the naval shipyards. We know that the MOD's budget is subject to continuing pressure and we also know that, quite simply, not enough of work is coming from the MOD to keep all the present naval shipyards fully employed up to their maximum capability. For that reason export markets are extremely important. I hope that their importance is also included in the Government's assessment of the defence industrial base.

The VSEL bid also calls into question the future of smaller defence companies. They will face particular difficulties in the future, because if the process is one of rationalisation, with large companies coming together to form bigger groups, where will that leave some of our smaller but highly proficient and technically expert defence contractors?

Another problem relates to competition and monopoly—a central issue that the MMC reference must address. There is not enough business coming out of the MOD to enable the Government to rely on competition

alone as a mechanism to influence the structure and shape of the defence industry. There is not enough business to keep three yards fully occupied. Not long ago there were five naval shipyards, but, sadly, in the past two years we have lost Cammell Laird and Swan Hunter.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) that the possibility of greater European collaboration within the European Union must be considered. I would be interested to know whether the Government are currently considering amending article 223 of the treaty of Rome and proposing any changes in that regard at the intergovernmental conference in 1996. Are the Government considering a case for the creation of a single European market for defence goods? What would be its implications for the United Kingdom?

On the question of collaboration and greater co-operation between European defence contractors, will the Minister of State for the Armed Forces give us slightly more information than that offered by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement? The right hon. Gentleman referred specifically to the Government's belief that they need to retain a capability to build hulls. I asked him whether that involves the key operation of fitting out. With respect, I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman quite understood my question. Naval shipyards are not just places where hulls are built, but where equipment is installed and ships are finished, for example, by fitting engines, propulsion units and weapons systems. The right hon. Gentleman is well aware of that, but he did not say that the Government saw the need to protect fitting out as an operation conducted within the remnants of the United Kingdom's warship building industry.

In the light of what the right hon. Gentleman said, hulls could be completed in the United Kingdom but towed somewhere else to be fitted out with kit and equipment that may be British or foreign. It is important that, in order to retain the skills base in the naval shipyards, those fitting-out operations are also completed in the United Kingdom.

A large proportion of the equipment fitted in the type 23 frigates is not built in the United Kingdom. That fact was not at the heart of the question that I put to the Minister of State, but if we want to retain a hull-building capability in the United Kingdom—I strongly urge that we want to do that—are we also committed to retaining that technical ability to fit out and finish off those hulls and platforms? I strongly urge the Minister to make it clear that that is the Government's intention, because that key fitting-out operation is just as important in terms of retaining our shipbuilding capability as is the ability to complete a steel hull.

I hope that once the MMC report on VSEL is published there will be an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to discuss its implications. It has always been my contention that the issues raised by the VSEL takeover go far beyond the future of the Barrow and Furness economy. They affect the whole structure, size and location of the British defence industry. That issue is critical to the future of the Royal Navy and our armed services in general.

8.56 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. In common with other hon. Members, I should like to begin by paying tribute to all those who serve in our armed services, particularly those in active service now in support of the United Nations. Since this is a debate on the Navy, I should like to pay particular tribute to those who are serving in the Royal Navy.

I should also like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on his thoughtful opening speech. I welcome him to his new role on our Front Bench. I should also like to thank the Government Whips, because, in the past, I have sat through many other debates on services and been called right at the end only to see the Government Whips pull in Conservative Back Benchers to speak who had not sat through those debates. I appreciate the fact that the Government Whips have not done that on this occasion. In the 20 years in which I have served in the House it is interesting to note how support for debates on the services has steadily declined within the Conservative party. There was a time when it was extremely difficult even for Conservative Members to get called.

The speech by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement was also extremely helpful. I do not blame him for drawing attention to the difference between the Opposition Front Bench and people like myself. I am certainly not ashamed of my position as someone who has always supported unilateral nuclear disarmament and I shall continue to do so. I have no need to wear a badge as I have always supported those views. If they were right at the height of the cold war they are still right.

What disappointed me was the Minister's reluctance to accept that there is common ground between the Government, the Opposition Front Bench and people like myself. We are all committed to getting rid of Trident; we disagree on the method not the desire. It is important for the House to stress just how expensive the Trident system is, the £30 billion in expenses that are likely to be involved and the unimaginable horror that would result if the weapons were ever used or if they were involved in an accident. Even if the weapons were never used, considerable environmental problems would be involved in getting rid of the ships and the weapons.

I had hoped that the Minister would spend some time telling us how the Government envisage the removal of the weapons systems. In particular, I would have liked him to tell us what progress is being made in the preparations for the non-proliferation treaty discussions and to give the House the assurance that they have always been reluctant to give—that Britain is not in breach of the current non-proliferation treaty by the introduction of Trident and the number of weaponheads that may be involved, and that it will not make the negotiation of the new treaty that much more difficult. I was disappointed that we did not hear it from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement; perhaps we will hear something from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces when he replies to the debate.

What progress is being made on getting a complete test ban on nuclear weapons? The Government have reluctantly accepted that we can do all the testing that we want with simulation rather than actual tests, but there is still a question mark over what the Chinese do. If the Chinese test, the Americans may test and that will lead to the issue of whether we do. It would be helpful to hear more about the Government's views.

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

As the whole idea was that Trident would be a deterrent, there should be more transparency about the Government's proposals and their policy towards it. If it really is a deterrent, the more we tell people about it the more likely it is to deter.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Mr. Bonsor), the Chairman of the Select Committee, pointed out the continuing military capability of the former Soviet Union. What are the Government doing about that? There must be fear in people's minds that a changing regime within the former Soviet Union might return to a rather more warlike and aggressive stance. How far are the British Government helping to scale down the military industrial complexes within the former Soviet Union? Only if they can be scaled down and their resources reallocated to consumer production—the sooner that happens, the better—will there be less likelihood of a new threat developing from that part of the world.

Therefore, it is very important that when we discuss arms conversion, we do not limit our debate to the United Kingdom and western Europe, but explore what can be done to aid arms conversion within the former Soviet Union.

We have also to examine other threats. Conservative Members talked about the threats from fundamentalists and terrorist groups. The theory of deterrence does not work when we face a threat from those groups of people. It is important that we rethink how we are going to deal with such threats. In respect of both the fundamentalists and the terrorist groups, it is essential throughout the world to ensure that nuclear materials are not readily available. I fear that some of those groups may not be deterred—if deterrents have ever worked against anyone—by the threat of us having nuclear weapons, that may even spur them on to action.

I had hoped that the Minister could have said a little about what we are doing to prepare for the decommissioning of nuclear-powered submarines that already have been laid up and the Polaris submarines and their nuclear fuels. The United States and the former Soviet Union have increasing numbers of nuclear-powered submarines rusting away in various coastal inlets. Their disposal will create problems. When we are talking about creating jobs, any country that can come up with the technology to become involved in decommissioning nuclear submarines has good prospects for some excellent jobs in the future, not only providing employment opportunities but making an important environmental contribution.

I turn briefly to the question of the diversification of defence industries. The Minister said that we could not expect the Government to provide subsidies for arms conversion. However, the Government have provided subsidies for most of our defence contractors over the years in the form of defence research and development work. I suggest that the Government continue that research and development, but at the same time encourage some of our military contractors to look at civil uses for their equipment.

If we are not careful, any chance of competition for military contracts will decline steadily and it will cost far more money to purchase goods and equipment from a single supplier. It would be a better use of taxpayers' money to encourage the existing suppliers to diversify their operations and give them an alternative base.

The alternative—which the Government seem to be very keen on—is to encourage our defence contractors to sell military equipment to any country in the world. I believe that that is a very dangerous policy. Time after time we have sold defence equipment to allegedly safe, favourable regimes which, five or six years later, have changed totally and, in some instances, have become extremely hostile to this country.

I do not believe that we should try to subsidise and maintain defence contractors in this country through a policy of selling military equipment to any country in the world which is not acting aggressively towards us at that time. It would be far better to spend a small amount of money to ensure that defence contractors can develop alternative, peaceful uses for their factories and their skilled workforce. Factories could then have a military production line as well as an economically viable civil production line. That would be better than pushing defence contractors out of business, or forcing them to sell military equipment to undesirable countries.

I hope that the Minister who replies to the debate will tell us what progress the Government have made with regard to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Will he inform the House when the Government hope that the Soviet Union will move to reduce its capability for producing all sorts of ships, many of which have nuclear capability? Will he explain what the Government are doing about decommissioning the existing nuclear-powered submarines in this country? I also seek the Minister's assurance that the Government will look more carefully at the countries to which they encourage British arms manufacturers to sell weapons, because we may be storing up problems for the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Dr. Reid.

Mr. Soames: Hear, hear.

9.7 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and thank you for the groans of support from the Government Front Bench. In a wide-ranging debate such as this it is obviously impossible to address all the points that have been made—although I am sure that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will do his best in his wind-up speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) raised a specific point about HMS Caroline being retained in the north of Ireland. Having consulted my colleagues, I can assure him that a future Labour Government will be well disposed toward that matter.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) made his usual formidable contribution to the debate. I usually quote him at great length when criticising the Government, but in his speech today he challenged our commitment to the defence review, as did the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). I will return to that point later.

The contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) and for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), as well as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves), were spiced with the knowledge and experience that they

gained through the armed forces parliamentary scheme. However uncomfortable that experience may make the Government of the day—I am sure that it will happen to us when we are in Government—it is a worthy scheme. In the decades following the end of conscription, fewer Members of the House have had experience of or personal contact with the armed forces. I know that the scheme is widely supported.

The hon. Member for Hall Green emphasised the importance of our carriers. I think that he was one of only two people to raise that matter tonight and he was correct to do so. I hope that the Minister will have something to say on it. He also mentioned amphibiosity, and I concur with the views that he expressed. If I heard him correctly, however, he referred to a "subtle escalation" in nuclear war. I know that there may be nuances of difference between on us on that subject, but did he really say that?

Mr. Hargreaves: The hon. Gentleman misheard me. I think that I was suggesting that submarines could be used for the subtle escalation or projection of force. That would be in conventional terms, of course, rather than nuclear.

Dr. Reid: I am greatly reassured by that comment.

A number of hon. Members raised an important issue—the ratio of shore leave to time spent at sea—which I shall deal with briefly. That does not mean to say that I deem it to be less important than other issues. During debates on the Army, it is common for us to raise the subject of the time between roulement battalions—I suppose that this is the parallel in the Navy. I know that the Minister will be concerned about it. Perhaps he will assure us that, as the downsizing feeds through and the world position changes, and our Northern Ireland commitments diminish, the problem will ease. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned because the material condition and welfare of our troops is essential. It is a good thing in itself and is a vital component of morale.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, who chalienged the defence review, did so in a sustained and intellectually coherent fashion, which we found refreshing, as it has often been dismissed over the years by Conservative Members, without any real basis of intellectual argument against it. I listened carefully, as did my colleagues, to what he said. There is, perhaps, much wider agreement than at first appears—certainly with the first two of his points—on the relationship between defence and foreign affairs and the nature of matching resources and commitments. Indeed, were they not official spokesmen, both Ministers would agree with those points. I take it that he is arguing that a review was right all along and that the Government have got it wrong all along. But having got it wrong and imposed all the burdens on the services, for God's sake do not impose yet another burden. He can be assured that we are aware of that difficulty and will take it into account in our own thinking.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) spoke of the anxiety and the reality of job losses in Plymouth and Devon and the sensitivity of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces when dealing with sackings. There was, of course—we all want to forget—a long and rather unedifying discussion on membership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. I am of the opinion that if everyone in the House who is accused of CND membership was actually in CND at one time, its coffers would have been swollen well beyond what they were. One hopes that if the hon. Gentleman ever joins the armed forces parliamentary scheme again, his target practice will be slightly more successful than it was tonight, because when—at around dinner time—only five or six Labour Members were present, he picked two who, supposedly, were in CND, and was wrong on both occasions. If in one's previous political incarnation in the SDP one has stood on the same platform with CND representatives, and proudly displayed it in one's election leaflet, one should not, when one later becomes a Tory Member of Parliament, stand up and accuse Labour Members of being in CND, when they were not in the first place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devonport gave a pretty damning indictment of the Government's policy on personnel, housing and education. No doubt the Minister will wish to reply.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) made pertinent points on the defence industrial base and the size of the merchant navy.

I was increasingly convinced by the defence of Greenwich advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). I hope that the Minister was listening as carefully as I was. He suggested the existence of huge and significant omissions from the consultation document which must put its validity and objectivity in question.

As usual, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), who attends nearly all our defence debates, delivered insights into procurement management and enlightening statistics relating to naval expenditure. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) again raised the general subject of the Government's approach to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, targeting his points successfully. He also pointed out—and it is worth noting—that very few Tory Members have been present for the debate.

This must be the first occasion in living memory on which the Conservative party has run out of speakers during a defence debate, and it demonstrates beyond doubt that the defence argument is being won by the Labour party—a party whose defence stance is confident and assured. That contrasts with the performance of the Minister. As we know, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces approaches the Dispatch Box in a timid, faltering and directionless way, scratching around for solutions.

What do we ask from a debate such as this? We normally seek elucidation, enlightenment and education; that is the nature of our parliamentary exchanges, is it not? What have we learnt from today's debate? We have learnt about a number of interesting minor details: I was amazed to learn, for instance, of the emphasis that the MOD apparently places on subsidies for foxhunting. It seems that foxhunting adds immeasurably to the tactical judgment of sailors in particular. I look forward to studying the underlying reasons when my party is in government.

We also learnt that the vast majority of soldiers, sailors and airmen have experienced a cut of over 15 per cent. in their salaries and remuneration since the Conservatives came to power in 1979. Having drawn attention to that, we were accused of stirring up subversion in the armed forces. Apparently, it is now a treasonable offence to point out to a soldier, sailor or airman that the Tories have cut the amount of money that he receives. Not only hanging but drawing and quartering is the fate that awaits those who commit the even more treasonable offence of

[Dr. Reid]

pointing out that, during the same period, admirals, commodores, brigadiers and generals have been given a 17 per cent. pay increase. Of course, those who will decide the matter are members of the armed forces, who will make their opinion known in the secrecy of the ballot box.

We learnt that during the periods since the war when Labour has been in government a higher percentage of gross domestic product has been spent on defence than under the Tories: 6.4 per cent. per annum, rather than 5.8 per cent. Those are interesting statistics, given the Conservatives' record in maligning our position on defence.

We also heard again something that we had heard only 24 hours ago. Yesterday, for the first time in years, we heard an admission—from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement—that what we have said for the past four years is true: that in the decade between 1985 and 1995 the defence budget has fallen by 25 per cent. in real terms. It has been—I quote the Minister—

"a much sharper fall in recent years for the support services."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 960.]

The Minister may think that that is not the first time that the fall in the budget has been admitted publicly. I cannot expect him to know this, because he has not been around for the past four or five years, but some of us were accused of misleading the House by suggesting that a 25 per cent. cut was scheduled in that decade's budget.

Naturally, we fully expect the Treasury to seek financial solace from the Ministry of Defence, particularly in the aftermath of the cold war. Our charge against the Government is not that they have slashed defence expenditure; it is the simple but damning charge that, in the course of those reductions, they have proceeded without strategy or coherence; have cut, are cutting and will continue to cut in a piecemeal fashion; and, in the course of cutting, they wasted finances, squandered skills and thrown away equipment. In so doing, they have undermined both capability and morale in our armed forces.

No wonder a recent paper from the Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies concluded:

"Far from being able to claim that 'defence is safe in our hands', the Conservatives must hope that defence will not be an issue at the next election."

Trying to make a virtue out of a necessity, the Government claim that the big upheavals are over and imply that the cuts have finished.

Mr. Colvin: To demonstrate the invalidity of what the hon. Gentleman has just said, may I point out that, first, the United States of America, which is accepted as being the most powerful country in the world in terms of defence, has cut its defence expenditure far more strictly than this country, with reductions of some 40 per cent. Secondly, it is responsible to cut the teeth first, to the extent required for our commitments, and only then deal with the tail. That is why recent reductions in support services have been of a higher percentage than front-line reductions, which is precisely what "Front Line First" is all about.

Dr. Reid: Two points arise from what the hon. Gentleman says. First, people should be careful before accusing others of wanting to cut defence and not being patriotic. I do not say that the hon. Gentleman does that, but it has become a habit among Tory Members. The present Ministers are too courteous to do so, but on one occasion I was accused of being almost treasonable, so I pointed out that those who had betrayed this country, whether in our intelligence services or armed services, up to and including Lord Haw-Haw, did not have the same background as my comrades. We question no one's patriotism or commitment to defence.

Mr. Colvin: Nor do I.

Dr. Reid: I know, but some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues occasionally do. When it comes to testing the statistics, whether they are on wages, expenditure or on a historical basis, people should be careful. Who formed NATO? Ernie Bevin was not a leading member of the Conservative party. I said that we do not attack Ministers just because they cut defence expenditure. I gave a list of how they have cut defence expenditure and said why they should fear that when they face the electors.

We have now been told that the big upheavals are over. In the previous debate on this matter, we asked the Secretary of State to confirm that no more cuts would be made, but he would not do so. We asked whether more changes would be made, but no Minister will say that no more changes will be made because cuts are already in the system and the world is changing. So the Government should not make a meal of saying that there will be no more big upheavals.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement was on BSkyB television last week and said that he expected a surface fleet of fewer than 35. If he is now prepared to guarantee that 35 is the minimum beneath which we shall not go in the foreseeable future, we shall accept that.

Mr. Freeman: I made it plain in my opening statement that the Government's policy on the escort ships is clear. For the foreseeable future, we plan to have 35. On the interview to which the hon. Gentleman refers, perhaps he will do me the justice of watching the entire programme, although I cannot guarantee that all my remarks have been included in it. No one can guarantee that. I implied that the number of platforms is not the sole determinant of defence capability; equipment on the ships and aircraft are also determinants. That point may have been slightly too complicated and sophisticated for the programme, but that point differs from my clear commitment about the number of escort vessels.

Dr. Reid: That was a more courteous end to the sentence than I had expected at one stage. I have not seen the whole programme because the television station would not give me all of it. I do not think that it has been broadcast yet. I saw and studied only the section that was on the news. I did not claim that the Minister said that the number would be below 35, but we did worry. He has cleared that matter up and we accept it, but he will understand why we have such misgivings.

In the past, when faced with demands for assurances, Ministers have always been what Churchill called—if I may quote other hon. Members' family members—"resolute in their equivocation." The role being played in this matter by the former Minister of State for Defence Procurement worries me. I am not sure that he has gone that far away in his new job as the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

When Churchill was put into an eminent position in a period of dark crisis for this country, Royal Navy ships were signalled with the brief telegram, "Winston is back." I doubt whether a telegram is being signalled around all the ships saying, "Jonathan has gone for good", because I suspect that Jonathan is taking a closer interest in the matter than it appears.

It is not just that cuts are being made; they are being made in a non-strategic fashion. There are three examples of that: Rosyth, the Upholders and the merchant navy, all of which have been mentioned. Strategically, the closure of Rosyth assumes that we will never again require substantial naval operations in the water to the north of the country. Is that a wise decision? Operationally, it undermines our primary obligation to defend our home waters by minehunters, minesweepers and offshore patrol vessels. It also undermines our ability to protect our oil, gas and fishery resources.

The Select Committee on Defence referred to the danger of

"blind cuts imposed by the Treasury axe".

When it comes to cuts, there is a mad axeman there who knows where the bodies are hidden.

Mr. Freeman: There is a distinction between the fleet's operations in the north-eastern approaches, and the facilities required to support the minesweepers and minehunters. There will still be facilities at Rosyth to support, in certain circumstances, those vessels. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to confuse those two issues.

Dr. Reid: Unfortunately, I cannot give way on every point, although I appreciate that a dialogue might be enlightening for all of us. The second example is the classic case of the Upholder. I will not go through all the details of the Upholder saga, which were mentioned earlier, but I wonder if the Ministers have thought over the history of the matter. The Upholder design contract was awarded in 1980. The first building contract was placed in 1983. The remaining three were contracted in 1986. The final boat went into service in mid-June 1993. The decision was made to take them out of commission at the beginning of July 1993.

Do Ministers realise what that means? It took 13 years to put Upholder in the water and 13 days to sink it. That is an incredible comparison, quite apart from the money involved. Thirteen years were spent getting a new submarine in the water and, within roughly 13 days of the final boat going in, a decision was made to decommission. That is a classic example of planning and procurement shambles in the MOD.

Merchant navy tonnage has fallen to one third of the tonnage that it inherited, with its strategic, industrial and political importance to this country. That is a fall of enormous magnitude. It is no good Ministers telling us that they are keeping their eye on it. I had to use this example once before. I am always suspicious of Ministers who tell us that they are keeping their eye on things because, as a very young lad, I had to watch a Scottish goalkeeper called Frank Haffey at Hampden Park keeping his eye on the ball, but Scotland lost 9-3. The fact that his eye was on the ball was of no benefit because the ball kept passing him. Could we have some action?

The Government have no coherent defence and industrial policy. The state of our amphibious capability should be a particular cause for concern. Perhaps the Minister can reassure me about the worrying case of Intrepid, which, as far as I am aware, still lies in dock, is unable to put to sea, and has been stripped of spares to keep other ageing assault ships going. It is in a state of extended readiness. Where I come from we used to call that mothballed. What we used to call cuts is now downsizing. We have been told that there will definitely be an order for two replacement ships. However, when announcing that order, the Minister said that the Government would order, "up to two". That must be the epitome of equivocation. How can there be any doubt about the numbers one or two? Perhaps it includes none. Apparently, in the euphemisms employed by the Ministry of Defence, that has now been changed to ordering "one (plus one)". Is the Minister having two, one or none?

I will not go on at great length about the Government's response to waste. However, I want to put one thing on the record. I do not intend to be offensive to anyone personally, but it should be a matter of honour in the House that when wastage is on such a massive scale, running into hundreds of millions of pounds, and is serious enough for Ministers to demand the resignation of a public servant—a serving officer—surely it should be serious enough for one of the Ministers or the Secretary of State to resign. How is it that in a Cabinet full of people who have brassnecked their way through scandal after scandal without resignation entering their mind, suddenly a scapegoat is found and a demand for resignation is levied against someone who, at this stage, cannot answer for himself?

I have already mentioned the increase in salaries for the other ranks as compared with that for the top brass. We have no objection to anyone in the armed forces receiving a salary, remuneration, back-up, education or housing that befits the sacrifices and risks that those personnel take. However, at a time of constraint, when morale is being tested and when sailors are being asked to spend longer periods away from home, we do object to a settlement that increases the top salaries by 17 per cent. and decreases the bottom salaries by 15 per cent. We make no apology for our objection to that.

As we approach the extension conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the Government's record has hardly been calculated to convince others of the wisdom of an unconditional extension. We have warned the Government about that continually. They have refused to limit the number of warheads on Trident, they have stood out against a moratorium on nuclear testing and they had to be dragged away from the development of a new sub-strategic nuclear system—TASM, the tactical air-to-surface missile. They have constantly refused even to consider a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons. Is it any wonder that there is now such resistance among non-nuclear states to an unconditional extension of the non-proliferation treaty? Can the Government tell us what they will do if they become the victims of their own behaviour and the non-nuclear states refuse to endorse the treaty?

This year, we set the Royal Navy the tasks which, in essence, have changed very little over past decades or even centuries. It has the task of safeguarding our home shores and mainland. We have asked it to fulfil a vital contribution to our allied effort and to represent our interests abroad, in war and peace. This year, as ever, our Royal Navy has responded with the discipline, dedication and professionalism that we have come to respect and to expect from the senior service.

[Dr. Reid]

The Opposition join others in the House in recording our gratitude to the men and women of the Royal Navy. That includes those involved in the protection of our territorial waters and fisheries, those in the national carrier task group, the ships of Operation Maritime Guard in the Adriatic and the Sea Kings at Split, all of which stand ready to provide close air support, casualty evacuation and additional assistance to our ground troops in Bosnia. It also includes those in the Armilla patrol in the Gulf who, for a decade and a half, have protected peaceful commerce in that region, and the men and women who serve our country, whether on shore and at home or abroad, in the warm waters of the Mediterranean or the icy flows of the south Atlantic. Tonight we signal our appreciation and our debt to them all. We firmly believe that their professionalism, commitment and dedication deserve a better Government than they have at present, and we pledge ourselves to ensure that they have such a Government in the not too distant future.

9.34 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): That was, as usual, a tidy and polished speech by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) who seemed to be getting a little ahead of himself by regarding these Benches with goggle eyes. We shall do our very best to fight him off.

I hope to deal with most of the issues raised today but any specialist points relating to procurement will be dealt with separately by way of a letter from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. I therefore hope that the House will indulge me if I deal only with the more general issues.

Clearly, this debate has been interesting and important, as such debates always are. I share the disappointment expressed by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North that so few hon. Members have come to debate a matter of extreme importance to the interests of the United Kingdom and of our services. Before I embark on the substance of my speech, I, too, pay a warm tribute to the men and women of the Royal Navy as they continue to play a crucial role in the defence of the United Kingdom. It is a great privilege to be Minister of State for the Armed Forces and have the opportunity to deal for a time with such admirable people.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State outlined some of the important operations in which the Royal Navy has taken part in the past 12 months. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North paid a handsome tribute to the Navy's extensive operational role. In addition to its operations in the Adriatic and its contribution to the international task group off Somalia, the Royal Navy continues to operate vessels all over the globe. As we have been debating here tonight, in the south Atlantic HMS Dumbarton Castle is returning from a deployment to the Falkland Islands while HMS Endurance, the ice patrol ship, is on her annual deployment to the Antarctic—rather her than me. HMS Marlborough is making her way to the South Atlantic and, far out underneath the oceans, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, the independent strategic deterrent patrol, is on guard for the life of Britain.

In warmer climes, the current West Indies guardship, Broadsword, and her tanker, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Brambleleaf, represent our interests in the security and stability of the independent territories in the Caribbean. As my right hon. Friend rightly said, they regularly take part in anti-drugs operations in support of civilian authorities and seize the drugs that are increasingly bound for Europe.

In the far east, the Hong Kong patrol craft continue their duties to patrol the waters of the colony and support the civil authorities in very difficult anti-smuggling operations in which they demonstrate exceptional courage and skill. HMS Liverpool is also in the region, having just completed a visit to Malaysia, and is on her way to India.

As some hon. Members said, closer to home several Royal Marine units are in Norway for winter training and have this week participated in a major exercise in the Norwegian sea. They are being supported by several ships, including the assault ship HMS Fearless. Next week, all those units will move on to participate in NATO's major exercise, Strong Resolve. It is a large amphibious exercise, also in the Norwegian sea, and one that I very much look forward to visiting.

While on the subject of the Royal Marines, I am delighted to be able to say that Brigadier Thomson and General Le Pichon, the commanding officers of 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines and the French 9th Marine Infantry Division, have today signed an exchange of letters promoting closer links between the two formations. The letters identify a wide range of opportunities for co-operation, ranging from exchanges of personnel to observing and participating in exercises. That link between marine units represents a valuable and practical step in building closer links between France's armed forces and our own.

Coming closer to home and to an interest close to your heart, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Navy remains busy in home waters around the United Kingdom. Her Majesty's ships Anglesey, Guernsey, Lindisfarne, Cattistock and Shetland are all on fishery patrol tonight on duties around our coastline. A number of ships are undergoing their operational sea training—indeed, today they will have been fighting the Thursday war before deployment on operational tasks—and several others are undertaking trials. That is extremely demanding and important work. A major joint maritime exercise off the north coast of Scotland, involving numerous Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships, alongside those of our NATO allies, completes tomorrow. Meanwhile, 42 Royal Marine commandos are on patrol duties in Northern Ireland.

Although by no means exhaustive, I hope that that list adds to the quick spin that my right hon. Friend gave of the Royal Navy's commitments. It justly claims to be and remains a worldwide, blue-water Navy, of whose achievements we may be truly and justly proud. We are privileged to have a force of dedicated, highly trained, skilled and well-motivated men and women to undertake such important roles and to maintain a state of high readiness in what is often a fast-changing scene.

In any fighting force, great care must be taken to protect the well-being of the uniformed people. The Royal Navy is keen to deploy its assets effectively to meet a wide range of commitments, but, in so doing, it is keen to ensure that reductions in uniformed strength should not place undue pressure on individuals through stretch. In praising their commitment I would not wish to overlook the contribution made by the civilians who support the modern Royal Navy. They perform an increasing variety of essential work, whether as industrials, stores officers,

engineers, scientists or administrators, working in tandem with Royal Navy service men and women to maintain the Royal Navy's presence around the world.

I shall deal with some of the points made by hon. Members. I begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) to the Opposition Front Bench in his first service debate. He did a pretty—well he did a job. Indeed, by the end of it, he convinced me, and I suspect that he successfully reinforced the views of all of us on the Conservative Benches and of most people in the country, that there is no field of politics in which the Labour party is less convincing than defence.

I suppose that the hon. Gentleman gained a good deal of experience of the services when he was a junior research assistant at the London School of Economics. None the less, he made a detailed speech into which he had obviously put a good deal of effort and I shall try to deal with some of the points that he raised. Clearly, he made a sensible and important point about matching resources to tasks, with which we all agree. The Royal Navy is busy. That is exactly what it is there for and that is just as it should be. It is true that it has borne this year a heavy operational load and everyone agrees that it has done so with remarkable success. It is trained and equipped to influence events in the interests of this country, to exercise control of the sea and to be able to project power from the sea. Those are the principal roles of the Royal Navy, of which we should not lose sight.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central talked about the housing trust—a familiar hobbyhorse. He knows that we are setting up a new tri-service housing organisation to be known as the Defence Housing Executive, whose sole purpose is to manage and maintain better the married quarters estate on an integrated basis, rather than on single-service lines. We remain extremely confident that the Defence Housing Executive will make an important and significant contribution to improve management of service housing for the benefit of service families and taxpayers alike.

The hon. Gentleman made some criticisms of the chief executive, Mr. Robinson, who was recruited on a three-year, fixed-term appointment. It is certainly not Mr. Robinson's fault that the trust proposal did not succeed. On the contrary, he has done a very good job for us in reorganising our housing effort.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central made some points about the services' pay. Indeed, we have seen a rush-job, cack-handed press release put out by the shadow Secretary of State for Defence. The House should know that since 1979, we have always implemented the recommendations of the Armed Forces Review Body. These recommendations and this body have the full confidence of the services. The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong to attack an independent body in that way.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central went on to discuss the naval stores consultation, a matter also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence. As they know, the Government have responded to the Select Committee's report and have welcomed the Committee's qualified endorsement of our naval stores proposals. We consulted widely on those proposals with the work force and the local authorities. Decisions were not taken until all the representations had been received and thoroughly dealt with.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central also mentioned the disposal of the Upholders. It was clearly a difficult decision, which was taken in the light of a changed strategic environment. Their primary task was to patrol the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap where their shorter endurance and slower speed compared with SSNs—strategic submarines nuclear—was not a disadvantage. The relative importance of this area of operations is declining. A greater requirement now is for flexible and mobile forces capable of responding to the more diverse range of tasks that we face world wide. The greater speed and endurance of the SSNs is better suited to the new security environment.

My right hon. the Minister of State for Defence Procurement set out the position on procurement in a full and detailed speech. The hon. Gentleman—

Dr. Reid: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Soames: No, because I must get on. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central praised my right hon. Friend on his enlightened approach to procurement. Clearly, procurement is an important matter industrially and militarily within the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman also raised the question of a defence review. I tell him, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) rightly said, that nothing could be more calculated to damage and destroy the morale of the armed forces, for no good reason, than such a review. The Government will maintain balanced forces who are well equipped and well maintained.

I shall deal now with my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster. The House listened with respect to the powerful contribution by my hon. Friend, who has done a distinguished job as Chairman of the Select Committee. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and I noted with care his fears about Russia, about Islamic fundamentalism and its insidious spread and about the need to keep our defences in robust good shape. My hon. Friend speaks regularly and authoritatively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster was pleased with the progress made in a number of our procurement projects. I share his pleasure at the announcement of the two assault ships which the hon. Member for Motherwell, North called into question. Clearly, there are two assault ships to be ordered and the landing platform helicopter HMS Ocean. I noted the points that my hon. Friend made about Manadon and the type 23 simulator. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State will let him have the details on that price. My hon. Friend congratulated my right hon. Friend on the way in which he is handling these complex procurement matters.

My hon. Friend made an important point about the Merchant Navy. I am pleased to have the opportunity to deal with that matter. The size of the merchant fleet has decreased, but studies by the Government have shown that despite that, there are generally still sufficient vessels on the British registers for defence purposes and that we would have no difficulty in manning chartered or requisitioned ships with British crews if that were necessary. We are not, however, complacent and we maintain a continuing dialogue with the Chamber of Shipping and the Department of Transport on manpower issues.

My hon. Friend also expressed concern about the impact of funding constraints on Royal Navy exercise programmes. I hope that I can reassure him that an

[Mr. Soames]

appropriate level of training is an integral part of any ship's programme. Each year, such a programme is drawn up for each vessel, including ministerially approved operational tasks, other operational commitments and exercises, and is then funded accordingly.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) made a thoroughly thoughtful and interesting speech. I congratulate her whole-heartedly on what has obviously been her own admirable deployment with the armed forces parliamentary scheme and the Royal Navy. She has covered herself in glory. I am sure that the Navy will have greatly enjoyed showing her its splendid ships and people. I look forward to sharing her experience on a jackstay. I am not sure that they will not drop me in the middle, though.

I am very sorry, as my right hon. Friend will have been, to hear about Walter Strachan and about Lord Ewing. The House will wish to send them its best wishes.

The hon. Lady has been a doughty fighter and champion for her constituency interests. She dealt at length with Rosyth. As she knows, the decision was reached only after the fullest consideration of the many points that were raised during the most extensive consultations. In the final analysis, we did not accept that there would be any operational disadvantage arising from our proposals; on the contrary, there will be operational benefits.

Although we naturally regret the number of job losses, it is simply not possible to ignore the significant savings that will be available. There will continue to be 4,500 defence jobs in the Rosyth area. The dockyard will have a substantial allocation of ship refit work for some time to come. I wholly understand the hon. Lady's concern and anxiety—I will deal with the other points that she made by letter—relating to decommissioning submarines and how we will help the economic regeneration of the area.

The hon. Lady referred to my right hon. Friend's assurance on his recent visit to Rosyth that RD57 would not be used to store decommissioned nuclear submarines. Our policy in respect of those submarines continues to be that they will be stored safely afloat at the location where they are decommissioned. In regard to those at present stored at Rosyth, no decision has been made yet about their future storage. Should a decision be taken to move them at some point, there should be no difficulty in doing so.

The hon. Lady has had a bad week of it, I agree. I am sorry that she continues to receive the dreaded letters. I am sorry about Pitreavie, but the rationalisation of naval command, control, communications and intelligence facilities will generate savings of £22 million over the next 10 years. Again, they are substantial savings which, in the present climate, we could not possibly not take. We had to take them. No convincing rationale has been advanced that would justify forgoing them. I will be in touch with the hon. Lady in more detail on the rescue co-ordination centre.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) made a thoroughly well-informed and detailed speech. Again, I am delighted to hear that he had such an excellent visit with the Royal Navy. Of course I shall pass on his thanks. I share his high opinion of those with whom he has been dealing. It is a great joy to deal with service people. Their can-do culture is a refreshing change from the rather banal world in which we live.

I noted my hon. Friend's views on aircraft carriers, and I shall certainly pass them on to my right hon. Friend. I wholly endorse his views. Early studies into a replacement for our current carriers are in hand. My hon. Friend was pleased with the order for the assault ships and the landing platform helicopter. I note his points about the joint rapid deployment force. He also mentioned a matter relating to the type 23 command system. If I may, I will let him have a letter on that matter.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend is pleased with the news about Tomahawk. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced on 14 July, we are exploring the procurement of Tomahawk land attack missiles from the United States for fitment to our submarines, and we are grateful for a quick and helpful response from the United States Government. I wholly endorse my hon. Friend's assessment of the brilliance and great success of the Royal Navy and, above all, the fact that that service is in extremely good heart.

I hope that the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East will not be embarrassed when I say that he made a first-class speech. I found very little in what he said with which I could disagree. On stability, which he and I have discussed at great length, I refer him to an admirable remark made by the First Sea Lord the other day, that the storm has passed but the swell will be felt for some time. The hon. and learned Gentleman is right. As "Options for Change" continues, as the defence cost studies come to a conclusion and the changes go downstream, plainly there will be turbulence to come.

I wholly agree with the views which the hon. and learned Gentleman expressed in a thoroughly clear way about the defence review. He talked of the Bosnian lift, and he expressed the view—with which we would all agree—that a unilateral lift of the embargo would be a disaster. Plainly, if such an action were to take place we would find ourselves in an untenable position and we would have to withdraw. Everything has been done to try to ensure that that does not happen.

The hon. and learned Gentleman also remarked on the importance of Europe and of a future European security and defence identity. He will be reassured by the fact that, for the Government, NATO remains the bedrock of the UK's defence policy. For nearly half a century, we have chosen to organise our collective defence against major external threats through NATO, which is the only security organisation with the military means to back up its security guarantees. A good deal of work must be done in Europe, and it must enable us to retain our ability to respond in a flexible manner.

The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned combined joint task forces, and plainly they will help to develop a European security and defence identity which is fully compatible with NATO. He spoke of the need for a balanced Navy and, in the judgment of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and the service chiefs—particularly the First Sea Lord—we have an effective and balanced Navy which is adequately trained and equipped. I entirely agree with his view about the requirement to maintain absolutely our ability to fight at the very highest end of the spectrum. We are wholly and irrevocably committed to that.

The hon. and learned Gentleman welcomed the decision on Tomahawk. I acknowledge his views on Rosyth which he shares with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West. I am sorry that that part of the world

has had such a rough time. My right hon. and learned Friend has made the matter of allocation refits known to the hon. and learned Gentleman, and I again join him in paying tribute to the work of the Royal Navy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) gave me notice that he had to do go down to his constituency tonight. I pay tribute to him for an excellent speech, and for the admirable work which he has done in representing to me and to all of my colleagues at the Ministry of Defence in a robust and vigorous manner the real concerns of his constituents. I acknowledge the difficulties which are being faced in the west country, and my hon. Friend was quite right to draw attention to the lamentable record of the Labour party on defence matters.

I noted with great sympathy my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton's calls for stability in Devon and Cornwall. I know of the anxieties about base-porting and assault ships, and I should like him to know that, following my visit to Plymouth, I have passed on the concerns to the First Sea Lord. I know that the Navy planners are looking at the matter.

I assure my hon. Friend and all those who represent the Plymouth area that, whatever happens at Chivenor, there will always be a substantial Royal Marines presence in Plymouth. I noted my hon. Friend's strictures about Bickleigh, which I visited the other day. It is an excellent camp which does need some work, and I will make sure that the matter is carefully considered.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) made a breathtakingly trivial and ineffective speech. It was a ridiculous tirade which I am going to gloss over as it did not even dignify a serious reply.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) dealt with a number of important points, including the questions of the EH101s and of the chaplains' school, which are receiving consideration.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) has found that our correspondence has been rather more prolonged than it should have been. I have noted the points he has made tonight, and I shall study his latest letter with the greatest care. I should be pleased if he would come in to have a talk to me about the letter. I wholly agree with his views on the beauty of Greenwich.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), as one would expect, made a thoroughly polished and sensible speech. He was, however, a little churlish about the Navy programme. One cannot possibly exclude Trident from the procurement programme, and by any stretch of the imagination, the programme has done extremely well. VSEL has done a marvellous job on Trident, and the Navy has a handsome procurement programme in the pipeline. I shall study the other points which he made about the reserves, and let him have a letter.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) made some important and significant points about the non-proliferation treaty. It is a sad loss for all of us that, even though he is still a member of CND, he fails any longer to wear his button. We do understand that, in these politically correct times, he must no longer wear the single battle honour or medal he is ever likely to win.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North in, as usual, an excellent and sensible speech—except when he started being silly towards the end—endorsed almost everything that the Government believe about the need for a stable front line. I wish to tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government have made it absolutely plain that the major cuts in defence are over and finished; the front line is now safe and secure; we are delivering a stable front line, which will represent well-trained men and well-equipped ships. That is vital, because only with a stable front line can we build and plan for the future, for a Royal Navy that we can continue to be proud of and grateful for.

It has been an excellent debate. I congratulate almost everyone who has spoken, and I look forward to the Army debate next week.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Resolved,

That Mr. Richard Page be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Sir Kenneth Carlisle be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Rural Dispensing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

10 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The present regulations on rural dispensing are outdated and, in my belief, need reforming. They do not serve the purpose for which they were originally designed, they do not implement present Government policy of encouraging care in the community and patient choice, and they are divisive of the professions of medicine and pharmacy.

In Lincolnshire, there is a greater proportion of dispensing doctors than in any other part of the country, so my constituency of Gainsborough and Horncastle is especially affected. I can best illustrate the problems by referring to the health centre in Welton, slightly north of the city of Lincoln.

There has been an excellent health centre there for many years. A patient could visit the doctor, who prescribed the medicine required, having all the patient's records at his fingertips. The prescription was immediately relayed to the pharmacy department in the same building, and the patient collected the medicines with little delay. The system worked well and to everyone's satisfaction.

When the villages were small, no pharmacist would consider the district profitable enough in which to open a shop. The doctors were obliged to prescribe and dispense. Now that the villages have expanded, there is sufficient business to make it viable for a chemist to set up. That has made it attractive for an independent pharmacist to apply to open a pharmacy—in Welton's case, a large supermarket, which has a branch in the village and which already has a near-monopoly of the pharmacies in the Lincoln area. I think that that alone is worrying.

As the regulations stand, if the application succeeds, the pharmacy department in the health centre must, by virtue of the regulations, close to all patients except those who live outside a one-mile limit. In Welton's case, that is a very small percentage. However, the first criterion to be considered, as stated in the regulations, is that no loss of service to the patients should be caused by the opening of the pharmacy. Indeed, the intention of Government, as I know, is to improve and extend services.

The procedure was as follows. In 1990, the chain store applied to open a pharmacy. Then it had to prove that the village was rural. Although it would have taken an Act of Parliament to change Welton's status from rural to urban, apparently for pharmaceutical purposes it could simply be declared urban at a hearing. Then the family health service authority considered the situation and turned down the application, on the grounds that, if the pharmacy at the health centre was closed down with the loss of income, services to the public—which should concern us in the House—were bound to deteriorate.

Predictably, the chain store appealed. The appeal was heard by the drugs committee of the Yorkshire—not Lincolnshire—health authority. It consisted of two doctors, two pharmacists and a chairman. Bearing in mind the constitution of the committee, obviously the result turned on the chairman's casting vote, and he, not being a local person, could not possibly have been aware of the strength of local feeling, and anyway he was restrained in his decision by the regulations.

The decision—in favour of the pharmacist in that case—was relayed to the FHSA, which then had to decide whether the new pharmacy, in the words of the regulations, was "necessary or desirable". In so doing, it was not allowed to take into account the wishes of the patients and the doctors or to take note that pharmaceutical services were already available from the health centre.

Let me emphasise how the patients felt about the decision. At a public meeting, nearly 600 people turned up—just in one village—and only six voted for the opening of the new pharmacy. The wishes of the majority were ignored. If I called a public meeting in the village of Welton on whether we should join a single currency, six people would turn up, but 600 people turned up to the meeting on the pharmacy and all but six voted to keep the status quo.

A huge number of letters on the issue were written to me—my postbag was overloaded with them—to councillors and to the FHSA, but I, as the Member of Parliament, the councillors, the FHSA, the local doctors and local people could not do anything.

The regulations give the FHSA no choice but to uphold the appeal, even though the FHSA obviously knew from its earlier decision that the outcome of the appeal would adversely affect local services. It was left with no authority: everything was a foregone conclusion.

The whole process took two and a half years and resulted in thousands of letters, public meetings and a huge amount of antagonism. What is worse, public expectations were built up. People felt that, if they were consulted, as they were, their views would have some effect. In fact, the whole process was a total waste of money and a total sham. It did not offer proper consultation.

It is not surprising that a huge amount of resentment has been built up in just one village on one issue alone. That is what has happened in peaceful, rural and contented Lincolnshire. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware of that, and will do something about it.

New regulations should incorporate a clause requiring the FHSA or the appropriate health authority to act in an advisory capacity. Many of the current problems could have been avoided if the FHSA had brought the doctors and the pharmacy applicants together to discuss the situation to their mutual advantage. The FHSA should have knocked heads together. The practice had applied to employ a pharmacist, but that application was refused by the FHSA. The doctors were not advised about alternative solutions that would have involved co-operation and avoided all the confrontation that has led to such angst and unhappiness.

The process is now concluded. What has been the result in the health centre? Let us remember that we are not talking just about regulations, pharmacies, doctors or their renumeration. What should concern us in the House is what has happened to the services provided by that particular health centre. First, four partners were reduced to three. Secondly, the senior nurse, who ran the pharmacy department and whose knowledge and advice was well-respected, could no longer be financed.

Thirdly, two other receptionists had to go, and fourthly, surgery times had to be reduced, including before and after work surgeries. Patients attending surgeries must now take time off work which they and their employers

can ill afford. In addition, facilities and security for dispensing at the health centre and maintained by that centre are not now available to approximately 80 per cent. of patients. That process, when repeated many times in the county as well as throughout the country, must represent a huge waste of resources.

All in all, the regulations have produced a system exactly the opposite of that for which they were designed, and of that which is Government policy as stated by my hon. Friend. I urge my hon. Friend that the Government should reform their regulations to allow an open, free market. That is what Conservative Back Benchers and our colleagues on the Treasury Bench presumably believe in—an open, free market. That is our philosophy of government. It is a ridiculous position which allows a grocer to employ a pharmacist while a doctor may not. How absurd that we have got into such a position.

If there was an open market, in which all Conservatives believe, urban doctors as well as those in rural areas would benefit, because they too could employ a pharmacist and open a pharmacy if they so wished. I am not suggesting that it would be possible to move to such a beneficial open, free market throughout the country straight away—I know the pressures that my hon. Friend is under—but perhaps we could start with rural areas.

Until one has experienced the difference between an in-house pharmacy and a trip to the chemist's shop, it is hard to convey what it means to the patient—convenience, privacy, consultations between patient, doctor, pharmacist and patient records; and, perhaps most important, the co-operation between doctor and pharmacist at all levels where now there is division.

Like other professions, pharmacists are fighting for their continued existence, and I have considerable sympathy with them. Outside the NHS, they are obliged to waste their undoubted talents being shopkeepers in order to make a living. Inside the NHS, they can concentrate on being pharmacists.

The argument that doctors should prescribe and pharmacists should dispense is sound, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will make that point when he replies to the debate. It should be used not to separate the two professions, but to bring them together and encourage co-operation between them.

If over-the-counter medicines were available at chemists' shops or health centre pharmacists, there would be simple competition and we believe in that. A great many common drugs, such as aspirin, are available in ordinary shops. The enormous number of drugs now available off prescription would then be available in rural districts. If health centres are to be run on business lines, as encouraged by the Government, the regulations need to be changed.

Dispensing by rural doctors is said to be more expensive than dispensing by pharmacists, because doctors over-prescribe to their own profit, use brand drugs instead of generic drugs, and prescribe more than urban doctors. However, rural doctors claim that, by being able to dispense, they can reduce hospital costs and thus the total cost of providing health services in rural areas. They say that prescribing brand drugs reduces their legal liability when things go wrong.

If the regulations allowed for pharmacists to be incorporated into health centres, a new system could be devised that would be less costly to the NHS and fair to both professions.

As more pharmacy applications are made, legal loopholes in the regulations are being found. Those loopholes do not allow any consultation with doctors and patients, so the views of those most affected may not be taken into account. That increasingly shows that the principles of the legislation have been so totally lost that it is being used merely for commercial purposes, often by retail multiples with potential losses to NHS.

A large number of villages in Lincolnshire—Welton is just one example—have the same problem. Applications are constantly being made throughout the country. There is, therefore, a serious national problem and clearly reform is needed. It is not just a constituency problem, but I am delighted to come to the House and use the example in my constituency to illustrate it.

In preparing my speech, I was anxious to be fair to both sides. Of course, I have had a great deal of pressure from local doctors and local people, but I have also spoken to the secretary of the Lincolnshire local pharmaceutical committee, Mr. Noel Baumber, because I wanted to be fair to his side of the case.

It is worth while to relay the views of pharmacists, as they are also unhappy with the present system. They believe that pharmacists and doctors need to be remunerated on the same basis to remove any incentive on the part of doctors to overprescribe. They say that doctors benefit from a 10.5 per cent. margin on the cost of the drugs they provide, that their fee income is related to the number of prescriptions they prescribe, and that their dispensing income is added to their superannuation.

The chemists argue that such a conflict could not arise if GPs were not given incentives to dispense. They say that Baroness Cumberlege has confirmed that GPs can double their income by dispensing. They also say that dispensing is sometimes delegated to unqualified staff, who are not supervised. I cannot confirm the accuracy of those statements, but I relay them to the House. Lastly, the chemists say that pharmacy dispensing is better and less expensive. That is the views of the two sides.

Let us deal with what is important—us, the patients, the people, the country and the Government. It seems to me that we—the patients and the Government—must find a way to end the dispute between doctors and chemists.

First, the service should be run for the patients, and not for those working in the NHS. We should all believe that cliché, but the chairman of the local drugs committee, Mr. George Sutton, to whom I talked yesterday, told me that, as he attempts to hold the line between doctors and pharmacists, the protagonists seem to forget it as they argue over their remuneration.

It is no longer good enough for the Government to wash their hands of the dispute, Pontius Pilate-like, and say, "Come back to us when you have sorted it out yourselves". The Government should act; at the very least, they should reform the system, so that the FHSA is given proper discretion and the powers to respond to local opinion about what is best for the community. It should give reasons why it accepts or rejects local opinion, so that we can avoid the farcical situation in the village of Welton.

Local doctors have told me that the Minister needs to examine the apparent loophole in regulation 12 of 1992, which appears to allow the free entry of locally established pharmacies without recourse to a hearing. According to Mr. Sutton, the NHS appeals unit should

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

be discouraged from reviewing a case unless the original hearing is clearly flawed. The FHSA sometimes wonders whether it or the appeals unit is the authority, because apparently all cases go to appeal.

The next step would be to ensure that a doctor's decision about whether to employ a pharmacist will affect only the viability and income of his practice and not him personally. The third step would be to allow rural doctors to continue dispensing, even if a pharmacy opens up in the village. Why not? We believe in competition. The fourth step would be to introduce a full, free and fair market, so that the consumer can make his or her own choice about where to get a prescription. I urge the Minister to reform the regulations, before further damage is done to the rural NHS.

10.16 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am extremely grateful to have the chance to respond to the Adjournment speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). It is an extremely important matter, and I congratulate him on securing the opportunity to raise it.

My hon. Friend always addresses himself to matters in this House with a great degree of elan. He often assaults the establishment, and, sadly, tonight I have the role of the dullard Minister who must respond to him about the technicalities and complex matters which govern how people in rural areas have reliable access to the dispensing of drugs.

Although it may be boring to go through all the complex policy matters, it is important to set them out. As my hon. Friend said, it is a complicated issue. There are tensions between pharmacists and dispensing doctors, because a prime policy role is involved in ensuring that all national health service patients receive the treatment they require. The public must also secure value for money in the way that drugs are dispensed. That has been the continuing policy of the NHS since its inception, regardless of where patients may reside—in urban or rural areas.

I will briefly set out the policy on dispensing. Principally, doctors diagnose and prescribe medication—that is their proper role, as my hon. Friend said—and pharmacists dispense medication. In the Government's view, that makes the best use of the complementary skills and experience of members of both professions, to the benefit of all patients. There should be no question of competition between the two professions, although I know that my hon. Friend has set out a case suggesting that that may exist.

It is Government policy to establish co-operation between the members of an integrated primary care team, particularly in rural areas. It is sometimes difficult to achieve that co-operation, and there may be tensions, but the Government must overcome them and ensure that the patient benefits in the long term.

Pharmacists are, of course, best placed to advise a patient how best to use his or her medicine to get the maximum benefit with the minimum side effect. That is extremely important in a number of contexts, not least of which is the conclusion of a course of drugs. Pharmacists can also advise on the use of medicines that are purchased over the counter—not only drugs that are dispensed but the increasing range of self-medication to which many people turn instead of using the primary care sector, and that is vital.

Mr. Leigh: What if the doctor at the health centre employs a pharmacist? Does not the patient then get the benefit of the advice of both a doctor and a pharmacist on the same premises?

Mr. Malone: As I go around the health system, I see a number of examples. It is not always the case that pharmacists and doctors, be they prescribing doctors or not, are in conflict.

I was, for example, in a health centre in Purfleet, Essex, seven or eight days ago, which was a general practice of six or seven partners and contained a pharmacy. I would suggest that the rules do not prevent that. It is quite possible for such a set-up to work quite happily together, not only to dispense the drugs that the primary carer prescribes but to provide the over-the-counter medication, which I believe will become increasingly important and which is becoming increasingly recognised.

There are models. The rules and regulations do not militate entirely against what I presume my hon. Friend is suggesting—a good market answer to the problems.

Let us move on to NHS dispensing in rural areas. It will be worth while to set out for the House where we are. I shall touch first on the one-mile rule—when pharmacists come into an area in which there are dispensing practices, dispensing practices are obliged to dispense only to those who live outside one mile of the immediate area. That rule was introduced in the early part of the century. Part of the problem that I suppose my hon. Friend is addressing is that there is a great history behind all this. In the 1970s, there were major problems between the professions, and that led to the Clothier committee, which reported in 1977.

It is probably not without significance that the difficulties and the tensions between those involved in primary care and pharmacists is that it took six years before controls on entry in rural areas were introduced in the House, in 1983. I am not quite certain, but I have a suspicion that my hon. Friend and I were probably unwitting partners in 1983—when we both entered the House—to the regulations that implemented those rules. I certainly do not remember precisely when it was, and I suspect that my hon. Friend does not either.

The main features of the controls were that a pharmacy or doctor wishing to start dispensing had to show that it would not prejudice the proper provision of medical or pharmaceutical services. If permission to dispense is granted, it may come into effect over a period, and that is carefully put in place to ensure that the change in income of those who previously dispensed is not sudden. The controls are an attempt to strike a balance between providing the important services of a pharmacist wherever possible and ensuring that patients continue to have access to a dispensing service in areas where a pharmacy could never be viable.

I would ask my hon. Friend to bear in mind the history of the regulations. In the days when there were communities in which no pharmacist wished to set up, because there was no reason to do so, the regulations were introduced to allow GPs to dispense, which was a very important service.

The present arrangements allow doctors to dispense to patients who live in rural areas that are not served by pharmacies, who would have serious difficulty in obtaining the necessary medication from a pharmacy, or who require immediate medication in the course of emergency treatment. In practice, however, the rules also allow doctors to dispense to patients who could easily visit a pharmacy at the same time as visiting their doctor.

In recent years, there has been a gradual increase in the number and proportion of dispensing doctors. During the same period, the average number of dispensing patients per dispensing doctor fell; so the number of dispensing patients has remained virtually the same.

As for the operation of the Clothier regulations, family health service authorities are required to consult—among others—local community health councils. My hon. Friend mentioned consultation; this consultation is important, because it allows patients to express their views. There is also the prejudice test, with which my hon. Friend will be familiar. A family health service authority must consult any person on the medical list who is likely to be affected.

I know—not only from what my hon. Friend tells me, but from the correspondence I receive—that there has been what I would describe as an uneasy truce between the two professions. The relationship is difficult: as my hon. Friend pointed out, tensions exist, and there are two debates. My hon. Friend set out one side of the argument, which is that dispensing doctors benefit unfairly from the arrangements.

I suggest that that is not so. My Department subjects the margins in relation to payments that doctors are able to receive in connection with drugs to close examination, on a continuing basis. My hon. Friend may think that that is a source of tension between dispensing doctors and pharmacists, but it is regularly a source of even greater tension between my Department and dispensing doctors.

I strongly disagree with my hon. Friend's assertion that the system favours the needs of individual pharmacists rather than those of patients. We aim to ensure that patients living in rural areas enjoy the same range of services as are available to people living in urban areas. That has been difficult to achieve.

My hon. Friend may think that it is simple to make a bonfire of regulations, but it is more difficult than he imagines. A balance of provision has grown up over time; if we simply tore up the regulations that have developed, it would be to the detriment of patients, and would lessen their ability to gain access to and make use of a dispensing service. That is not to say that we should not listen to both sides of the argument—the pharmacist's case and that of the dispensing doctor—and decide how to proceed; that is perfectly proper.

My hon. Friend rightly referred to the free market. With the development of new health centre communities, we are seeing new ways in which dispensing services are provided, and they are free of the tensions that have existed between the professions before. I cited an example earlier that I expect to be repeated increasingly across the country: circumstances in which the medical profession and pharmacists decide that they have mutual interests in regard to both prescribing and dispensing.

I hope that, as time moves on, the tensions to which my hon. Friend referred will diminish. I am alert to the fact that those tensions exist, and have received a number of representations from both sides of the argument. As my hon. Friend knows, a number of issues are currently being considered by the courts, and I shall not comment on those. I shall return to them, however, once the courts have delivered a view.

Finally, I reassure my hon. Friend that it is the Government's overriding intention that all those who require access to drugs, by either prescription or dispensing—the patients—can get them in the most convenient way. I hope that we can proceed in a way that will diminish tensions between the two professions of pharmacy and medicine.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 17 February 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Tobacco Products Labelling Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Before moving on to the meat of my speech, I want to thank hon. Members in all parts of the House who have sponsored the Bill, which is an all-party measure and not partisan. My thanks go also to my outside advisers—Action on Smoking and Health and the Tobacco Control Alliance. I am sure that they accept the importance of widespread support for the Bill from the sharp end of public health. Without wishing to bore the House, I shall name some of the organisations that have indicated their support for the measure. I shall identify also those who are against it.

Support has been clearly demonstrated by the British Heart Foundation, Imperial Cancer Research Fund, National Asthma Campaign, Cancer Research Campaign, British Medical Association, Coronary Prevention Group, Medical Practitioners Union, Society of Health Education, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, British Cardiac Society, British Paediatric Association, International Union Against Cancer, Coronary Artery Disease Association, Royal College of Radiologists, Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Royal College of Midwives, Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland, Royal College of Physicians, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Quit—the National Society of Non Smokers, International Organisation of Consumer Unions, Parents Against Tobacco, Institution of Environmental Health Officers, National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, Royal College of Surgeons, Society of Occupational Medicine, National Heart and Lung Institute, Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene, Family Heart Association—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] Conservative Members who represent the tobacco industry must be embarrassed at the wealth of support for my Bill from people at the sharp end, who have to deal with the consequences of smoking. I am not surprised in the least at the barracking from Conservative Members.

Other organisations that have indicated their support are the Royal College of General Practitioners, Health Visitors Association, Ulster Cancer Foundation, World Health Organisation, Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians, Tenovus Cancer Research Appeal, Royal College of Nursing, Health and Safety Executive, British Lung Foundation, Marie Curie Cancer Care, Chest, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Addiction Research Unit and British Thoracic Society. That is an impressive list of expert support for the Bill. The only vested interest that I can detect there is in public health and the well-being of the vast majority of our people.

The list of those who are against the Bill is not long. It consists of the tobacco industry and FOREST, the Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco, which is 95 per cent. funded by the tobacco industry. That is it. It is hardly surprising that there is so much support for the measure when one accepts, as I think the Government now accept—

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: I shall give way generously, but it might be more meaningful to give way when I have gone more deeply into my speech.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman wants to get back to his constituency.

Mr. Lewis: It is not altogether fair of my hon. Friend to say that.

It is hardly surprising that there is so much support for the measure when one considers that more than 111,000 people die prematurely each year from tobacco-related diseases, which include lung cancer, emphysema, heart disease and strokes. That is why there is so much sharp-end support for the Bill.

Colleagues in all parts of the House know that I have many other interests such as leasehold reform and animal welfare, and a number of people were surprised when I chose this subject for a Bill after I came fourth in the ballot. The simple answer is that in my constituency alone one in five people die each year from diseases that are attributable to smoking. Salford, which takes in most of my constituency, is one of the country's black spots for tobacco-related diseases.

As important as that, one of the events in this place that convinced me to take on the tobacco industry again was the visit to the House last year by the late Roy Castle during a remission in his terrible illness. We had a super afternoon with Roy Castle, who was on top form, although he knew what his destiny was to be in just a few short months. Without being maudlin, I can say that his visit had a profound effect on me.

I have been a lifelong non-smoker for no reason other than that when I was a youngster I was interested in sport and was extremely fit. That is probably hard to believe now. I did not realise then that smoking could be such a horrendous disease and the only problem that I saw with it in those days was that the lads who smoked and played football with me ran out of breath quicker than I did and could not run as fast. However, it is far more serious than that and Roy Castle's visit and the conversations with him underscored that.

When we consider that more than 111,000 people die each year from tobacco-related diseases, it is no wonder that customers of the tobacco industry need to be replaced. Where does it get those replacements? Another simple statistic is that, on average, 500 youngsters are recruited each day to the tobacco habit. Of course, most of them will die in later life because of that habit. I emphasise that those who are recruited to smoking and touched by its effects and those who die from tobacco use are of all political persuasions and social classes.

[Mr. Lewis]

As long ago as 1971 the Royal College of Physicians, in a strong report, recommended health warnings so as to have a greater impact on smokers, and the purpose of the Bill is to strengthen those warnings.

Mr. Colvin: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that warnings to children on the dangers of smoking are now part of the national curriculum and that last year the Government spent £13.5 million on promoting that? Surely that is adequate warning for youngsters. If they insist on smoking, that is their own problem, but at the moment the Government spend an adequate amount on educating children about the dangers, and that is the time to do it.

Mr. Lewis: The point is that more youngsters are smoking. The issue is whether the £13.5 million is well spent. In the House, there are arguments day after day, when people ask whether money thrown at problems is money well spent. I am happy to see the national curriculum embrace the subject, but we have to look at the effectiveness of that education, and the statistics show that it is not effective. I concede that we are in the early days of such education in the national curriculum. None the less, I do not think that the money is being well spent. My measure would be a much better idea and it would not cost the taxpayer a penny.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Would my hon. Friend care to reflect upon the contrast between how much the Government spend on trying to persuade young people not to smoke and the amount spent daily by the tobacco industry on trying to encourage young people to take up smoking?

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a cogent point. That argument has been well rehearsed in the House and outside. There is obviously a correlation between the amount spent by the industry and the amount spent on health education.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): The hon. Gentleman says that more young people are taking up smoking. Where did he find figures on that? The latest figures from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which he will know about, show that the numbers are going down. Part of the reason for that is voluntary agreements brought in by the Government and the measure mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) to discourage children from smoking. Where did the hon. Gentleman get his figures to show that the number of children taking up smoking is going up? May we have some facts, please?

Mr. Lewis: The figures are more or less static, and as a percentage they are rising. The figures are readily available and if the hon. Gentleman took a trip to the Library, he could soon turn them up. He must concede that all the effort by Government and health organisations is a drop in the ocean compared with the amount of effort that is put in by the tobacco industry to replace the people whom it is killing.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: I should like to press on a little further, but as I said, I shall be generous in giving way.

Mr. Greenway: I speak as one who is currently seeing 204 jobs disappear from my constituency. Those are people who were honourably employed by Gallaher and who worked very hard. I am extremely supportive of the argument, although I am not a smoker. It is unpersuasive, is it not, to say that more young people are smoking and then to concede in response to an intervention that that is not the case. What effect would the Bill have on imported or smuggled cigarettes? Would it be possible to force the manufacturers of those cigarettes to use the imprimatur that the hon. Gentleman suggests? Those cigarettes are taking jobs from my constituents, to the passionate distress of Northolt.

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman should be patient. I assure him that I shall tackle that issue because it forms an important part of my speech. Public health and the future of the current generation have to be balanced against jobs, and I accept that that is a difficult balance. I have tobacco workers in my constituency, but I also have coal miners. I did not hear the hon. Gentleman make too much of a fuss when coal mines in my area were being closed. I am sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, which organises in the tobacco industry. I am not saying that the tobacco industry should be shut down tomorrow. My union and the members whom I have represented for more than 30 years understand that. What they do know is that I am trying to deal with what is undoubtedly a public health risk.

On the specifics of what the Bill will achieve, it will increase the size of warnings on packets and it will make them more emphatic so that they come more easily to the attention of people who are likely to start the smoking habit. During recent weeks, I have spoken to many people of my generation who smoke. Almost to a man, they said that had they known about the health risks when they started smoking in the 1950s or 1960s, they would never have started the habit. The sort of advice that they received from parents, family and teachers in those far-off days was, "You will never have any money if you smoke; it is an expensive habit." They never said, because they did not know, "If you start the habit, you will more than likely end up in the 1990s with heart trouble or emphysema, or you may even die of lung cancer."

That is the whole point of the Bill. I want to turn back the clock and build on the experience of other countries. The warnings must be more emphatic.

Mr. Greenway: As I said, I care passionately about the jobs in the tobacco industry in my constituency. It is irrelevant to talk about coal mines. The hon. Gentleman has not answered my point about his Bill not applying to imported cigarettes from France and Germany. That is undermining jobs in my constituency. People are not stopping smoking, so all the Bill will do is undermine more jobs in British firms. That is a serious concern for my constituents.

Mr. Lewis: I have the greatest respect for the hon. Gentleman, but I have already told him clearly that I shall come to that point later in my speech. I think that my argument is quite reasonable, because many hon. Members here today voted effectively to dismantle the coal industry. The hon. Gentleman voted for that and the industry was literally dismantled within days and weeks. That led to Britain having to import coal. It is exactly the same argument that the hon. Gentleman puts about cigarettes. However, I am being fairer than the hon.

Gentleman, because the consequences of my Bill will take time to come to fruition. It will not close down the tobacco industry tomorrow. If the Bill is passed, everybody will not stop smoking the day after tomorrow. The hon. Gentleman's tobacco workers will not be thrown out of work.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The hon. Gentleman promised that he would answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). Perhaps it is unanswerable. However, he must deal with that point in the centre of his speech. He cannot dictate to the rest of Europe, which imposes health warnings covering 4 to 6 per cent. of a packet. Under the hon. Gentleman's Bill, Britain would have warnings covering 25 per cent. That would wipe out the entire tobacco industry in Britain and cigarettes would be imported instead. How will that deal with the smoking habit in this country—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I note with some displeasure the number of seated interventions and general mutterings. I am noting where they are coming from and hon. Members may find that they slide down my list somewhat.

Mr. Lewis: There is a way to satisfy the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). I am sure that it can be well and truly sorted out in dialogue with the Minister.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): The hon. Gentleman referred to what happened in the coal industry. I voted against the Government on that issue, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that it appears that he is suggesting that two wrongs make a right.

Mr. Lewis: I am not sure that that is a wholly relevant point.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I speak as a non-smoker and I understand some of the hon. Gentleman's points. He has just dealt with the question of whether people will be thrown out of work immediately. Those who run small tobacconists shops in my constituency are worried that, as has been explained by some of my hon. Friends, they will be thrown out of business more or less instantly because of the adverse impact of smuggling. They have asked me to put that point to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Lewis: I have already said that I shall tackle that issue later in my speech. However, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the representations which I get from tobacconists in my constituency are usually about tax hikes and the effects of Budget proposals. It is easy for hon. Members to get carried away when analysing their postbags.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I would not want the hon. Gentleman to think that everybody on the Conservative Benches intends to vote against his Bill—some of us intend to vote for it. A point has been made about corner shops that sell tobacco. I wonder what proportion of their income is derived from that aspect of their business. One of the most interesting developments over the past two or three months has been the impact of the national lottery on those shops. I understand that the 5p commission per ticket has yielded between £500 and £1,500 a week per shop, which is far more than the profit that they could ever make on tobacco.

Mr. Lewis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; I had not thought of that point.

As I was saying before all the interventions, as long ago as 1971, the Royal College of Physicians recommended stronger health warnings on cigarette packets. The Bill would move that idea further along. In every sense, it is a consumer empowerment device. It is about choice. It will have an enormous effect on public health. It will enhance public awareness of the hazards of tobacco use by improving the communication of necessary information. It is designed to ensure that cigarette packs have less appeal to young people.

I do not think that any of the apologists for the tobacco industry could deny that the tobacco industry puts enormous effort into the design of packs to make them attractive. I may be arguing with the Minister during most of the proceedings on the Bill, so I want to thank him for at least removing Camel art from the shelves as part of the voluntary agreement. We shall have many arguments about the voluntary agreement, but I welcome that one positive feature, and the Minister deserves credit for it.

The labelling of tobacco products in the European Union is regulated by two directives—one was adopted in 1989 and the other in 1992—which impose a minimum standard on member states. However, despite the amendments that were adopted in 1992—which, in particular, reinforce the labelling of tobacco products other than cigarettes—there are a number of weaknesses in the European legislation, which must be strengthened. The Bill will do that.

In the United Kingdom, health warnings are required to cover at least 6 per cent. of the front and back surfaces of the pack, which is 2 per cent. more than is required by the directive. Although that step has been well lauded, the effects in real terms are fairly negligible. I have no doubt that the Minister will claim credit for the fact that the UK standard is 50 per cent. in advance of the European Union standard.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): It is not 2 per cent. more, but 50 per cent. more.

Mr. Lewis: I accept that. Mathematics is perhaps not my best suit.

Mr. Skinner: One or two people cannot understand mathematics. The previous Chancellor of the Exchequer lost £10 billion in an afternoon and never went near a betting shop.

Mr. Lewis: I thank my hon. Friend for that. Today, I have qualified for the job of Chancellor of the Exchequer. It seems that being innumerate is the best qualification, but I thank the Minister for his intervention.

The principal weakness of present legislation is due to the lack of visibility of warnings because of size, position, typeface, design and the use of colours. I know that you will not be pleased at me using props, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I shall refrain from doing so, but looking at various pack designs in the past few weeks has given me a clear idea of the enormous amount of effort and Saatchi

[Mr. Lewis]

and Saatchi work that goes into disguising the warning against the background of the pack. I do not think that anyone will argue about that.

Pack design is clever. A background of long lines makes it difficult in certain lights to see the warning on the pack. That is the principal weakness of the current legislation.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting observation about designer packets. He might care to explain why a particular cigarette brand has found itself a nice little niche in the market, even though the packet is white with a skull and crossbones, and the brand is called Death.

Mr. Lewis: The brand is appropriately named. I am not sure that it has a niche in the market because of the colour of the pack. As I understand it, it is about clever importers getting round import legislation and using customers as agents. We are talking about cigarette packs which appear on the shelves in tobacconists shops, and which are passed around in places such as the tea room. We are not talking about companies that get round legislation by importing cigarettes. It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head. That is a fact about Death cigarettes.

Mr. John Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman mentioned Camel. I do not know whether he intends to mention it later; some of the supporters of his Bill may do so. I am pleased that he lauds the Government's decision, which was supported by the tobacco manufacturers. Does he agree that Camel sales in the UK amount to only 0.25 per cent.? It is obviously an offender and I think that the industry has admitted that. He is stretching the imagination a little far by saying that the warnings on manufacturers' packs are not obvious to people who want to look at them. If people choose to ignore them, that is up to them.

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman is being disingenuous. I was being illustrative about pack design. I was not arguing about those companies' share of the market. I am talking about the simple premise of the designer packs. I gave just one example where I thought that the Minister deserved a little pat on the back. The hon. Gentleman should allow me that indulgence, and not spoil me and make me mad. That is a little over the top.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, if manufacturers abide by the letter but not by the spirit of the voluntary code, they add to the pressure to tighten the code or to introduce more legislation? Does he agree that if 5,000 people a week stop smoking, 2,000 because they are dead and 3,000 because they have given up before they die, and if fewer people take up smoking after the age of 21, much of the effort must be directed at people who, sadly, copy the example of older people—not necessarily because of advertising—and who look on smoking as an acceptable habit?

Mr. Lewis: As always, the hon. Gentleman is looking for a compromise. I do not know whether any compromise is on offer. However, if the House gives the Bill its Second Reading today and if it is considered in Committee, those ideas may be explored. My position now, however, is that we should follow the example of other countries, such as Canada and Australia, and seek to ensure that packs are of the same design as in those countries. It is not doing the tobacco industry any harm in those countries. It seems a reasonable route to take.

Clause 1(1)(a)(i) improves the position in relation to the size of the health warning. It states that it should be

"printed in a position where it is clearly visible and unlikely to be damaged when the packet is opened".

Subsection (1)(a)(ii) states that the health warning should be

"printed in the centre of a rectangular area . . . which is surrounded by a border"

to ensure that the message stands out and that it is not incorporated into the pack design.

That appears to have been successful in Canada and Australia. If colleagues wish, I could go through chapter on verse on the experience in those two countries, although I accept that the new pack design was introduced in Australia several months ago and that a bedding-in period is probably required.

Subsection (1)(b)(i) states that the warning on any packet containing cigarettes or rolling tobacco should cover at least 25 per cent. of the pack surface. Provisions have been made if the pack is not rectangular. The provision ensures that the health warning is printed at the top of the packet, thereby maximising the visibility of the message.

With the warning positioned at the top of the packs, smokers are constantly reminded of the health implications of smoking. Existing warnings, positioned at the bottom of the pack, are easily obscured when stacked for display and when circulated during normal social intercourse.

Professor Gardner has published a paper for the Society of Clinical Psychiatrists. He states:

"Social and personal rituals with cigarette packets related to fundamental human daily activities may reinforce dependency messages. Health messages on the packs are not prominent enough to continually warn smokers during these activities."

He argues that there should be new, stronger health warnings

"to help break the automatic pilot guiding the purchase and use of cigarettes."

We do not take that into account very much. The problem involves not just the purchase of cigarettes across the counter and the continual use by the individual, but people passing packs round and reinforcing the message while they are having a cup of tea or a glass of beer.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): The hon. Gentleman has not referred to poster advertising, which contains pungent health warnings. He has to convince us today that sufficient awareness does not exist among the public at large. My information is that people out there—adults and children—are already well aware of the dangers of smoking.

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman has convinced himself. The latest voluntary agreement on poster advertising has accepted the need for larger warnings, and the need for white lettering on a black background or black lettering on a white background. That has been the case since 1 January. All I am saying—I think that I take the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) with me—is that the same conditions should apply to packs. [HON.

MEMBERS: "Why?"] If those conditions are good enough for posters and are deemed necessary by Ministers and by the industry, why should they not apply to packs?

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor and Maidenhead): Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) was trying to raise this point. Has the hon. Gentleman met anyone who was unaware of the dangers of smoking?

Mr. Lewis: Yes—[*Laughter.*] Hon. Members may laugh. I can tell them what they will probably regard as a funny story. I was told a day or two ago that one young woman would buy only packs that did not have the warning that smoking can damage babies. She needs educating. She probably buys brands that have an entirely different warning on them because she does not like the warning about damaging babies.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I want to clear up a point, which the hon. Gentleman understands, that was put earlier and left standing; it goes rather against the hon. Gentleman's argument. Smoking among youngsters has increased. The figures that I shall quote are in *Hansard* of 27 January at column *393* and are included in a reply from my hon. Friend the Minister. I quote only from *Hansard*, as you understand, Madam Deputy Speaker. The information on the prevalence of cigarette smoking among adults aged 16 and over shows that in 1988, the figure was 32 per cent. and that it is now down to 29 per cent. For women, the figure has gone down from 30 per cent. to 27 per cent. The information for the prevalence of regular cigarette smoking among pupils between 11 and 15 shows that in 1988, the figure for boys was 7 per cent.; it has now gone up to 8 per cent. For girls, the figure has gone up from 9 per cent. to 11 per cent. Let us have the facts and not a lot of nonsense.

Mr. Lewis: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. As Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure—

Mr. John Carlisle: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I was involved in the previous altercation about facts, I point out to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) that the facts I quoted were from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I can deal with this point of order right now. It is not a point of order; it is a matter for intervention if so required.

Mr. Carlisle: It is a question of my good name—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman is as sensitive as that, I wonder whether he should be here at all.

Mr. Lewis: As always, I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who is the distinguished Chairman of the Procedure Committee. I would have expected no less of him. I tell the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) that I would rather accept the Minister's word for the purposes of my argument.

Clause 1(1) ensures that the health warning is placed on a white background and on the front and top of the packet, to maximise visibility. Clause 1(2) details the type and colour requirements for the health warning, ensuring legibility and prominence. That provision is similar to the provision for poster advertisements to which the hon. Member for Harrogate referred. To avoid desensitising the message, which is a common occurrence, the colours should be rotated so that for 50 per cent. of the time, the lettering is white on black and for the other 50 per cent. of the time, the lettering is black on white. Clause 1(2) also prevents the incorporation of the warning into the design of the pack by requiring the addition of a distinguishing line between the warning and the rest of the pack. For a white background with black lettering, there would be a black border; the reverse would be the case for white lettering.

Clause 1(3) details the type and colour requirements for the product information on the side of the pack, which is an important feature. The analysis of the tobacco product includes the tar yield and other details of its composition. Clause 1(4) addresses the issue of flexibility when dealing with the warning on different pack sizes. It is not always possible to have a rectangular warning; that would be a matter for discussion in Committee.

Clause 1(5) allows the Secretary of State discretionary powers to address the import of tobacco products from other European Union states for consumption in the United Kingdom. I hope that the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) will pay particular attention to this part of my argument. Article 8 of the relevant Council directive on labelling allows member states to introduce requirements concerning the import, sale and consumption of tobacco products that they consider necessary to protect public health. Under article 8, the Secretary of State has the power, in the interests of public health, to ensure that imports into the United Kingdom are on a par with the indigenous product.

Mr. Harry Greenway: This is clearly a most important point. Can the hon. Gentleman give me three or four examples of countries where the directive is currently applied?

Mr. Lewis: I do not think that that point is relevant. We have the directive. Article 8 gives the Secretary of State the power. I am not interested in any other Secretary of State in any other country in the Union. I am interested in what happens here. Under the directive, our Secretary of State has the power to take up the position that I have described. There is no argument. Comparisons are odious at this stage of the game.

Mr. Greenway: Comparisons are not odious; they are absolutely essential if the hon. Gentleman is to convince the House of this important part of his argument. What would be the attitude of the French Government, the German Government and other Governments in countries that export cigarettes to this country if we started to ban their exports in this or any other area? There would be retaliation; it would be a denial of free trade. Is not the whole thrust of the European Union for free trade? If the hon. Gentleman cannot give me three or four examples, or even one, how does he expect to convince me?

Mr. Lewis: I am being drawn into a European Union argument. I am one of the original Euro-sceptics. My proposition is simple.

Mr. Greenway: Give an example.

Mr. Lewis: I do not think that examples are necessary. Article 8 of the directive is relevant.

Mr. Greenway: Give an example.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have warned hon. Members before that seated interventions are not helpful. The hon. Gentleman should either seek to intervene in the normal way or he should stay quiet.

Mr. Lewis: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) will not take no for an answer. Article 8 of the Council directive gives the Secretary of State the power, in the interests of public health, to ensure that other countries in the European Union adhere to that directive. If there is a difficulty with that, let us thrash out the detail in Committee. I am sure that the Minister would welcome that approach. I hesitate to say that the hon. Member for Ealing, North is on the wrong horse, but my proposition is simple.

Mr. Greenway: I am bound to persist with my argument. I am not a smoker, but I care passionately about the 204 people in Northolt who may lose their jobs—

Mr. Skinner: They are losing those jobs now.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) must convince the House, but he cannot even give one example of—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. My strictures about seated interventions apply to both sides of the House, especially to those sitting on the Front Bench below the Gangway.

Mr. Greenway: If the hon. Gentleman cannot give me a single example on an issue which is absolutely essential to my argument and which matters hugely to my community, how can he expect to convince the House or the country?

Mr. Lewis: I did not anticipate having to give examples. A directive exists. We are all loyal members of the EU, I should have thought—some are—and certainly Governments are loyal members of the EU. The Secretary of State has powers under article 8 of the directive, so what is the fuss? I am as concerned as—

Mr. Leigh *rose—*

Mr. Lewis: If the hon. Gentleman would just hang on, I shall deal with one intervention at a time.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North should accept that I am as concerned as he is about jobs, probably even more so, because I have never voted in any way to deny jobs anywhere. I do not think that one can say that about him, but leaving that on one side, there is no doubt that article 8 of the directive provides the Secretary of State with sufficient power.

Mr. Leigh: The argument about the directive is crucial to the debate and the hon. Gentleman is generous in giving way so that we can investigate whether he is right. In fact he is wrong, because the EC made clear its position subsequent to Canada's attempt to enact the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. The Commission said:

"The EC is of the opinion that this proposed requirement, an increase of 25 per cent., is more trade restrictive than necessary to fulfil an aim of protection of public health, especially when compared with EC legislation, which has achieved this objective with messages varying from 4 to 6 per cent."

The Commission has already made it clear that any increase in the size of the warning on the packet to 25 per cent. would be contrary to the workings of the internal market.

The hon. Gentleman quoted just part of article 8. I accept, as he said, that it makes it clear that

"The provisions of this Directive do not affect the right of the Member States to lay down, in compliance with the Treaty, requirements concerning the import, sale and consumption of tobacco products which they deem necessary in order to protect public health, provided"—

the following is important—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should, by their nature, be short. That was too long. The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) can resume his seat.

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman has killed his argument, because I do not think he is aware that Canada is not a member of the EU.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: No. Let me quote from article 8. I remind the hon. Gentleman once again that Canada is not a member of the EU, whether it wants to be or not.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: No. I have given way enough. Let me clarify what article 8 of the 1989 directive says. I shall quote it in full:

"1. Member States may not, for reasons of labelling, prohibit or restrict the sale of products which comply with this Directive.

2. The provisions of this Directive do not affect the right of the Member States to lay down, in compliance with the Treaty, requirements concerning the import, sale and consumption of tobacco products which they deem necessary in order to protect public health, provided such requirements do not imply any change to labelling as laid down in this Directive."

Hon. Members: Exactly.

Mr. Lewis: Hang on. The directive still allows the Secretary of State a measure of discretion to promote public health on cigarette packs. That could be debated further in Committee should the House give the Bill a Second Reading. Hon. Members have not convinced me and I have not convinced them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Lewis: No, I shall not give way. Conservative Members have had a good crack.

The labelling of tobacco products is recognised as an important part of smoking prevention policy. It is constantly evolving as a result of continuing progress by medical research into the consequences of tobacco on health. I cannot understand how Conservative Members cannot recognise the need for better health education in respect of tobacco consumption.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has probably spent all morning in a television studio, because he has just walked into the Chamber. As he is the best known tobacconist in the House, I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to give way to him.

Mr. Evans: I can speak from experience.

Mr. Lewis: The first health warnings appeared—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I gave a warning earlier about seated interventions. If, as I gather, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) was watching the debate on television, he will have heard it.

Mr. Lewis: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was on the other end of the camera.

The first health warnings appeared when the dangers of tobacco consumption had just been discovered. No one can argue about that. Those warnings communicated general messages about the possible health risks of smoking. The increased knowledge about the full extent of the danger of tobacco use must be reflected in the way in which that message is conveyed.

The research conducted today is enormous when compared with that conducted 30 years ago. Just last year, Sir Richard Doll and Professor Richard Peto, of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, illustrated the enormity of the risk associated with smoking. They found that one in two of all regular smokers will die prematurely as a result of their habit. Those killed by tobacco in middle age, between the ages of 35 and 69, lose an average of between 20 and 25 years of non-smoker life expectancy. The Tobacco Manufacturers Association claims that smokers are fully aware of the risks involved, but that is not true. That is no argument for not introducing my Bill.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lewis: Yes, because I have given way to hardly any of my hon. Friends.

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend said that tobacco smokers understand the risks involved, but is he aware that many tobacco smokers do not appreciate the effect of smoking on their circulation system? A number of people who have had to have limbs amputated did not realise that that was a possible consequence of smoking.

Mr. Lewis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because in the past 10 days I have spoken to two smokers who surprised me when they said that amputation was one of their biggest fears. They told me that they understood that their habit caused damage to their lungs and perhaps to their hearts, but they did not appreciate the risk to their limbs. I had not given it much thought either.

Mr. Robert Banks *rose—*

Mr. Lewis: I have given way enough to Conservative Members. I shall give way no more, as I am about to conclude.

It is true that public information campaigns in developed countries have made most people aware that tobacco is bad for their health and that it may cause lung cancer and other serious diseases. Because of the high risk attached to smoking and the degree of choice involved when individuals decide to smoke, thereby introducing themselves to that risk, the perception gap is extremely important. The Bill would address that by ensuring that the style of the warning reflected its importance.

Research carried out by the Health Education Authority illustrated that point by concluding that there is a tendency among many smokers to interpret the small size of the warning as evidence of Government duplicity. Smokers also equate the size of the warning to the magnitude of risk. With regard to our current health warnings, it is not surprising that research shows that perception of the health risk is very commonly underestimated.

A National Opinion Polls survey in 1994 stated that 60 per cent. of smokers still do not recognise that smoking causes the highest number of premature deaths in the United Kingdom each year. The point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) underscores the message that I have been trying to convey today.

I hope that the Bill will go into Committee and that we can consider the issues that Conservative Members may feel have not been dealt with adequately today. I believe that the Bill will add immeasurably to the education of the public on this vital public health matter.

10.30 am

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I support the Bill for a specific reason: I am massively interested in the health of the nation and the need to take every possible step to protect the health of the nation. Therefore, my analysis of the Bill relates to two areas. First, what are the effects of smoking? Are they bad and should we encourage the reduction of those effects? Secondly, if all hon. Members believe that smoking is bad, could the Bill assist to reduce the effects of smoking? That seems to be a fairly sensible and logical approach to the matter.

As I am about to consider the need to decrease smoking, I must declare that I am chairman of the council of the National Asthma Campaign. Therefore, I can speak with some authority about asthma. I want to remind hon. Members about the effects of smoking, not with regard to its causing asthma, but with regret to its effect on asthmatics.

A survey carried out in 1991 showed that cigarette smoking is a common trigger of asthma attacks, causing difficulties for 57 per cent. of people with asthma. In 1986, the World Health Organisation acknowledged that older people, and those with asthma or heart problems, can be adversely affected by people smoking close to them. I am concerned about the passive effects of smoking as well as the actual effects.

Studies have shown that children with asthma experience more severe asthma symptoms when exposed to smoke from their parents' cigarettes. That evidence can be found in the Murray and Morrison survey published in 1989.

Mr. Colvin: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Peter Emery: I would like to make a little more progress with my speech.

Mr. Colvin: My point is rather relevant.

Sir Peter Emery: My hon. Friend will have to wait a moment and be patient.

In 1990, American researchers discovered that smoking in the home is associated with higher rates of asthma, an increased need for asthma medications and an earlier onset of the disease itself. A study of 10,000 British children, who were followed from birth to the age of 10, revealed a 14 per cent. increase in childhood wheezy bronchitis when mothers smoked more than four cigarettes a day and a 49 per cent. increase when mothers

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smoked more than 14 cigarettes a day. That evidence can be found in the "American Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health".

It is proven that mothers who smoke when pregnant or soon after can increase the likelihood of their child developing asthma. Research shows that children whose mothers smoke 15 or more cigarettes a day have a 33 per cent. higher chance of developing asthma.

I could recount a list of the medical evidence about the effects of smoking on health which could become a filibuster. I am sure that the House is unanimous about the effects of smoking. Can any hon. Member who opposes the Bill say that he believes that smoking helps health? Can anyone do that?

Mr. Colvin: Well, my right hon. Friend has just asked a straight question.

Sir Peter Emery: I will finish my question before I give way to my hon. Friend. Can any hon. Member say that smoking has no effect on health? Those are the questions that must be answered. If my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) wishes to stick his neck out, I will be delighted to cut it off.

Mr. Colvin: I tried to intervene earlier when my right hon. Friend was talking about passive smoking and smoking in public places. I wanted to draw his attention to the fact that he may have picked up the wrong speech because the Tobacco Smoking (Public Places) Bill is the next item on the Order Paper today. We are considering tobacco labelling at the moment.

However, my right hon. Friend asked the direct question as to whether tobacco smoke has a beneficial effect on health. I am not a smoker, I hate tobacco smoke and I am especially against passive smoking. However, I always make a point of travelling on the top deck of a London bus simply because I believe that tobacco smoke is so toxic that it kills the germs that I would otherwise breathe in if I sat downstairs. I am sure that there is no scientific evidence that that is so. The belief is simply based on anecdotal evidence from my own experience. I have managed to get through the winter without catching a cold because I travel on the top deck and breathe in that horrible smoke which kills off all other germs.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that that is the end of the anecdotes. That was a long intervention.

Sir Peter Emery: I had always thought that my hon. Friend was rather more serious than anecdotal. I can say only that no one in the medical world would give a tinker's cuss for my hon. Friend's argument.

I have read the Order Paper and I am aware of the Bill which relates to smoking in public places. However, I am arguing about smoking in public places and anywhere else. A study has shown how exposure to cigarette smoke for an hour causes a 20 per cent. deterioration in the lung function of adults with asthma. That evidence is revealed in "The Passive Effects on Bronchial Asthma" by the Domes, Bolin and Slaggen inquiry which was published and accepted by the Department of Health.

It is clear that passive smoking causes a 20 per cent. deterioration in lung function; this is for asthmatics and for people with bronchitis, emphysema and all the other diseases of the lungs. There is also evidence that exposure to other people's smoke can lead to an increased need for emergency hospital treatment for people with asthma.

I want now to consider public opinion and smoking. In February and March 1992, the European Community conducted a questionnaire of the citizens of the 12 member states. In the Community as a whole, the majority of those surveyed—85 per cent.—said that they favoured clearly defined areas reserved for smokers and areas where non-smokers are protected.

Mr. Couchman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I believe that we have the unique opportunity this morning to discuss two Bills on smoking. It is quite clear that although my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is undoubtedly passionate about the effects of smoking on asthma, he is talking to the Tobacco Smoking (Public Places) Bill rather than to the Tobacco Products Labelling Bill. Would you please rule to the effect that we should wait and discuss passive smoking when we reach the second Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) would like to take my place. Had I thought that that was the case, I would have so ruled.

Sir Peter Emery: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I find it very strange that people cannot understand that passive smoking, and the decreasing of passive smoking, is a major factor which the Tobacco Products Labelling Bill can do something to assist. I find it particularly surprising that people are unable to understand that.

Nobody has any medical basis for suggesting that smoking can be beneficial or that it is not harmful. If that is established, let us consider whether the Bill can do anything to assist. I do not think that the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis)—certainly not myself—would suggest that there will be a revolutionary effect from the Bill, but every small step to decrease the use of cigarettes is beneficial to the health of the nation. As I said at Health questions recently, every day five people die from asthma—that is more than 2,000 a year. The problem is made worse by the effects of smoking. If we want to do something to assist the health of the nation, even if it affects such a major industry as the tobacco industry, and even if it affects some people who are in employment, the overall effect on the nation should be our major aim.

Mr. Harry Greenway: My right hon. Friend knows of my constituency interest in this matter. The good people of Northolt who are losing their jobs have no interest in his argument, because British cigarettes, which can be controlled by the House and which are already being overtaxed anyway, are being replaced by imports. My right hon. Friend has not addressed that point at all.

Sir Peter Emery: I have not actually dealt with imports. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) talks about his constituents. I should like

him to go to the Asthma Society in his area. More than 276 of his constituents would urge him to support the Bill because they are affected by it.

Mr. Greenway: My right hon. Friend is missing the point. It is not that existing smokers are ceasing to smoke. They are being forced to smoke not British cigarettes but imported cigarettes.

Sir Peter Emery: My hon. Friend's argument is nonsensical, and I just do not accept it. The number of imported cigarettes sold in his constituency is the absolute minimum compared with the sale of ordinary cigarettes manufactured by his own constituents. My hon. Friend and I know that, so let us not have false arguments.

Can increasing the size of warnings on cigarette packets help to decrease smoking? A major investigation was carried out by Professor Alex P.W. Gardner for the British Psychological Society. I shall refer to only three of his conclusions; there are many more. He said:

"Existing smokers claim that current health warnings have little impact and many appear to merge and to be incorporated in the pack designs."

Hon. Members have only to see certain cigarette packets to realise that that is the case. Professor Gardner went on to state that

"Research suggests that smokers feel the packet is image related, exciting . . . and desirable.

Cigarette packets do have strong affective associations to the smoker".

That is particularly so among women. He went on to state:

"The inference from this is that major changes are needed . . . to the package design to offset these effects and make the health message more salient."

There is a most intriguing example of that fact. The American cigarettes, Lucky Strike, had a green package in the 1930s. Research found that women did not buy Lucky Strike cigarettes because they liked to have a white packet in their handbags. The manufacturer could not see a way of changing the modus of its approach until America was brought into the war by the Japanese. There was a campaign which stated, "Lucky Strike green has gone to war," and a white package was produced. That was purely to attract female smokers. The tobacco industry itself knows that package design has a considerable effect on the sale of cigarettes.

Mr. John Carlisle: My right hon. Friend is quoting Professor Gardner, whom the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) also quoted, saying that design has an effect. Will my right hon. Friend also accept a quote from Australia? The hon. Member for Worsley also mentioned Australia in part of his defence. He referred to Dr. Power of Macquarie university, who said:

"There is no evidence anywhere in the studies reported that any changes to cigarette packets will have any effect on the behaviour of the target groups."

That was part of the research that was carried out for the Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer. There are always other sides to the argument. Surely my right hon. Friend is not going to accept just one person's evidence on that rather spurious case.

Sir Peter Emery: I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) takes that view. Therefore, perhaps he will accept the evidence of the tobacco manufacturers. In the example that I gave, the manufacturers themselves went out of their way to alter their campaign in order to change the package. That is what they did. We do not have to go to the professors—even to those whom I am quoting—because the industry itself accepts that. Perhaps my hon. Friend, who is interested in the industry, will accept the evidence of the industry.

I shall now continue my point about the need to increase the size of warnings. We must accept that it is self-evident that a notice that takes up 25 per cent. of the relevant area is more likely to be read and taken into account than one which covers only 6 per cent. of the area. I should like to hear the arguments of those who think otherwise, but that fact should be obvious. Therefore, if we are interested in hammering home a health warning about the dangers of cigarette smoking, does not it logically apply that it would be better to have something to which more people would pay attention and read than to have something to which they would be less likely to pay attention and to read?

Mr. Robert Banks: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Peter Emery: I shall finish my argument and then I shall give way.

The only people who do not think in that way are people in the tobacco industry. I shall refer to the reasons why the Government are taking their line.

Mr. Banks: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that before legislation is passed by the House it is important to have evidence to support the reasons for it. Can he tell us how many members of the public are not aware already that smoking damages their health?

Sir Peter Emery: My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), whom I know and like, puts a non sequitur. The Government accept that it is necessary to continue a campaign. It is not I but the Government who should answer my hon. Friend. The Government are spending £13.5 million of my hon. Friend's money, my money and the taxpayer's money to make that more evident. The Government are actually pursuing the very point that I am making. I wish to assist the Government and to take the matter further. I can see no reasons for not doing so other than those of the tobacco industry.

It is strange that those opposing the Bill say that it cannot be proved that there is any need to increase the warning on cigarette packaging. They suggest that the packet contains enough warning already and that the size does not matter. If it does not matter, why is the tobacco industry so against an increase?

Mr. Vivian Bendall (Ilford, North): Cost.

Sir Peter Emery: The point made in that sedentary intervention is more relevant than many of the points made during the debate by those standing up. An increase in the warning would mean the cost of a new design. It would be possible in the Bill to provide for a long period before the provision came into operation—long enough for designs to be changed without an additional cost factor. If cost is a argument, the Bill can be modified to cope with it. I am certain that the Bill's promoter would be happy to agree to that.

If the argument that the size of the warning has no effect is correct, why is the tobacco industry opposed to that increase? Why do the Government believe that, if the

[Sir Peter Emery]

legislation is enacted, it could put the voluntary agreement at risk—an argument that we have heard before and will hear from the Minister this morning? If that argument is true, that proves the effect of the increase. If increasing the warning would put the voluntary agreement at risk, it must damage the sale of cigarettes—something that the tobacco industry would hate. That is an even stronger argument for us to press forward with the provisions.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Emery: I have not given way to an Opposition Member yet, so I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Barron: The right hon. Gentleman has advanced a good argument. The argument about the voluntary agreement contains a threat. The tobacco industry can threaten any voluntary agreement which is not cast in statute and is fragile. If the tobacco industry does not want to uphold such an agreement, it can be coercive and threaten not to co-operate with the Government in advancing the cause of public health.

Sir Peter Emery: We all know of the campaign that the hon. Gentleman has been waging since he introduced his own Bill on tobacco advertising last year.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) will pass on to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health, who is to reply to the debate, that we need a clear statement from the Government today on their view of the Bill. When it is known that the Government are to oppose a private Member's Bill, it does not make sense for the Government not to make their position clear. When the position is not made clear, the Bill proceeds into Committee, where hours are spent debating amendments, and returns to the Floor of the House for Third Reading and Report in order that one or two people—who the Government know oppose the measure—may state their opposition to it. That means that the Government do not have to make their position clear. The House should require any Government to inform it of the Government's view on private Members' Bills on Second Reading. That would save an immense amount of time for all hon. Members in the House and in Committee. I urge the Government to make their position clear on the Bill before us.

Mr. Colvin: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Peter Emery: I shall give way two more times, but that is all.

Mr. Colvin: I support my right hon. Friend in what he has just asked the Government to say. Perhaps, at the same time, my hon. Friend the Minister will say whether the Chancellor believes that he should continue to impose the 3 per cent. increase in real terms on the price of cigarettes through additional taxation, year on year. The Government's ammunition to deal with the problems of smoking seems to be price, as well as constructive education.

Sir Peter Emery: I thank my hon. Friend, and am delighted to agree with him. I should like the Chancellor to put a much higher tax on cigarettes. In doing so, the Government would be pursuing their policy—to help the nation's health. The Government's stated policy is to decrease smoking. The worry is that smoking is not decreasing among the young, which is why I read out the statistics from the Minister—

Mr. John Carlisle: It is.

Sir Peter Emery: Obviously, my hon. Friend was not present when I read out the figures.

Mr. Harry Greenway: It was not me—I have not said anything.

Sir Peter Emery: I was referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle).

I do not intend to repeat the statistics. My hon. Friend can look at the figures in *Hansard*—either those given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State or as repeated by me. There is no decrease in smoking among young people.

Mr. Carlisle: That is not true.

Sir Peter Emery: My hon. Friend says that that is not true. For goodness sake—why should I repeat the darn things? If we look at the figures—*[Interruption.]* I shall not bother with them. I should not waste the time of the House. The facts are apparent from the Government's statement on the Floor of the House, which can be read in *Hansard*.

I am worried about young women, who cause me the greatest concern. There has been a positive increase in smoking among young women—much more than among young boys. Those women are likely to be most affected by the style of pack. They, as youngsters, may not know of the dangers. People have asked who does not know about the dangers of smoking. Youngsters may not know about those dangers. The message should be hammered home on the labelling of the pack—that must make sense.

Why should we not pass the legislation? What possible reason can there be for not doing so? We all agree that we are interested in the nation's health. If the Bill would make one positive little step forward, surely it should be encouraged. The only reason for arguing against the Bill is to protect the tobacco producers' interests. The Bill is not a major piece of legislation.

Mr. Leigh: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Peter Emery: No, I will not. My hon. Friend will no doubt wish to catch Madam Deputy Speaker's eye and make his own speech.

There cannot be a reason for opposing the legislation unless it is to defend tobacco producers' rights. If that is so, I am sorry, but I believe that the majority of the people in this country would back such legislation. The 198 branches of the National Asthma Campaign cover most constituencies and involve many more people than those who work in the tobacco industry—they would be massively in favour of the Bill. The Government should accept the Bill because there is no reason not to do so.

10.58 am

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): In the last minute of his speech, the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) mentioned the politics of the tobacco industry in

this country. I can draw a direct parallel between what he said and the private Member's Bill that I promoted last year with his support and that of many other Conservative Members on the subject of tobacco advertising.

We had seen leaked documents from the Secretary of State for Health, which had been discussed in Cabinet in 1993 and which stated that advertising would reduce tobacco consumption, not merely result in smokers switching brands. The same arguments have been advanced today in sedentary interventions as were made against my Bill. Arguments opposing legislation to increase public knowledge of the dangers of smoking are made in the interests of tobacco companies, not in the interests of the public's health.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) for introducing the Bill and enabling us to debate once again the dangers of smoking and associated issues. These are important issues, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on his excellent speech. Like him, I had to put up with nonsensical interventions last year when I introduced a similar Bill. I believe that they are made by hon. Members who do not declare their interests in these matters. My hon. Friend did well and I congratulate him on the way in which he moved the Bill's Second Reading.

I congratulate my hon. Friend also on reading out a list of organisations and individuals within them who live daily with the victims of tobacco use. Their support is vital when introducing legislation to increase public education so that people are increasingly aware of the damage that tobacco does to the nation's health. I noticed that some hon. Members seemed to be uneasy when the list was read out. Anyone who visits his local hospital and meets people who are dying because of the effects of smoking will understand that we must do everything that we can to bring to the attention of the public the great dangers that result from smoking.

When the House considers any legislation that bears on smoking we always hear about the loss of jobs that will ensue. The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has already raised the issue. In 1991, the Department of Health, as it now is, was taken to court by the tobacco industry. It was argued at the time that if the proposed restrictions were introduced the tobacco industry would produce its products abroad. The Department decided in 1991 to go beyond the measures set out in the EEC directive by 50 per cent., and it was taken to court. The three tobacco manufacturers that took it to the European Court lost their case in 1993. We know that the tobacco industry has not gone abroad to produce cigarettes.

The weak arguments that are advanced on behalf of the tobacco industry do not reflect what has happened. I am aware of the argument about loss of jobs, but it is really one about not placing restrictions on the sale of tobacco products and not enlightening people by explaining to them what happens when they use tobacco products.

Mr. Leigh: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the second paragraph of article 8 of the EC directive makes it clear that any requirements that bear on the import, sale and consumption of tobacco must not imply any change to labelling as laid down in the directive? If the Bill becomes law, there is nothing that the Government can do to stop imported cigarettes carrying health warnings that cover only 4 to 6 per cent. of each packet. Those cigarettes will flood into the country and destroy jobs in our tobacco industry.

Mr. Barron: That is an example of the emotive language that is used in these debates. The hon. Gentleman talks about destroying jobs. The same comments were made in 1991, and they were reported in newspapers.

Mr. Lewis: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Barron: Yes, of course. My hon. Friend answered the questions that are now being raised when he spoke earlier. Unfortunately, some hon. Members do not want to listen.

Mr. Lewis: There are none so blind as those who will not see. The Commissioner responsible for social affairs recently said at the World Council on Smoking and Health that it was his intention to review the EC directive with a view to strengthening it. The process is on-going.

Mr. Barron: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for supplying that information. There is to be a review later this year. We should be arguing for the 25 per cent. requirement to apply throughout the European Union. We should be interested in public health throughout the Union and not only in our own country. Some hon. Members might have a problem with that, but I have not.

Mr. Harry Greenway: If the issue is not about jobs, why did the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) attempt to draw an analogy—a false one—between lost mining jobs and lost jobs in the tobacco industry? If he and my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) do not think that the potential loss of jobs is real, let them come with me to Northolt and meet people whose jobs will be threatened. They do not care.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House, and the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) in particular, that according to "Erskine May" moderation and good temper are characteristics of debate. That is more an ideal to be striven for than that which is being achieved at the moment.

Mr. Barron: If the invitation of the hon. Member for Ealing, North extends to visiting the tobacco industry in Northolt in the morning and talking to members of the union that sponsors me who work within it, and then in the afternoon visiting the local hospital and talking to the consultants who are looking after the victims of smoking, I shall gladly accept it.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): If we are weighing loss of jobs against loss of health and even loss of life, there can be no doubt that although loss of jobs is an important consideration, loss of health and loss of life are yet more important. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Bill, highly desirable though it is and deserving of reaching the statute book, is a second-best solution? Surely it would be best of all if we abandoned all advertising of tobacco products. Such advertising should be unacceptable to us. It is surely unacceptable that great

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

corporate interests should be free to engage in advertising and propaganda to lure people into habits that will be deeply destructive to them.

Mr. Barron: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that when addressing me he is shoving at what might be called an open door. I completely agree with him. It is interesting that since we debated these matters last year and the introduction of the voluntary agreement, the Department introduced an increase in the size of health warnings on billboards. That was done under the new and tighter arrangements for the voluntary agreement. I am sceptical about the agreement, but if the new requirement is good enough for hoardings near schools, for example, it is surely good enough for cigarette packets in school tuck shops.

Mr. Harry Greenway: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I waited a while before seeking to raise a point of order out of courtesy to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). I wish to raise the point of order now before my right hon. Friend leaves the Chamber. I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to draw a distinction between passion for one's constituents and bad temper. For my part, there was no bad temper when I intervened. However, I care passionately about the jobs of my constituents. I spoke only with passion, as my right hon. Friend well knows.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, passion can sometimes lead to ill temper.

Mr. Barron: What is the effect of health warnings? I have a copy of the brief that was distributed by the Tobacco Manufacturers Association to hon. Members a couple of weeks ago. Part of it reads:

"The requirements of the Bill would not have the consequence of reducing tobacco consumption in the United Kingdom."

That statement is unequivocal. A copy of the briefing that was sent out by Conservative central office was handed to me this morning. It is from the Conservative research department—*[Interruption.]* I heard one or two of those words during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley.

The briefing states:

"Terry Lewis' Bill seeks to raise the size of health warnings on cigarette packets from the current 6 per cent. of the surface area to 25 per cent. The Government"—

presumably there is not that much division in the Conservative party that central office does not speak on behalf of the Government, but perhaps we will find out whether that is the case later—

"fought off an industry challenge in the European"—

I am sorry, I will start again. The Government

"does not consider that this measure would have any significant impact on reducing smoking against the background of the action outlined above."

Clearly, Tory central office, if not the Government, feels very much the same way as the tobacco manufacturing industry.

Mr. Trend: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Barron: No, I will finish this point first. I want to draw the House's attention to the research paper on the Tobacco Products Labelling Bill, which the House of Commons research department produced this week. On page 8, it quotes the present Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who was then Secretary of State for Health and who said, on 11 July 1991, when the House introduced the Tobacco Products Labelling (Safety) Regulations 1991, which caused a stir among tobacco manufacturers:

"The evidence from many of the representations put to us during the consultation period suggested that the warnings would be more effective if we increased the size, and removed the attribution to the Health Department's Chief Medical Officers. I believe that the new system of labelling will make a real contribution to achieving the smoking prevalence targets proposed in our recent consultation document, 'The Health of the Nation'."

What has changed, in terms of the consultation and advice that the Department of Health has received between 1991 when the Secretary of State said that and the briefings that Tory central office is producing now, to persuade the Government that there will be no change in consumption if the Bill is enacted? The House and everyone concerned—either for or against—has the right to know why the Department of Health appears to have a different view on the matter.

Mr. Trend: I am intrigued that the hon. Gentleman has a copy of the central office briefing—he has the advantage of me. When he quoted from it some seconds ago, I thought that he was about to say that the Government had fought off the industry, but then he thought the better of it and quoted a different passage. Although I do not have the brief, my guess is that it probably pointed out that the Government robustly fought off a challenge by the tobacco companies on the amount of space that the UK Government demand for health warnings on tobacco packages. That is a good point in the Government's favour. They robustly defended their point of view against the tobacco industry and the hon. Gentleman should have said so, instead of trying to smear them as being the lapdogs of an industry.

Mr. Barron: I asked a question of the Minister that is relevant to this debate and to the Bill. I started to quote another paragraph and I will quote it now. It said:

"The Government fought off an industry challenge in the European Court of Justice to have the size of the warnings reduced."

They did so and I mentioned that fact in response to the intervention of the hon. Member for Ealing, North about the fact that jobs would flow from this country if the size of the health warning were increased. It did not have that consequence then and, while I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman would accept what I say, that has always been a weak thread in the debate and it does not hold water now.

These are examples of products that are for sale in this country. In the bottom left-hand corner, and in Australia and Canada—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that, if he intends to use illustrations, it is important to describe them. He must remember that the *Official Report* is entirely written.

Mr. Barron: This illustration clearly shows why the Bill wants an increase in size. Conservative Members can see the coverage for health warnings on cigarette packets from Canada and Australia. It is clear from afar. None of them can see the warning on the Benson and Hedges

packet on the bottom left of the illustration, which has black lettering on gold and is for sale in our shops. The first warning that they will miss, as they get further from the illustration, is that on the product manufactured in this country. The warnings on the packets from Canada and Australia are stark.

There are many other examples—the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) is showing us a British packet. He is absolutely right. This is the Australian packet, which is a little different. Can hon. Members see? It has two health warnings. The message is there.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of my stricture, which is practical. It must be very clear exactly what is being said in the written record.

Mr. Barron: I accept that, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Wirral, South was showing us a graphic example of Benson and Hedges cigarettes. I could not see any of the health warning from here, but Conservative Members clearly saw what was on the packet that I produced.

Mr. Bendall: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that illustration has nothing to do with size? It is to do with colour, because no one could read anything at that distance.

Mr. Barron: If the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill, he will see that that issue is at its heart. The warning will either be black on white or white on black and I dare say that then, even at the present 6 per cent., one would at least be able to see some of the lettering on the Benson and Hedges packet that I held up. One would be able to see that something was there, which is more than one can do now because we do not have contrasting colours. For that and for other reasons, the warning fails and hon. Members should take that into account. That change is in the Bill.

Mr. Barry Porter: I declare an interest, in the sense that I smoke and, prior to the Budget, I gave advice and assistance to the Tobacco Control Alliance, which is the alliance of corner shops that sell tobacco. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will accept the fact that one would have to be blind, deaf, or mentally deficient, or a combination of all three, not to be aware of the dangers of smoking, as is evident from all the organisations and individuals who go on about them. I have made a choice. It may be a silly choice, but at least it is informed. I know what is said and published, as does everyone else. We have enough information for anyone to understand any risks that they may be taking. Is that not right?

Mr. Barron: I am grateful for that intervention and will draw directly from it. At one level, the hon. Gentleman is right. I do not want to stop him buying cigarettes. If he chooses to take the risk, that is fine, and at his age it is a mature decision and something that only he can decide. Decisions on smoking are not always mature decisions, however, as they are taken by young children. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) said that the incidence of child smoking has been reduced, but that is not true. I have here—

Mr. John Carlisle *rose—*

Mr. Barron: This will not take a minute. The hon. Gentleman was the only member of the Standing Committee that considered my Tobacco Advertising Bill last year to say that smoking is good for public health. Many people would disagree, including one member of my family, whose funeral I attended last Friday.

Mr. Carlisle *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows the rules. If the hon. Member who has the Floor does not give way, other hon. Members must resume their seats.

Mr. Barron: I have here a table from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys on smoking.

Mr. Carlisle *rose—*

Mr. Barron: Just a moment.

This table shows the incidence of smoking among girls. In 1988, 22 per cent. of 15-year-old girls were smoking. We have spent some money on health education to try to reduce that percentage, although I do not think that it was enough, both in schools through the national curriculum and through various packages, such as Smokebusters in schools—and elsewhere—which many hon. Members have supported. That is when the majority of people start smoking and those are immature decisions. In 1993, the last year for which we have statistics, the figure was 26 per cent. We are not winning the battle, particularly among young girls. The figures for boys aged 15 are 17 per cent. in 1988, and 19 per cent. now.

It is beholden on us all to do everything possible to change the position. I attempted to do so last year with the support of both sides of the House, but my Bill failed. I predict that, in the next five years, no matter who is in government, legislation will be introduced, because the organisations in the list that my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley read out will lobby us year in, year out until we do all that we can to mitigate the use of that product, which kills so many of our fellow citizens every day.

The Bill goes a long way towards doing something about the problem. To judge from the passage that I read out, it seems that my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley would have had the support of the Department of Health in 1991. I want to know whether he has it today.

Mr. Carlisle: I do not want to labour this point, but it is extremely important to point out that the figures that I have been given by the OPCS for the years 1984-92 show that the number of 11 to 15-year-old boys who smoke has dropped by some 40 per cent. and the number of girls by just over 15 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman must understand that a tiny number of people find the odd cigarette beneficial. Had my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) been a smoker, he might have drawn a cigarette to calm his understandable outrage at the way in which Opposition Members dismissed the Bill's effect on jobs in his constituency.

Mr. Barron: I shall not be drawn into discussing jobs because the industry that I came from before entering the House lost thousands of jobs as a result of legislation voted on by Conservative Members. I concede that half a dozen or so Conservative Members did not vote for it. I shall not describe my surgeries as a result of the consequences of those political decisions. As I told the hon. Member for Ealing, North, I am prepared to meet

[Mr. Barron]

people in his constituency who think that the Bill threatens their jobs. I do not want them to lose their jobs but the public health issue must be taken into account.

The hon. Member for Luton, North chose to quote figures for 1984. He was right to say that, in 1984, 28 per cent. of 15-year-olds smoked and now the figure is 19 per cent., so it has gone down since 1984. But I deliberately gave the figure for 1988, since when the number of young smokers has gone up. During that time, we are supposed to have had better health education to stop young people smoking. The fact that the figure has increased since 1988 shows that, whatever we are doing in schools, it is not having the effect of stopping young people starting to smoke. We could go back to the base line of 1900 if we so chose, but it would not get us away from what is happening in our society or our responsibility as legislators to act against it.

Mr. Couchman: Does the hon. Gentleman concede that it may be part of the perversity of youth that young people may be reacting against the heavy campaign against smoking and taking it up as a challenge to their elders?

Mr. Barron: Young people start to smoke for a host of different reasons, which we debated last year, including peer pressure or the fact that other people at home have started to smoke. It is no good thinking that one can pick a single reason off the shelf and build one's argument around it.

I support the Bill and tried to introduce legislation last year because we must take on the issue in every way that we can and at every opportunity. If the Secretary of State for Health believed in 1991 that the size of the warning on cigarette packets would have an effect in terms of public health, it is good enough to believe that that is so in 1995. I support the Bill and hope that the House will give it a Second Reading today.

11.26 am

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I rise to intervene only briefly in this debate in the hope that all hon. Members are anxious to proceed to the second important Bill to be discussed today: the Tobacco Smoking (Public Places) Bill. I warmly support the Bill and congratulate the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on his good sense, having secured fourth place in the ballot on private Members' Bills, in introducing it.

Mr. Leigh: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I put it on record that we are now nearly two hours into the debate and not a single opponent to the Bill has yet been called?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is entirely at my discretion as to who is called. If the hon. Gentleman is challenging that, he must think better of it.

Mr. Leigh: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course I am not challenging that, but it is important that the record states that a number of hon. Members oppose the Bill and, two hours into the debate, they have not been called. It has therefore not been a balanced debate. I simply wish to make that point.

Madam Deputy Speaker: May I point out that numerous interventions have taken some time to be dealt with? The majority of those who intervened clearly stated their opposition to the Bill.

Sir John Stanley: I was congratulating the hon. Member for Worsley on introducing the Bill, which intends to be helpful, responsible and overwhelmingly beneficial. The hon. Gentleman's opening speech and the subsequent speeches by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) put forward the case for the Bill extremely cogently.

The case for the Bill is based on one essential and fundamental proposition, which I hope opponents to the Bill will at least acknowledge: it is universally accepted that tobacco in general, and cigarettes in particular, are addictive and potentially lethal. At the critical point—the point of sale and use—the warning of those facts should therefore be prominently displayed to consumers.

That overwhelming case for the Bill is relevant not only to those who choose to exercise their right to smoke—I deny no one that choice; it is also relevant because, notwithstanding the legislation in force, very young people have access to cigarettes. It is deeply regrettable that many parents still have the habit of smoking in close proximity to their children, including babies. In those circumstances, it is an essential part of our responsibility that tobacco companies display with due prominence the essential warnings about health.

A number of hon. Members have expressed in interventions their opposition to the Bill. If they catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, they will be able to develop those points further. One singularly specious argument against the Bill is that it represents unwarranted interference in freedom of choice.

Mr. Bendall: It does.

Sir John Stanley: My hon. Friend thinks so, but that claim is not only specious but extraordinarily paternalistic. It rests on the proposition that adults are incapable of making an informed decision whether to use a particular product that carries a health warning. If one carries that argument to its logical conclusion, health warnings should be removed from the packaging of all products that may pose a health or other hazard. That would not be remotely acceptable because on that basis, one would have to campaign to discontinue warnings against having unprotected sex because of the danger of AIDS. I am sure that few hon. Members would be prepared to advance the argument that far.

Mr. John Carlisle: My right hon. Friend argues that warnings should appear on tobacco products because, if used to excess, they can kill. Does not the same apply to alcohol? Should not warnings appear on bottles of alcohol, because it can have an equally devastating effect on people who use it to excess—in exactly the same way as cigarettes? Why draw a distinction?

Sir John Stanley: It is strange that my hon. Friend is apparently unaware of the different medical consequence

of smoking cigarettes as compared with drinking alcohol. I am not aware that alcohol consumption is likely to lead to fatal lung cancer.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does not my right hon. Friend accept that an illness such as cirrhosis of the liver, which can be fatal, may be caused by excessive alcohol consumption? Is he saying that it is nicer to die from cirrhosis of the liver?

Sir John Stanley: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that many forms of activity can, in some circumstances, lead to death—but there is no parallel to the direct relationship between smoking and fatal illness.

As to the reaction from tobacco manufacturers to the Bill, they should pay—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the right hon. Gentleman continues, I remind him of the old custom that hon. Members speaking from the Front Benches should not step over the red line. [HON. MEMBERS: "Is that a red warning?"] A verbal warning has been given.

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful for your reminder, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am now standing firmly behind the right mark on the tennis court.

Tobacco manufacturers should pay much closer attention to profound changes in public perception of their responsibilities in this country and elsewhere—the hon. Member for Worsley referred to foreign countries. The undoubted right of people to exercise their wish to smoke is increasingly balanced by the right of non-smokers, who are probably in the majority, to enjoy an unpolluted, smoke-free environment and to take measures to ensure one. The tobacco companies have not taken sufficient account of that profound change. The legal climate also is changing. In the United States, substantial litigation is in train, in which large numbers of people are seeking to sue for personal health damage from smoking. Following a recent decision by the Legal Aid Board in this country, it seems likely that similar litigation will begin here. Against that background, tobacco companies should adopt a different stance in promoting their products.

The key issue is the Government's response to the Bill. I remind my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health that I was among the hon. Members who were deeply disappointed by the Government's response to last Session's private Member's Bill on tobacco advertising, introduced by the hon. Member for Rother Valley. From my perspective, the Government gave a dismal reaction and failed to take into account their responsibility for the nation's health.

Mr. Sackville: Our response on that occasion was a robust statement on the strengthening of the voluntary agreement with the tobacco industry, which puts this country well ahead of any other in Europe in efforts to reduce tobacco consumption. I simply do not know what my right hon. Friend is talking about.

Sir John Stanley: My hon. Friend stated the Government's view, but it is not one with which I agree. The large number of hon. Members in all parts of the House who supported the Second Reading of the Bill of the hon. Member for Rother Valley also took a different view from the Government.

We hope that there will be stronger legislation on tobacco advertising in future. I hope that the Government will display a more constructive and responsible attitude to this Bill than they did to that of the hon. Member for Rother Valley. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Worsley, whose Bill has my enthusiastic support.

11.37 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) and his comments. I make the point to certain Conservative Members that I am another supporter of the Bill who has been fortunate to catch Madam Deputy Speaker's eye.

I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on his luck in the ballot, which many of us enter, but are rarely successful, and on his Bill. Many hon. Members, irrespective of party, have long campaigned on the effects of smoking on the population. Last year, I spoke in support of the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), and some years ago I was a member of the Standing Committee that considered a similar measure introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), which centred on shop tobacco advertising. Those Bills, like that now before the House, enjoyed wide cross-party support.

I suppose that we all in our personal lives or in our work as Members of Parliament have experienced an event that never leaves us. I am sure that colleagues recall our meeting in the Jubilee Room with Roy Castle, who was greatly loved and respected by the people of this country. When he spoke to us, he was seriously ill and as he outlined the background to his lung cancer, no one could not have been deeply moved by the effect that that had on him and on his family. He said that he had contracted lung cancer because of the nature of his work. As hon. Members have said, passive smoking caused his illness and, sadly, it caused his death.

In recent years, two issues have caught the attention and imagination of the general public, and legislation on them had wide support. The first was drinking and driving, and I do not think that anyone now opposes the legislation to deal with that. Hon. Members have spoken about people's right to choose. No doubt hon. Members will recall that a long time ago there were debates about seat belt legislation. Some hon. Members said, "If someone wishes to drive his car without a seat belt, that is his choice." However, seat belt legislation has saved an enormous number of lives and such measures have the support of the general public and the vast majority of hon. Members.

In recent years, attitudes to smoking have changed. When one goes to a restaurant, one is asked, "Do you wish to sit in a smoking or a non-smoking sector for your meal?" In hotels, people are asked, "Do you want to have a room on a smoking or a non-smoking floor?" There are similar attitudes in transport services. Following tragic fires on the London underground, a strict ban on smoking was imposed. I rarely see anyone totally breaking that law and saying, "I could not care less about the laws. If I wish to have a cigarette while I am using public transport, I will have one."

Without doubt anti-smoking procedures in offices and workplaces have increased. I am sure that many hon. Members have seen in Victoria at various times of the day small groups of workers smoking outside the entrance. That is because company policy and the attitude of the

[Mr. Tom Cox]

people employed there is to say, "This is a non-smoking place of employment." That shows the attitude of the general public.

Mr. John Marshall: The hon. Gentleman gave examples of restaurants with non-smoking and smoking zones and of hotels with smoking and non-smoking rooms. He also said that in some offices smoking is completely forbidden. Does he accept that those attitudes have come about not as a result of Acts of Parliament, but by the decision of individuals, by the working of the marketplace? Is not that often a more effective tool than legislation?

Mr. Cox: I question that. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the marketplace, but I shall not go down that track because the many interventions in the debate show how interested the tobacco companies are in the marketplace. My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley said to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), "I will meet the workers whom you are obviously concerned about provided you also take me to your local hospital."

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): My hon. Friend was asked whether legislation had reduced smoking. Perhaps it has not, but does he agree that the Government's policy is to reduce smoking? Does he accept that the courts have had an effect as well? They have recognised the dangers of passive smoking and have made awards to employees whose health has been damaged by passive smoking. Therefore, employers have an incentive, which has been placed upon them by the courts, to restrict smoking in places of work and other public places.

Mr. Cox: My hon. Friend makes two valid points and I need not comment in detail. I fully support what he said.

It is said that advertisements do not have any great effect. In recent years, the tobacco companies went in for specific types of advertising and spent vast amounts on it. The advertisements were aimed overwhelmingly at young people and portrayed a certain image of smoking. The message was, "You are a tough macho person and you will be popular with the girls if you smoke this brand of cigarette." We all recall the sort of motor car that was featured and how the driver would pick up attractive young ladies. To complete the image, one had to smoke a particular brand of cigarette. Vast sums were spent on such well-researched advertisements.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cox: I normally give way willingly and have done so a couple of times. But many hon. Members wish to speak and there have been an enormous number of interventions. I do not intend to speak for long, so I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

There are clear signs that many young people are smoking: 25 per cent. of 15-year-olds smoke. We see them everywhere as they leave school. Hon. Members have spoken about Government policy on seeking to educate schoolchildren about smoking, but it does not seem to have been very successful. All hon. Members, whatever part of the country they represent, know that within two or three minutes of coming out of school, many children are smoking cigarettes. That needs to be looked at in detail.

St. George's hospital in my constituency is one of the largest in the country. I should like to quote from a letter dated 9 February from Professor Walters, who is professor of child health at the hospital's medical school. The letter states:

"My particular research and clinical interest is lung development and the lung diseases of children, primarily asthma. There is now incontrovertible evidence that parental smoking, particularly maternal smoking especially during pregnancy is harmful. Furthermore, data shows that the group most rapidly increasing in its intake of smoking in the UK is young women."

We have heard that comment many times in the debate. The letter goes on:

"Wandsworth, the area in which I work, has one of the largest incidences of childhood asthma in the Country and this is reflected by the very high admission rate at this Hospital for this disease in children."

That letter emphasises the point made by some hon. Members about the effect of smoking on children and on health generally. Of whom do people take notice? Is it of the highly skilled medical consultant or is it of the tobacco companies, which are obviously interested in selling the products that they manufacture? I and, I believe, the vast majority of the general public will take far more notice of that letter and the person who wrote it than of someone who supports the tobacco industry.

I could quote any number of letters. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley gave a list of people and organisations who support the Bill. I just want to quote one more letter, again from a lecturer in medicine—Dr. Griffiths who works at St. George's and who fully supports the Bill. He wrote:

"One in four regular smokers die 15 years prematurely from smoking. Well over 110,000 smokers a year die from the effects on their general health of smoking. Smoking causes 81 per cent. of lung cancer deaths."

Again, that is evidence from a highly qualified doctor working in one of the largest hospitals in this country. Sadly, day by day he has to work with the effects on people who smoke. Therefore I and, I am sure, the majority of the general public, fully support the Bill.

I want to make just a few more comments before finishing my speech. Reference has been made to research into why young people smoke. I believe that attitudes change and that the reasons for smoking change, so there needs to be continuing research. For example, we have to question why those who took up smoking five years ago did so, and why those who are taking up smoking now are doing so. I want to put a suggestion to the Minister, although I fully understand that it needs to be studied in detail. We all know that young people have idols, whether they be in sport or in music. Young people pay a great deal of attention to them. Surely those idols are just the sort of people whom the Government should encourage to say, "Smoking is harmful; that is why I don't smoke."

We hear the records that youngsters like to play and we are aware of the promotion behind them. We know that youngsters have idols on the football fields—

Mr. John Carlisle: Cantona.

Mr. Cox: No, I am not talking about Cantona. There are some superb and honourable football players in this country who are a credit to football. They do everything

possible to promote the good side of football. They are the idols of the youngsters. The Minister and his officials should consider encouraging them to emphasise the dangers of smoking.

I want to echo a comment made by both the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling and the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) about needing a clear sign from the Minister of the Government's attitude to the Bill. Interventions are the life-blood of a debate and there have been a large number of them today. Although many of the points raised were important, they were really more Committee points and that is where they should be made. I hope that the Minister will tell us about the Government's attitude because there are many points of real concern, especially for some Conservative Members, which should be discussed in detail in Committee.

I and many other hon. Members on both sides of the House wish my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley the best of luck. We shall do all we can to ensure that his Bill becomes law.

11.54 am

Sir George Gardiner (Reigate): The hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) declared that he is a lifelong non-smoker. I am delighted to say that that is one attribute that I share with him. I have never smoked—a cigarette has never touched my lips—*[Interruption.]* Well, perhaps I am a passive smoker.

You, Madam Deputy Speaker, are regarded with a great deal of affection by hon. Members. We look upon you as a favourite schoolteacher. You keep us in order and ensure that we obey the rules. As we have seen today, you occasionally give us a lesson in good manners. Had you been a teacher at my school and, during break, had you gone up to the first floor, taking with you a pair of binoculars, and trained them above the open roof of the latrines, occasionally you would have seen little wisps of smoke, which might have made you somewhat suspicious. I can tell you that you would never have seen a wisp of smoke coming from the cubicle in which young Gardiner was sitting.

I believe that I have something else in common with the hon. Member for Worsley. As a teenager I was always very short of cash. I quickly realised that I could not afford to smoke and drink beer at the same time, or even in the same week. In my case, beer won—and so it has been ever since. I must confess that I dislike a smoky atmosphere. Like many hon. Members who have spoken, I go to great efforts to ensure that I sit in a non-smoking area in a restaurant. I almost rigidly apply a non-smoking rule in my office—with the sole exception of the occasional welcome visits from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle).

I appreciate—indeed, I pay tribute to—the obvious sincerity of the hon. Member for Worsley in putting his arguments, although I felt that some of them were rather thin. I do not think that there is any disagreement about the deleterious effects of smoking on health. I agreed with some of the first part of the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) when he referred to the difficulties suffered by asthmatics. Indeed, so far all hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, which I think has been a slightly unbalanced debate, have been motivated by the best of intentions. We all know where the road that is paved with good intentions all too frequently leads. We have a duty to consider proposals of this sort carefully. A great danger exists today, as it has in past Sessions, especially in relation to smoking, of introducing legislation that leaves us all feeling good and that we have struck a great blow for the health of the nation. The Bill would make no difference.

The same strictures could be applied to this measure as were applied to the Bill that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) introduced in the previous Session. I would call this placebo legislation—passing it may make us feel good, but it has no effect. We must ask whether the Bill is necessary. Among the member states of the European Community, Britain has, with the sole exception of the Netherlands, the most successful record in reducing the incidence of smoking. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys general household survey was published in January 1994. It showed that, in 1992 in Great Britain, 29 per cent. of men aged 16 or over and 28 per cent. of women smoked cigarettes. That was substantially less than in 1972, when 52 per cent. of men and 42 per cent. of women smoked. The Government's "The Health of the Nation" target is to reduce those percentages still further to 20 per cent. by the year 2000 for both men and women.

As has been admitted today, the reduction in the incidence of smoking is the outcome not of any one single measure, but of the implementation of an integrated package of comprehensive measures. Today, almost universal awareness exists of the health risks that arise from smoking tobacco. Whether people take any notice of that is a matter for them, but they are aware of it. Manufacturers' ability to promote their products is severely limited. Retail prices are high, primarily as a result of taxation rates, which exceed those applying to any other product. Of all the components of policy, the most effective means of reducing tobacco consumption is undoubtedly to raise the price.

Mr. John Carlisle: My hon. Friend might recall that, some two or three weeks ago in a debate in the House, Her Majesty's Opposition saw fit to oppose the latest taxation proposals in the second Budget by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They do not share my hon. Friend's opinion that price is a necessary component. It seems as though official Labour party policy is now that taxation should not be used as a weapon against cigarettes. A future Labour Government might even reduce the taxation if they follow the course that they took some two weeks ago.

Sir George Gardiner: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I do not doubt that the Opposition spokesman will give him the answer.

Price is a key factor. Research from all around the world suggests that every 10 per cent. increase in tobacco prices leads generally to a fall in consumption of between 3 per cent. and 6 per cent. Since 1979, the price of cigarettes in real terms has risen by more than 80 per cent. In his Budget statement of November 1993, my right hon. and learned friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that he intended to raise excise duties by at least 2 per cent. per annum in real terms. The two Budgets in 1993 led to a combined increase of 21p for a pack of 20 cigarettes. That brought the total increase in excise duties on a pack of cigarettes between 1983 and 1993 to no less than 1,235 per cent. Cigarette consumption fell by nearly 5 per cent. in 1993.

[Sir George Gardiner]

In his Budget statement on 29 November last year, the Chancellor increased cigarette prices again by 10 per cent. per pack of 20. In the mini-Budget on 8 December, to which my hon. Friend referred, and which was effective from 1 January this year, a further 6p was added. A recent survey by the leading market research company Mintel predicts that cigarette consumption is expected to fall by 5 per cent. per annum.

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend has been extremely tolerant and generous in giving way. Would he like to make the point that the yield from taxation on tobacco products approaches £9 billion per year? So far in the debate, not a word has been spoken about what would happen if smoking were virtually abolished, as I am sure many of the Bill's supporters would wish. Where would that tax come from, and what is the relationship between the cost of tobacco-related diseases and the revenue that is coming in? We have heard nothing on that score.

Sir George Gardiner: It would be interesting if the Opposition spokesman were to rise to that bait.

Although price is the key factor, public education is crucial, especially for young people. I agree that it is tragic to see young people, who are only too well aware of the health risks of smoking, nevertheless pushing them aside and bowing to peer pressure or pressure in their own homes to take up the habit. Often, there is almost a "mañana" effect. People think, "Smoking is all right for the next year or so, but by the time I am 30, I am sure I will have given up."

As we know, the Department of Health launched the biggest anti-smoking campaign ever at the end of last year. It has been referred to already. It cost more than £13 million. It will run for three years and it is aimed particularly at parents who smoke. Children whose parents smoke are twice as likely to smoke as children who come from non-smoking families. Tobacco advertising is already strictly controlled by voluntary agreement, and the effectiveness of that voluntary approach has been mentioned already. It was shown when Camel cigarettes agreed to end the use of new packaging that was arguably of greater appeal to children.

Health warnings appear on cigarette packets. In the UK, those warnings are larger than in any other European country, and 50 per cent. larger than required by the relevant European directive.

I also believe—I will not develop this point at great length because I am sure that other right hon. and hon. Members will do so—that there is a real danger that if the Bill is passed, it will undermine the voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising, which was negotiated with the tobacco industry in good faith and which is proving extremely effective in restricting the promotion of tobacco products. If the Bill is passed, it may be counter-productive to that agreement.

I shall concentrate on the Bill's relationship to the European directive on the labelling of tobacco products and its effect on British industry. As has been said, this is central to the whole argument today. My views on membership of the European Community—the European Union as we are now told to call it—are quite well known. I am described as a Euro-sceptic although I certainly do not wish us to be outside the EC. The House knows full well the importance I attach to this country's ability to govern itself as it wishes and to the House's ability to determine legislation rather than having Brussels or Strasbourg calling the tune.

In one sense, I wish that the Bill could be considered entirely on its merits without the complication of law made in Brussels, albeit that I would still find the Bill objectionable on other grounds, as I shall explain later. The fact is, however, that we cannot consider the Bill without putting it in the context of the European directive which, under the treaty of Rome, the United Kingdom has long since implemented under domestic legislation. When the Bill is put in that context, one quickly sees what a ridiculous and damaging proposal it is.

The Bill would make one law for our industry which could not be applied to competing imports. Why? The answer is because the European directive says so. Clause 1(5) says that regulations may provide that the main requirements will not apply to imports from other member states. It should say, "They shall not apply to imports if they comply with domestic regulations in the member state of origin." That is what the European directive says, whether I or the hon. Member for Worsley like it or not.

Before allowing the Bill to continue its passage we must, therefore, consider whether it is a sensible proposition or whether the whole idea is fundamentally flawed. There is no doubt in my mind that it is certainly fundamentally flawed.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I immediately declare an interest as I have a retail business that sells tobacco products. My hon. Friend spoke about the European Community directive and about the fact that it would give an unfair advantage to tobacco products manufactured outside the United Kingdom. I certainly would not want to see my shop with its shelves packed full of foreign products when we produce good cigarettes in this country. If we take action at all on this issue, it should be taken at a pan-European level and not just in the United Kingdom.

Sir George Gardiner: My hon. Friend makes a good point and I shall cover certain aspects of it later. His experience as a tobacco retailer echoes the messages I have been given by tobacconists in my constituency about the Bill's likely effects, if it is passed.

The Bill would require the health warning on packs of tobacco products to be 12 sq cm or 25 per cent., whichever is the greater, on the front and the back. That compares with the size laid down by United Kingdom regulations, which provide that the area of the lettering of the warning must be 6 per cent. Of itself, this is an important point. In addition, the way in which the 6 per cent. warning is measured under the regulations is quite different from the measurement method proposed in the Bill. The Bill's proposal of 25 per cent. or more must be compared with the size of warnings used by other member states of the European Union. The figure is 4 per cent. in countries with one language, 6 per cent. in countries with two languages and 8 per cent. in countries with three languages. All that is laid down in the European directive on the labelling of tobacco products.

The European directive was introduced as a single market measure to avoid distortions of trade in tobacco products. In other words, it was intended to ensure that all products carried roughly the same size of health warning. Whatever I and other hon. Members may think about the European harmonisation process and where it may lead

us, the fact is that the Bill is directly contrary to the directive. We should at least be aware of that when considering today whether the Bill has any merit.

We should be aware of the impact that the Bill may have on smoking habits and tobacco consumption. Given the choice of buying tobacco products that have health warnings very much larger than existing UK health warnings or buying products that have a warning two thirds or less of the existing UK size, as would be the case with imported products, it would not be surprising if smokers chose the packs with the smaller warning, not because they did not know of, did not understand or did not accept the health warnings, but simply because they found the design of the other packs more appealing. There is some psychology at work here. Many people could imagine that the packs that had the larger warnings carried the greater danger to health. Being aware of the health risk, they might buy the imported packs with the smaller health warning on them.

Mr. Couchman: I expect that my hon. Friend has received the letter from the British Thoracic Society, signed by Dr. James Friend, which mentions that Australian research has shown that adolescents, when given a choice of brands with a variety of warnings, do not choose the packs that carry prominent, strong, visible and legible health warnings. Does not that reinforce my hon. Friend's argument that people will buy packets that do not have strong warnings on them?

Sir George Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. Australia, of course, has the luxury of not being a member of the European Union and it can make changes to the warning on cigarette packets without being concerned about the possibility of coming into conflict with legislation from Brussels. Whether unfortunately or not, we are not in the same position as the Australians.

Mr. Leigh: Did not the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), the promoter of the Bill, give the game away earlier when he replied to interventions by me and my hon. Friends? He said that Commissioner van Miert proposed to change the regulations. The fact is that we have no change on the statute book at the moment. The hon. Gentleman did not deny that EC imports could flood in. Does not that make a powerful point in favour of my hon. Friend's views?

Sir George Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the House's attention to that point, both earlier and now.

We must go on to consider the impact on trade and on our industry. The United Kingdom tobacco industry directly employs 11,000 people. Those jobs are divided throughout the country. The industry accounts for nearly 3,500 jobs in the south and south-east of England; nearly 1,500 jobs in the midlands; about 1,400 jobs in the north-east; more than 1,300 jobs in the north-west; nearly 1,300 jobs in Northern Ireland; nearly 600 jobs in the south-west; about 600 jobs in Wales; more than 300 jobs in Scotland and nearly 200 jobs in the north of England. Those people are directly employed in the manufacture of tobacco products. Additional tobacco-related employment accounts for about 70,000 full-time jobs. They are found in a wide variety of industries including retailing, wholesaling, packaging, engineering, marketing, advertising and distribution.

If the Bill became law, imported products would be far more attractive to the smoker. It would not cause people to smoke less or fewer people to take up smoking, but it would simply mean that those people smoked imported products, either the brand they were used to smoking or another one. Even given all my reservations about European legislation, I cannot see the point of our passing a Bill simply to provide manufacturers in other member states with a marketing advantage over our own industry. That would mean that the House was putting British jobs in jeopardy and transferring them to other member states. *[Interruption.]* [HON. MEMBERS: "Why are they laughing"?] I am amazed by the Opposition's reaction to that.

Has the hon. Member for Worsley taken into account the real possibility that British manufacturers, when they find that they are penalised, will start moving their manufacturing base abroad to import goods here to protect their own market share? Either way, Britain would lose out.

Whatever the hon. Member for Worsley has to say in reply to that point, let him not be under any illusions. Despite the fact that the United Kingdom's tobacco products market is declining rapidly, overseas manufacturers still want a larger share. They will take every opportunity, and the opportunities that the Bill would provide, to do just that.

If the hon. Member for Worsley wants evidence of how different conditions in the United Kingdom market can and do affect trade, he need look no further than the cross-channel trade in tobacco products, which is a live issue in the part of the world that I represent. That trade has resulted from the fact that tobacco tax rates and prices are not harmonised between this country and other member states. The smuggling of tobacco products from the continent to this country is therefore increasing. If we now disharmonise legislation on labelling, as the Bill would, imported products would be sucked straight into the United Kingdom market.

The promoter of the Bill is asking the House to shoot its own industry and the nation's best interests in the foot. He is asking us to do so on unsubstantiated grounds that larger and more prominent health warnings on cigarette packets will dissuade people from smoking and that, thereby, the take-up and incidence of smoking in this country will reduce at a faster rate than it otherwise will do.

Mr. Robert Banks: My hon. Friend has already mentioned the Australian example. We have had no evidence from the sponsors of the Bill to suggest that the larger warnings on Australian packets of cigarettes have had any effect on the warnings transmitted.

Sir George Gardiner: I would be interested in such evidence.

Another consequence that would flow from the Bill is the absolute certainty of long, drawn-out and expensive legal actions in the courts in this country and in Europe. I have some grounds for claiming that, because, not unusually, the European directive is confusingly and unclearly worded. It has already given rise to different views by Advocate General Lenz and the European Court of Justice on a reference from the High Court concerning the United Kingdom's regulations on health warnings in the context of the European directive.

If the Bill is approved, the legal argument could be revisited since the European Court of Justice is not bound, as we know, by its previous decisions. There are strong

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grounds for argument on the point of proportionality, particularly in relation to the prime objective of the directive, which is to harmonise laws to avoid distortion of trade.

There are other grounds for argument, because the directive sets down exhaustive rules in relation to the presentation, as opposed to the size, of warnings. The Bill appears to go far further than the directive allows. It certainly conflicts with that directive in permitting regulations to cover imports, for the directive says specifically that it cannot do so. Practical complications will, therefore, be caused by the implementation of the Bill's detailed provisions, contravening the requirements of the directive.

Mr. John Marshall: I apologise to my hon. Friend for being outside the Chamber for part of his speech. When I came back, I did not realise that I would have the good fortune to hear the rest of it.

My hon. Friend has referred to imports. Is he saying that under European law, imported cigarettes from France, Italy, Germany and Holland would carry the size of warning relevant in those countries whereas cigarettes manufactured here would carry a different-sized warning? Would he like to speculate whether that would encourage international companies to relocate their activities outside the United Kingdom, perhaps to Holland, to manufacture the cigarettes consumed in this country?

Sir George Gardiner: I am not certain whether my hon. Friend was present when I referred to that real danger, which would be a possible consequence if the Bill were to become law.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Member has twice said that British companies would relocate to Europe because of the problems associated with carrying a larger health warning on British cigarette packs. How does he equate that with the social chapter and the cost upon business?

Sir George Gardiner: I accept that if the manufacturers of tobacco products moved from here to Europe they would be covered by the social chapter. They would certainly have to pay the added overheads that would be associated with that. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman recognises that. It would be a matter for those manufacturers' commercial judgment whether the loss that they would incur as a result of staying in this country and having to put larger warnings on their packets would outweigh the costs that the social chapter would impose upon them. Presumably that would be an argument in favour of the social chapter continuing on the continent but not here so as at least to protect some British jobs.

Mr. John Carlisle: That is precisely the point made by the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley). Because of the devastating effect that the Bill could have on tobacco companies, they are willing to take the enormous risk and face the enormous cost of the social chapter by moving their manufacturing to other countries—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may laugh about that, but we are talking about British jobs. By giving jobs away willy nilly and by taking no notice of the devastating effect that the Bill would have on employment in this country, Opposition Members are decrying their own constituents.

Sir George Gardiner: I thank my hon. Friend for his further intervention. I would like to conclude my speech as other hon. Members wish to participate in the debate.

All market research shows that there is a virtual 100 per cent. recognition and awareness among smokers of the health warnings on packets. There is also high awareness of the warnings themselves, even though there is one standard warning and six variants that are used in rotation. There is also a very high awareness of health warnings among children to whom the anti-smoking message is preached strongly every day inside and outside schools.

I must point out to the hon. Member for Worsley that it is quite possible, as he knows, to be an anti-smoker and to be at the same time opposed to the Bill as I am. He assumes that people smoke and that children experiment with smoking because they do not understand the health risks that they might be running. Whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not, he must accept that adult smokers continue to smoke with full knowledge and awareness of what is said about the health risks of smoking. They may delude themselves by saying, "Perhaps I'll give up the habit next year," or "Let's try it as a new year's resolution," or what have you—

Mr. Lewis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Gardiner: Let me complete the point. I would back any measures through the health service or elsewhere to encourage people who want to give up smoking to do that and any measures to make it easier for them to do that.

Mr. Lewis: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that giving up is not a question of choice? Nicotine is an addictive drug.

Sir George Gardiner: Yes, that is stating the obvious. We all know friends who smoke who say, "Yes, I wish I could give it up and save the money that I spend." There is no doubt that people are very well informed about the warnings.

Children, no less than adults, are also aware of the warnings. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said earlier, there is often a certain perversity about children and particularly teenagers. If we tell them not to do something, it is a challenge that they really must overcome, and all the more so if it relates to something that they think makes them appear rather more adult and when all the peer pressure is to do just that thing.

The Bill exhibits a particular and rather peculiar view of human life and behaviour. It presumes that by forcing warnings on people which they already know and understand, the Bill will change their behaviour and they will make choices that the hon. Member for Worsley and I would prefer them to make.

I take a very different view. I believe that people should be allowed to make their own decisions on a well-informed basis as I believe they already do on smoking, drinking, eating and all the other risky and pleasurable things in life. It is not relevant that I personally might not like the decisions that people make. I do not believe that we need a disproportionate measure such as the Bill, not least because it would damage the

country's interests without any guarantee that the hon. Member for Worsley would succeed in his fundamental, and I accept sincere, objective.

Finland fully understood that point when it decided most recently to comply with the European directive on the labelling of tobacco products. Finland reduced the size of health warnings on packs from 33 per cent., which was the national requirement before Finland joined the European Community, to 6 per cent. as required by the European directive in a two-language country.

I have no desire to promote the cause of a European super-state—far from it. That is not what I am doing in opposing the Bill. I am seeking simply to inject a note of realism into the debate and, in doing so, I am trying to put emotional considerations to one side. I ask my colleagues to do the same. If they do that, I hope and believe that the House will today reject this unnecessary Bill.

12.33 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on his good fortune in the ballot for private Members' Bills and on introducing a Bill that is designed to improve public health, in particular the health of our children. I was interested in the comments by the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir. G. Gardiner) about the nation's best interests in terms of producing tobacco and cigarettes. Perhaps the nation's best interests are in improving its health.

Over the past two or three years, the House has shown its willingness to allow progress—albeit limited progress—on Bills relating to smoking. The majority of hon. Members accept that we need to emphasise the dangers of smoking and to accelerate as much as possible a reduction in the prevalence of smoking. I sincerely hope that the House will allow the Bill a Second Reading today and will ensure that some of the issues that have been raised—they range widely from health matters to the European directive and to our position in Europe—are debated in Committee.

The Bill strengthens existing legislation on health warnings on cigarette packets and on packets of other tobacco products. By doing that, the effectiveness of health warnings will be increased, thus discouraging people from taking up smoking or, perhaps, from continuing to smoke. The Bill is aimed at young people who contemplate smoking and others who are trying to give up. The Bill reinforces the warning in order to dissuade people from smoking.

Conservative Members have said that everybody knows about the health problems of cigarettes and about warnings on packets. If that is the case, why not allow the size of health warnings to be increased? If everybody knows about the health hazards, it would not make much difference. Hon. Members have talked about differences in health warnings. They can see the effectiveness of that in what I am holding up. Warnings that have been increased by 25 per cent. have greater visibility and effect.

The health hazards of smoking are well documented. They were first highlighted in the 1960s. Warnings on cigarette packets date from 1971. We have had health warnings for more than 20 years, but there are still people who insist that smoking has no link to illness, lung cancer, strokes or chronic coronary disease. A letter was circulated recently by the Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco—FOREST—in which it said:

"In the first place, we of course differ from them"—

that is, the promoters—

"in contesting the notion that smoking is unique in giving rise to 'health hazards'."

We do not say that smoking is unique in causing health hazards. Smoking remains the largest single cause of preventable mortality in this country. That is the point that we want to get across. The 110,000 smoking-related deaths each year can, to a large extent, be prevented.

The hon. Members for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) said that there are no health warnings about excessive alcohol consumption. I do not dispute that for a moment. However, the difference is that cigarettes, when used as the manufacturer directs, cause deaths. We are talking not about the excessive consumption of tobacco but about the consumption of tobacco at any level, which can cause illness, death and so on. The point is the use of the word "excessive".

Mr. Barron: My hon. Friend, like myself, will have received a letter from a Member of the other place, who is the chairman of FOREST, which argues that we should take action against smoking. However, he said that there is also danger in articles such as kitchen knives and electric chainsaws. Does my hon. Friend think that, if a person purchases an electric chainsaw and uses it as the manufacturer says that it should be used, it is hardly likely to cause death?

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend makes a fair and valid point. The implements that he mentioned carry warnings about their use. If used properly, those implements should not cause problems. Such implements could cause accidents if used in the wrong manner, but they will not harm other people, whereas smoking does—through passive smoking.

More than 110,000 deaths each year are attributed to smoking. One person dies every day from passive smoking. That is not my figure, but was given by the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) at the Dispatch Box a year ago during the debate on the Bill on tobacco advertising introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). The right hon. Gentleman said that 50 children under the age of five were admitted to hospital with illnesses related to passive smoking. Those are Government figures that are accepted by the House. Those are the health issues with which we should be primarily concerned when debating the Bill.

The Government White Paper, "The Health of the Nation", recognised the dangers of smoking and devoted a considerable amount of space to that issue. The White Paper states that there are several hundred lung cancer deaths each year in non-smokers as a result of passive smoking. It states that smoking is linked to foetal and neo-natal mortality and low birth weight. It states that smoking contributes to 30 per cent. of all cancer deaths, and 80 per cent. of deaths from lung cancer; smoking accounts for 18 per cent. of coronary heart disease deaths and 11 per cent. of stroke deaths. That is Government information on targets, levels of sickness, illness and deaths contained in their White Paper, "The Health of the Nation". There is a health problem.

"The Health of the Nation" sets Government targets in relation to smoking. Its aims include reducing

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"the prevalence of cigarette smoking to no more than 20 per cent. by the year 2000"

and reducing

"consumption of cigarettes by at least 40 per cent. by the year 2000."

The paper also states that, in addition to the overall reduction in prevalence, at least 33 per cent. of women smokers should stop smoking at the start of pregnancy by the year 2000. The targets also include reducing the prevalence of smoking among those aged under 15 by at least 33 per cent. by 1994.

I should be interested to see whether Conservative Members questioned the Secretary of State for Health when the document was released on how many jobs in the tobacco industry would be lost by the year 2000 as a result of achieving those aims. I suggest that people welcomed the targets without mentioning the problems that would be caused to British industry.

Mr. Robert Banks: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will refer to the point that has reasonably been made that British cigarette manufacturers will be at a great disadvantage if they have a larger health warning on their packets. People will assume that those cigarettes are more dangerous than those purchased in packets from abroad which have smaller health warnings. Is it not true that, if a campaign were mounted to ensure the same definition on health warning sizes across the European Union, the House would support it?

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. He was right to say that there is a distinctive difference in the size of the warnings—a fact also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley. The hon. Gentleman believes that people will automatically assume that some cigarettes are more dangerous than others. That might be so, but he will see that the two packets that I have before me contain the same cigarettes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley mentioned consumer protection. If cigarette packets contained more product information, and if the levels of nicotine, tar and other elements of tobacco were included in the health warning, people might understand that they were buying exactly the same cigarettes, with exactly the same levels of tar and nicotine.

At the same time, I accept that it is an argument that we should consider. I would support consideration of a European-wide increase in the size of the health warning on packets of cigarettes. If the Bill is considered in Committee, we can debate that development at some length and perhaps accommodate the points made in interventions by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

Mr. Leigh: That is fair. Why do not we seek to arrive at a European-wide agreement? Having secured that, we can then introduce appropriate legislation.

Mr. Illsley: The purpose of the Bill is to put the United Kingdom in front of the European Union by increasing the size of our health warning to 25 per cent. of the surface area of the packet. We are seeking to lead the debate in Europe. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley has said, the matter is to be considered again by the European Union later this year. Perhaps there can be recommendations for an increase in the size of the label at that stage.

A comparison could be made with animal welfare, on which the Government are supposedly leading the debate in Europe. Why are they not leading the debate in public health matters, such as the labelling of cigarette packets?

Mr. Leigh: Fine. We should lead the debate in Europe. But we lead a debate in Europe in the council chambers of Europe. We do not unilaterally disadvantage our industry first. That is madness.

Mr. Illsley: How are we to lead the debate in Europe unless we can persuade the Government of the day to lead the debate in the council chambers of Europe? If we cannot persuade our Government—they need persuading because they rejected a Bill on tobacco advertising last year, and it is likely that they will not accept the Bill that is before us—how can we lead the debate in Europe? The Government should accept the Bill's Second Reading and allow a full debate in Committee. There are obvious differences on both sides of the House when it comes to the European directive and the Bill's provisions. My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley maintains that the Bill should not disadvantage us in Europe if the Government press for a similar increase in the size of warnings on European products.

In the debate on tobacco advertising that took place last year, it was accepted by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley that adult smoking rates had fallen. There is, however, a dispute among hon. Members on both sides of the House about the extent to which levels of smoking have fallen. It was accepted in the debate last year that from 1982 to 1992 the prevalence of smoking among adults had fallen from 35 per cent. to 28 per cent. My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley described that as a "significant improvement". I endorse that comment wholeheartedly.

For 15-year-olds, the story is different. Between 1982 and 1992, the comparable figures are 24 per cent. and 23 per cent. The prevalence of smoking among 15-year-olds has hardly changed, hence the need for increased warnings to address ourselves to the problem of young people smoking, especially girls and young women, who are now the most vulnerable group in terms of smoking.

It has been well documented that by the age of 15 years eight out of 10 adults who become regular smokers have adopted the habit. The age of 15 is not particularly old for children who smoke. The figures tell us that 500 young people a day take up smoking. It is obvious that that figure is far too high.

When it comes to children aged between 11 and 15 years, the target imposed by the Government's White Paper is clearly failing. It was hoped to reduce the prevalence of smoking in that age group to 6 per cent. Sadly, by 1993 it had risen to 10 per cent. The trend is reversing among children aged between 11 and 15 years. We are going the wrong way. Therefore, we must deal with the question of warnings.

The Government targets for young people are not being met, although the trends for adults are encouraging. I must return to "The Health of the Nation" White Paper, which says:

"Predictions of future trends are hard to make and subject to wide error. It cannot be assumed that current trends in the reduction of smoking prevalence will necessarily continue, since the smokers that

remain are likely to be the heavier and more dependent ones who find it hard to give up. Considerable effort will therefore be required even to maintain the present trends"—

to maintain present trends among adult smokers and reverse the trend among younger smokers. What better measure to try to buck that trend than the Bill?

The White Paper continues, under the heading "Smoking cessation":

"To achieve the objective it will be necessary that new smokers are not recruited to the habit and also that those who already smoke are able to stop."

The provisions of the Bill are exactly what the White Paper refers to—an increase in the size of the health warning to deter people from starting to smoke. The bigger the health warning, the bigger the shock at seeing it. That is obvious. It is an incentive to people not to buy cigarettes or, perhaps, not to use them. We must take the steps outlined in Government—not Opposition—policy to reduce the prevalence of smoking.

On the provisions of the Bill and the arguments surrounding it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley pointed out, it will increase the size of the health warning on a packet of cigarettes to cover 25 per cent. of the pack's surface area. It has been argued that the present level of 6 per cent. is about 50 per cent. higher than the size of warning required by our European partners—that is 6 per cent. of the surface area against 4 per cent.

Australia and Canada have adopted 25 per cent. As far as I am aware, little research is available from those countries, mainly because Australia adopted the 25 per cent. level only in January and Canada adopted it in September 1994 and so it is far too early to judge the impact of those warnings on smoking prevalence.

The Bill also calls for different colours to be used for health warnings on packets and for the lettering to be in black on white with a black border, or the reverse if the lettering is white. In the past, the lettering on the health warning on some packets was the same colour as that on the rest of the pack and was thus disguised, not easily readable and merely part of the rest of the wording.

When the labelling regime was put in place, the Government admitted that they had received representations warning them that the labelling and the health warning were too small. The Health Education Authority said that the effect would be marginal because it was difficult to read the warning, which was easily ignored. It suggested 33 per cent., which is higher than the requirement in the Bill.

The Cancer Research Campaign wanted an increased size in the warning, consistent with Government policy on reducing smoking rates. The International Union Against Cancer said that the figure should be 25 per cent. and the British Medical Association said that warnings would be a deterrent only if they were substantially increased in size.

I have seen examples of the various cigarette packets available in Canada and Australia and my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley circulated a colour photocopy of some of the packs available. Any hon. Members who have seen the photocopies can see instantly the difference in the effectiveness of the larger health warning, compared with that required on British packs.

The warning on the bottom of a packet of cigarettes can be easily hidden if packets are stacked on shelves. As the lettering is the same as on the rest of the packet, it can be easily disguised, so its size needs to be increased. The current warning on Australian and Canadian packets can be seen from a few feet away whereas it is impossible to see the warning on a British packet from that distance. Moreover, the colour contrast of the black and white labelling makes it extremely effective.

The wording should continue to warn of the dangers of smoking. We risk becoming complacent about the current warning. This morning we heard hon. Members say that, as everyone knows about the warning, we do not need to change the area of the packet subject to labelling. It is clear that we need to repeat the warning and, if we have reached the stage where everyone is aware of it but we still have a high prevalence of smoking, perhaps the time has come to jog people's memories and reinforce the message in the White Paper, "The Health of the Nation".

As we continue to learn of the harmful effects of cigarettes, we should continue to reinforce the message about the dangers of smoking. We should reflect the new evidence of those dangers in the warning and make the message direct. We must say that cigarettes are addictive and can harm children, and that smoking while pregnant is likely to harm the unborn child. Perhaps we should also reinforce the message about passive smoking. I shall say no more about that in view of hon. Members' comments following a visit to the House by the late Roy Castle.

It is well known and accepted that young people associate certain images with brands of cigarettes. When I was younger, the John Player Special brand was associated with motor racing, and Marlboro is still associated with McLaren and motor racing. I imagine that that image appeals to young people and we must deal with that if we are to reduce the prevalence of smoking among young people.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) warned that smuggling was affecting jobs in his constituency and that, if we increased the size of health warnings on cigarette packets, more contraband tobacco would enter the country and damage jobs in his constituency. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley, I come from a mining area and need no lectures on protecting jobs, as my constituency lost as many jobs as anywhere else. We lost those jobs because the country no longer wants coal. There is some dispute about whether we think that the country needs coal, but the Government accept that it no longer wants coal and forced a decision on the coal mining industry which lost hundreds of thousands of jobs through evolution and the increased use of gas turbine technology.

By the same token, as the country becomes more educated about the dangers of smoking, we shall need less tobacco. Sadly for the hon. Member for Ealing, North, jobs will be lost in his constituency. He will not lose overnight the hundreds of thousands of jobs that were lost within a few years in the coal mining industry, but he will lose jobs. He must face the fact that the country wants a reduction in tobacco smoking and that that is the Government's health policy. The hon. Gentleman must come to terms with that.

Some of my hon. Friends and I argued on successive Finance Bills for the assimilation of levels of duty on tobacco and alcohol to try to prevent contraband tobacco entering the country and the high level of smuggling, which affect jobs in this country. It is a supreme irony that coal miners from my constituency have been charged with importing contraband alcohol and cigarettes. It is a

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pity that the hon. Member for Ealing, North is not in his place because I am sure that he would have appreciated that irony.

The argument that tobacco manufacturers might turn to Europe and that more cigarettes will be imported does not hold sway. As the health warning area in this country is 6 per cent. and in Europe 4 per cent., why has not production switched overseas and imports increased? They remain at 6 million cigarettes, compared with 82 million cigarettes manufactured in this country.

Mr. Robert Banks: Perhaps I can answer that question. There is little difference between a warning area of 4 per cent. and 6 per cent., but a heck of a difference between 6 per cent. and 25 per cent.

Mr. Illsley: The tobacco industry did not think so, because it took the Government to court. It felt that the 50 per cent. difference between 4 per cent. and 6 per cent. to which the Minister referred earlier was significant enough to initiate litigation. The danger of European imports has been overstated. Provision is made in the Bill to deal with such matters. There are differences between both sides of the House on the European directive, but it is worth allowing the Bill to proceed so that they may be argued in detail.

Action on Smoking and Health produced a report for the Health Education Authority in December 1990 on the impact of the first Council directive on tobacco labelling. Unfortunately, it is not specific about the number interviewed in assessing popular views of health warnings. It stated:

"The impact of the new cigarette pack warnings exposed in this research is likely to be marginal whatever the nature of the message, because of their comparatively small size . . . There is a tendency to interpret the smallness of the warnings as evidence of government duplicity. More worryingly"—

this point was raised by the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks)—

"there also seems to be a tendency to equate the size of the warning with the magnitude of the risk."

The message is, increase the size of the warning and the perception of risk will also increase. The report continued:

"To maximise the impact of the new back-of-pack warnings, the optimum strategy would be to increase their size, position them near the top of the pack, rotate them frequently and ensure maximum colour clash with brand livery."

Opponents of the Bill argue that brand identity and trade marks, which tobacco companies spend much time developing, would be affected by larger warnings. The hon. Member for Luton, North, who is not in his place, commented from a sedentary position that packs would have to be redesigned. We saw from the photocopies circulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and from cigarette packs displayed in the Chamber that pack colours remain the same. Customers identify brand names—they do not go into a tobacconist and say, "I will have those cigarettes in the shiny black and white pack." Packs have already been redesigned to accommodate Canadian and Australian requirements, so the effect on trade marks would not be as bad as some people suggest. A 25 per cent. warning area would not obscure the majority of pack names.

Mr. Alexander: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that cigarettes imported to Canada must have the same size of label, whereas that would not be a requirement under the Bill?

Mr. Illsley: I am. That brings me to the argument on the European directive, as to whether we should enforce the requirements on imported cigarettes. That point was raised several times this morning, and the hon. Gentleman has been present for most of the debate. That is another argument for allowing the Bill to proceed.

It has been said that health warnings would infringe on the right to freedom of expression, but I do not accept that. The country wants to protect its health and that should be the main issue of the debate. It has also been said that the state or the European Union has no business to legislate in this area. The Government have produced a White Paper, have set targets and are pushing on the issue of smoking. Sadly, they are not doing enough in relation to the targets, which are now being reduced. Therefore, that argument does not add up.

It is said that consumers already know about the dangers of smoking. Many of them do, and many know about the health warning which has been with us for 22 years. That means that there should be no problem about increasing its size because, if that argument is valid, people will just say, "Oh, it is just the health warning again." The idea is to reinforce it so as to make it more effective to younger people and to those who want to stop.

It is said that health warnings have no effect on consumer awareness, but I do not think that that is true. Health warnings do have an effect on consumer awareness and a 25 per cent. warning would have an even better effect.

The Government have tried to reduce the consumption of tobacco through duty. There has been a reduction in the prevalence of smoking, but it is interesting to note that in 1985 tax as the share of the price of a packet of cigarettes was 74.6 per cent. In 1994 it was 76.4 per cent. so the Government are not doing much through duty to reduce consumption. The manufacturers may be able to increase prices dramatically, but the Government's share by way of duty is not having the influence that many of us would like to think it has.

Smoking among children is increasing. My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley has said that 500 young recruits are needed every day to replace the 300 who die every day. The Bill is a sensible measure which deserves a Second Reading and time in Committee. It deserves to become part of the law of the land and I hope that the House will vote for it.

1.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I welcome this opportunity to contribute on behalf of the Government to this Second Reading debate on the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), whose constituency borders mine. His utterances and his activities are reported in my local newspaper and I can assure the House that he

is a model Member of Parliament. He has even been known to put up posters on poster sites at Christmas wishing his constituents a happy Christmas.

Mr. Lewis: No health warning though.

Mr. Sackville: Perhaps they need one. He has been involved in many high-profile campaigns for the public good to do with telephone services. It is no surprise that in a totally unselfish way, he should seek to improve the health of the nation through this Bill.

There is surely common ground in the House on the importance of reducing tobacco consumption, and agreement on the illnesses and premature deaths that it causes. The Government and, I hope, all hon. Members are fully committed to that objective. However, we differ in our approach and in deciding how effectively to achieve a reduction in smoking. Government strategy is based on identifying the factors that are known to affect smoking behaviour and on taking firm, effective action on all fronts.

I stress that that strategy has proved successful. Over the past 20 years, levels of smoking have fallen from 45 per cent. of the population to about 28 per cent. As has been said, that is one of the best records in Europe and is second only to that of the Netherlands.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: I should like to carry on with my speech for a little longer.

In considering the Bill, we need to assess whether it would help to deliver the further reduction in smoking to which we are all committed. To reduce the damage caused by tobacco use, about which there is no dispute, the Government set ambitious long-term targets in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper. There are separate strategies for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland. The World Health Organisation has commended our target-based approach as a model for other countries. The targets we have set are ambitious not just because they require quicker progress than would be achieved on the basis of historic trends, but because the minority of people who now smoke are likely to be more dependent on their habit.

It is essential that strategies to meet the targets are based on the factors most likely to achieve actual behavioural change. We are making good progress against three of the four targets. For example, in the four years to June 1994, the actual number of cigarettes consumed fell by 14.5 billion, a reduction of 15 per cent. However, there are sectors in which we are not making progress. We must be frank and say that the behaviour of, in particular, 11 to 15-year-olds is very worrying. That underlines the continuing importance of not only specific initiatives targeting young people but effective measures to reduce smoking among the population as a whole. Parents have a strong influence on children's smoking habits, which is why our entire strategy to reduce smoking is focused on young people.

Ms Jowell: The Minister is stumbling over his Government's apology for their failure to reduce the number of young people smoking, especially young girls. He will be aware that 99 per cent. of smokers are established in the habit by the time they are 20. Therefore, it is important that we adopt any measure that will reduce the rate of recruitment to smoking. Britain has been less successful than almost any other European country, especially France, Spain and Greece, in the rate of reduction in the number of young people who smoke—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Lady has made her point.

Mr. Sackville: I must correct the hon. Lady—I did not stumble through any apology; it was simply my usual diffident speaking style. The whole strategy that we have adopted accords with what the hon. Lady has said in that it is focused on young people. We must stop them taking up smoking.

We have developed strategies on a number of fronts. In February 1994 we published the Government's action plan, "Smoke-Free for Health". It provides a clear and comprehensive framework within which national and local organisations can play their part in reducing smoking. I shall describe some of the main areas. One of the most important parts of any effective strategy to reduce smoking must be to ensure progressive increases in the price of tobacco.

Research from all round the world shows that every 10 per cent. increase in the price of tobacco leads to a reduction in consumption of between 3 and 6 per cent. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has given a commitment to increase tobacco duty by at least 3 per cent. a year in real terms. The last two years' Budget changes have increased the price of 20 cigarettes by 37p, an increase of 13.5 per cent. in real terms. That means that the United Kingdom has the second-highest cigarette prices in Europe and the highest prices for hand-rolling tobacco.

We have also been active in trying to persuade other European countries to consider the health benefits of raising taxes on tobacco—not only out of regard for the health of our fellow Europeans, but so that the health impact of UK prices is not undermined by cross-border shipping within a single market. We have continued to ensure that there are effective controls on the advertising and promotion of tobacco products.

On 1 January, the main provisions of a revised, strengthened, voluntary agreement on advertising came into force. That includes the withdrawal of all permanent shop front advertising for all tobacco products by the end of next year, a dramatic cut in permitted spending on cigarette poster advertising to below 30 per cent. of the 1980 level in real terms, and the removal of all mobile advertising and all advertising on bus shelters and other small sites.

When we published the new agreement, we announced a new separate agreement with the industry to ensure that cigarette packets did not contain any pictorial matter likely to appeal especially to children. The hon. Member for Worsley mentioned Camel and advertising that looked as though it might be especially appealing to children. That was withdrawn, and that demonstrates the value of a voluntary agreement.

Other key parts of the strategy include action to ensure that retailers follow the law preventing illegal sales to under-16s, to encourage managers of public places and workplaces to introduce effective policies to protect non-smokers from tobacco smoke, to improve scientific understanding of the risks from tobacco and to reduce harm from tobacco products. We remain convinced of the value of a voluntary agreement.

[Mr. Sackville]

On the issue at the heart of the Bill, it is a central part of the Government's overall strategy to ensure that the public understand the serious health risks of smoking. Wherever possible, the aim should be to discourage people, especially children, from taking up the habit in the first place. We must also ensure that smokers who want to quit receive all the support that they can.

Health warnings on tobacco products form part of a wide range of initiatives. For instance, we are continuing to expand national health education campaigns. In December, the Department of Health announced the biggest-ever national campaign on smoking, investing £13.5 million, which will run for three years and focus particularly on parents. Children with parents who both smoke are at least twice more likely to be regular smokers than children with non-smoking parents.

Education on the health risks of smoking is a statutory requirement in the national curriculum for children between the ages of seven and 16. There are new arrangements to encourage general practitioners to give their patients advice on smoking. Under the voluntary agreement, health warnings appear on all items of advertising. The new agreement increases the size and clarity of warnings on press and poster advertisements. Unlike warnings on packets, those serve as a reminder of the health risks of smoking for people who have not taken up the habit.

It is against the background of those initiatives and of the many other measures to reduce smoking that the hon. Gentleman's Bill needs to be considered. Since the early 1970s, health warnings on packets have helped to provide basic health information to smokers. In 1992, we introduced new health warnings, following the adoption of the European Community directive. UK health warnings are now the largest of any European country. They are 50 per cent. bigger than the minimum required by the directive.

As has been acknowledged, the Government successfully defended an industry challenge in the European Court of Justice to try to reduce the size to the level of other countries. So we can be fairly confident of our bona fides in our commitment to reduce smoking. We probably have the strongest health warnings of any European country, including the warning "Smoking Kills". Little doubt exists that, along with all the other initiatives that I have outlined, those health warnings achieve their objective. Few smokers do not know that smoking damages health.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister respond to what the former Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), said in July 1991 in a press release about the regulations on labelling that were introduced in 1992? He said:

> "I believe that the new system of labelling will make a real contribution to achieving . . . the targets . . . in 'The Health of the Nation'."

In my speech, I quoted a Tory central office briefing which said that the health warnings on cigarette packets did not make a difference. There is a clear contradiction here. Will the Minister tell me and the House why there was a change in the view of the Department of Health between 1991 and 1995? Can he answer that question?

Mr. Sackville: I cannot be responsible for all the various briefing papers that the hon. Gentleman has read. I can say that the view of the then Secretary of State for Health was that 6 per cent. was the appropriate size of warning. The Bill would require 25 per cent. When the directive was introduced, the majority of the various European Governments and the Commission took the view that 4 per cent. was the appropriate size. This is really a debating point. If the size of warning is such a powerful factor, why not make it 100 per cent? Why not cover all cigarette packets with all sorts of health details? If the hon. Member for Worsley thinks that that is a good idea, why was the Bill not drafted in that way?

Mr. Lewis: Why not sell cigarettes in brown paper packets? I have no problem with that. We tried to make the Bill fair and we have argued on an incremental scale. I share the Minister's ambition to go beyond the targets in "The Health of the Nation". The Bill is an incremental move; it is a serious move which will be commensurate with the risk.

Mr. Sackville: If the Bill is an incremental move, does that mean that the hon. Gentleman will introduce a Bill to provide for a larger size of warning next time? I do not know. The hon. Gentleman talks about fairness. The Government take the view that it is fair to have a 6 per cent. health warning, which is more than our learned colleagues in Europe appear to think. It is a matter of opinion. As I have said, if the larger the better, why stop at 25 per cent? The British Government have decided that 6 per cent. is an appropriate warning.

Mr. Barron: The Government consider that the 6 per cent. warning is appropriate; it was defended in the European Court, a matter on which I congratulate the Government. On the basis of what studies have the Government decided that 6 per cent. is the optimum size of warning on cigarette packets, as opposed to 25 per cent.? Why did the Department of Health take the decision that 6 per cent. should be the limit? It is the biggest size in Europe. On what basis did the Government take the decision that they could not accept the Bill?

Mr. Sackville: We could go round this all day. The 6 per cent. size provides a legible warning that can be seen by anybody who holds a packet. That is what was decided. I am glad to say that the warning is larger than the size decided by Europe.

Mr. Lewis: Will the Minister take on board the point that we are talking not just about the size of the warning? That is only one element. Perhaps the Minister should go to the nearest tobacconist and get a supply of a whole range of cigarette packets. If he does, he will see that the 6 per cent. warning is cleverly disguised against the background of the pack by the media people who work for the industry. One of the essential elements of the Bill is to make the lettering distinctive—black on white with a border or white on black with a border. It is not just a matter of size; it is also a matter of the way in which the warning is portrayed on the packet.

Mr. Sackville: That is the hon. Gentleman's opinion. I have to say that the available research evidence does not

justify the claim that a more prominent health warning would encourage a greater number of smokers to quit or discourage more non-smokers from taking up the habit.

Mr. Leigh: Do the Government have any evidence from the Law Officers or from anybody else to suggest that if the Bill were passed, they could prevent imports of cigarette packets bearing health warnings of only 4 to 6 per cent?

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Member for Worsley suggested that it would be possible for the Secretary of State for Health to take powers to impose the requirements in the Bill on all imported cigarettes. The legal advice that I have is that she could not take those powers. It is clear that the directive gives member states some discretion about the size of the warnings on domestically produced packets, but tobacco products imported from other EU countries must be allowed on the market if they conform with the labelling requirements of the directive. That is clear.

Mr. Lewis: I have received contrary advice. In any case, the advice given by Law Officers on other matters hardly offers a good track record. We could take up that matter in Committee.

Mr. Sackville: That is the legal advice I was given, but obviously such things could be changed if the hon. Gentleman wanted to travel to Brussels.

There can be little doubt that the health warnings are appropriate. That is why we have brought in a voluntary regime that allows a great variety of warnings.

Ms Jowell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: No. I must carry on because other hon. Members want to speak.

If we are to influence behaviour, that is more likely to be achieved by a combination of factors, such as price and carefully targeted health promotion messages. One of the main themes of our national health education campaign is to get parents to think about the dangers of smoking not just to their own health, but to that of their children. Unfortunately, it takes more than a message on cigarette packs to get that signal across.

Supporters of the Bill have referred to the example of the health warnings carried on cigarette packets in Canada and in Australia. The United Kingdom's record on smoking should be assessed not by looking at narrow differences of approach with other countries but by considering how successful we have been in reducing tobacco consumption. Our record is not just one of the best in Europe, but one of the best in the world. From 1974 to 1990, tobacco consumption among adults fell by 39 per cent. That is a slightly greater reduction than that recorded in either Canada or Australia. It is also worth noting that there has been no real change in the Canadian level of smoking since 1986. Adult prevalence is still about between 31 and 32 per cent., whereas prevalence in the United Kingdom has continued to fall steadily from 33 per cent. in 1986 to 28 per cent. in 1992.

I have made it clear that the Government believe that the detailed regulation proposed in the Bill goes far beyond what is sensibly required regarding helpful information on tobacco products. It has been argued that, should the Bill become law, tobacco manufacturers might seek to substitute imported goods. As things stand, it would be impossible to impose the regulations proposed in the Bill on such imported products.

Although we should not overlook some of the practical and legal considerations against the Bill, the central point is that we already have a comprehensive strategy to ensure that both smokers and non-smokers understand the harm caused by tobacco products. It is unrealistic to believe that the Bill would significantly improve public awareness, let alone affect actual behaviour.

We have an excellent record on reducing smoking, but we are far from complacent. We must make further progress through price, health promotion initiatives and the steady and consistent application of effective and reasonable policies. I therefore regret to advise the House that the Government will not support the Bill, but we will continue to take a series of initiatives to discourage smoking.

1.28 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), who introduced his Bill this morning in a most courteous way. I disagree with his conclusions, but he gave way most generously to many interventions and that was appreciated by Conservative Members.

Three thousand jobs in Nottinghamshire are involved directly in the manufacture of tobacco. They make a significant contribution to the city and to my county. Thirteen thousand other jobs around the country are also involved directly in the manufacture of tobacco.

Quite understandably, the hon. Member for Worsley has taken a break from the Chamber. However, on the Opposition Benches, there is the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell), who is waiting to make her speech, and the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). Where are the Labour Members from Nottinghamshire who should be supporting jobs that are at risk because of the Bill? Where are the Labour Members from Liverpool? They have gone. They take no interest in the matter. The Bill will do severe harm to jobs in their area.

Mr. Barron: How many coal mining jobs have been lost in the Nottinghamshire coalfields since October 1992?

Mr. Alexander: The hon. Gentleman and I are at one on that.

Mr. Barron: Just tell me how many.

Mr. Alexander: We know that many jobs have been lost. However, I said in my intervention in the speech made by the hon. Member for Worsley that two wrongs do not make a right. The fact that thousands of jobs have been lost in the coalfields must mean that Opposition Members should be far more assiduous in ensuring that jobs are not lost unnecessarily as a result of minor and perhaps silly pieces of legislation.

Parliament is today once again having its annual swipe against the tobacco industry. The proposals become dottier and more unrealistic year by year. As everyone knows inside and outside the House, smoking is a perfectly lawful habit. Done in moderation, it does no harm to anyone. It is dangerous only if indulged in too

[Mr. Alexander]

heavily, like many other pastimes and aspects of people's consumption. People do that freely and lawfully during their lives.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): In the light of the hon. Gentleman's comment about smoking being such an innocent pastime, why did the Minister say, "We must stop people taking up smoking"? If it is so innocent, why would the Minister make such a statement?

Mr. Alexander: I am glad to answer that, although I cannot answer for my hon. Friend the Minister. I do not seek to encourage people to take up smoking. That is not my object and it may or may not be the object of the tobacco manufacturers. However, we certainly do not want people who have taken up smoking to do so to excess because tobacco consumption taken to excess can kill.

People of all ages are aware of that fact. We have had tobacco advertisements on packets and on our roadsides for so long that anyone who is not aware of that fact, almost as a fundamental, must be incredibly stupid.

Ms Jowell: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is absolutely no medical evidence to suggest that there is a safe level of smoking?

Mr. Alexander: That may well be so, but I shall refer to things taken in moderation in a moment. We are certainly aware that people who smoke moderately do not suffer from tobacco-related diseases. The real problem with tobacco-related diseases relates to heavy consumers. That is why I continue my point that tobacco is a lawful product.

Ms Jowell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alexander: I have given way once and I want now to make progress.

I do not smoke cigarettes, like my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner). It is probably 40 years since a cigarette passed my lips—I think that the last time was when I was at college; I did not care for smoking—but I occasionally take the odd small cigar. What I am fed up with—many Conservative Members are fed up with it, too—is the continuous exaggeration of the case against moderate smoking.

All hon. Members have had a briefing from the very eminent Lord Harris of High Cross, who had the—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It was a significant contribution to the debate, and it would be remiss if it was not heard in the Chamber. He made the point that many other activities that are indulged in by members of the public, such as eating, drinking, horse-riding, skiing and mountaineering, involve a severe risk of injury or death if done to excess or if consumed foolishly. He makes the further point that it is daft for Parliament in particular to resolve everything by trying to give us a risk-free existence. Good for Lord Harris of High Cross. That is a point about which I personally feel strongly.

We hear much about smoking-related illnesses—indeed, rightly so; it is part of what we are debating—but it needs to be borne in mind that the cost of treating those illnesses is more than outweighed by the tax take from tobacco consumers, the majority of whom smoke in moderation.

Mr. Key: Nonsense.

Mr. John Carlisle: Perhaps the figures should be stated, particularly for my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who says that my hon. Friend is speaking nonsense. About £9 billion a year comes from taxation on tobacco. My hon. Friend will probably know that the latest figure on smoking-related disease and the cost to the national health is less than £1 billion a year. Perhaps my hon. Friend will offer my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury the chance to intervene, because he obviously believes that £9 billion is not needed by the Exchequer.

Mr. Alexander: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He makes an additional important point.

The arrangements for health warnings, as we know, are a consequence of the implementation of the EC directive on the labelling of tobacco products.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend refers to the EC. I think that he means the EU directive. We must be up to date; it is the European Union directive. Does he accept that there is something strange about the European Union, in that it spends hundreds of millions of pounds encouraging the production of tobacco by farmers in Greece and other parts of the EU and it then spends a small amount on trying to discourage tobacco consumption? Is not it strange that an organisation that encourages the production of a commodity should discourage the consumption of it? Is not that Alice-in-Wonderland economics? Does not it underline the need for British Commissioners—perhaps Commissioner Kinnock in his tireless campaign—to stop the EU encouraging the production of tobacco?

Mr. Alexander: Quite so. My other hon. Friend makes a valid contribution to this important debate. I apologise for calling it the EC. Perhaps I am old-fashioned enough to call it that for a little while yet, but there we are.

Tobacco manufacturers have always accepted, although reluctantly and fighting their corner, the need to fulfil their obligations in regard to health warnings and the directive. There is a danger that those voluntary arrangements, if pushed too far by the health freaks in this country and the House, could well break down. We must recognise that tobacco manufacturers advertise their product in order to persuade people to use their brand, not another one. Their advertisements are not invitations to take up smoking. If they were, they would be illegal and would be banned. No tobacco advertising tempts me to take up smoking.

Those who ask us to support the Bill say that it would reduce tobacco consumption. I do not see how, of itself, the Bill could do that. Since 1971, there have been health warnings, and young and old in this country are aware of the risk of smoking to excess. There is the Health Education Authority's teenage smoking programme on television, and other advertising messages constantly reinforce that information.

We discussed the issues in last year's debate on the proposal of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) to ban tobacco advertising. I do not wish to repeat them all, but I shall deal with the subject of children—a

matter that has already been stressed in the House. There is a lack of understanding of children's motivation. Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said that young people do things for devilment—for a dare. Placing a bigger warning on a cigarette packet will not cause young people to think again before experimenting with tobacco. Advertising is not directed at children. There are many pressures on children other than advertising to take up cigarette smoking and tobacco. The Advertising Standards Authority would soon stamp on any advertisement that promoted a macho or sexual image.

My main argument against the Bill is that tobacco manufacturers are acting legally. What consumers do with the product is lawful. If the Bill's supporters and the hon. Member for Rother Valley were honest in their objectives, they would introduce a Bill to ban the manufacture and consumption of tobacco. We could have a proper debate on that, instead of debating the nit-picking little Bills that we seem to get every year, particularly from the Opposition.

Mr. Bendall: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a slicing over the years? The next Bill on the Order Paper, the Tobacco Smoking (Public Places) Bill, results in further slicing away.

Mr. Alexander: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend.

Most of the cigarette packet now consists of a brand message. If, as a result of the Bill, that brand message is dulled, the information to the consumer about what he or she may choose to buy is also dulled, making it easier for importers to make their brand message known in shops. We return to the issue of brand choice and trade mark protection.

A trade mark is a valuable commercial commodity, which the Bill will damage. Canada has been mentioned in the debate. I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), but he did not seem to take the point. If one uses Canada as an example, one must be aware of the fact that Canada's advertising warnings have to be carried on imported tobacco as well as on locally produced tobacco. That, perhaps, would be fair. The Bill, however, would not be fair, and that should be stressed.

We would be putting things seriously at risk if we followed the route suggested by the hon. Member for Worsley. As I have said, the tobacco companies have willingly accepted their obligations. They have accepted advertising standards restrictions and they have fulfilled their duties to educate those in the retail sector about their obligations, especially their legislative duties. They are entitled, however, to resist, and to ask hon. Members to resist, further inroads into and restrictions of their legitimate market freedoms. It is foolish to put a fine industry at risk only to pass the trade over to foreign manufacturer competitors. Our manufacturers are not in the business of selling Government health warnings. Instead, they are in the business of making a lawful product.

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend agree that if British manufacturers felt compelled to move their manufacturing processes to another EU country, the industry would leave these shores for ever and jobs within it, similarly, would never return to these shores? Is not that the point?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend makes an additional and valuable point, which even at this late hour in the debate has not been sufficiently covered. I was talking to a senior member of Imperial Tobacco only the other day. He told me that there was a serious possibility that if the Bill were enacted, his company would consider moving its manufacturing operations abroad.

There is much more at risk than would appear on reading the Bill. If the Bill results in using tobacco manufacturers to sell Government health warnings, it will harm our industry. It will offer no perceptible advantage to the nation's health. It will not change children's habits. I hope that the House will reject it.

1.47 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on the choice of his Bill and on the simplicity of it. I have no doubt that he considered many more detailed proposals to discourage people, especially young people, from smoking. Similarly, I have no doubt that most of them would have encouraged strong argument and opposition, not least from the tobacco industry. I would have sympathised with some of the arguments.

I would not have believed until this debate that anyone could have grounds for opposing the Bill, which is designed simply to draw greater attention to the lethality of the product as close as possible to the product itself. I applaud the hon. Member for Worsley on being so single-minded in the aim of his Bill.

Like most of us, I had a constituency interest today. I had accepted an invitation to attend the annual founder's day of the Bournemouth school for girls, which is located in my constituency. It is one of the most successful girls' grammar schools in the country. It has become even more so since it became grant maintained. I explained to the headteacher that I felt that it was in the interests of her pupils and those who followed them that I should be present to support the Bill. I do not have any evidence that any pupil at the school would dream of going behind the bicycle shed for a quick one—*[Laughter.]*—with or without the encouragement of boys from Bournemouth school for boys, which is located nearby. Perhaps I should ask my son, who goes there. On second thoughts, perhaps I should not.

The fact is that teenagers are still smoking in the same numbers as they were 10 years ago, as we have heard in the many references from impeccable sources today, including my hon. Friend the Minister, despite increased health education, as well as ever higher taxation of tobacco products. What is even more important, from the point of view of girls at the Bournemouth school for girls, teenage girls are more likely to be smokers than boys of the same age.

According to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' research on smoking among secondary school pupils in England, 11 per cent. of 11 to 15-year-old girls are regular smokers compared with 8 per cent. of boys of the same age. If only those girls knew or thought about the fact that lung cancer is overtaking breast cancer as the leading cancer killer for women, that women who smoke and use the contraceptive pill have 10 times the risk of

[Mr. David Atkinson]

heart disease and stroke, and that babies born to mothers who smoke have a lower birth weight, by about half a pound, and a higher risk of death and disease in early childhood.

Many of us in this Chamber will have relatives and friends and certainly some colleagues in this place who died agonising and premature deaths because of lung cancer and other smoking-induced diseases.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I am in sympathy with my hon. Friend in that I support the Bill, at least in principle, although I envisage some practical difficulties. Does he agree that there are probably more effective ways to stop teenage smokers, especially the young girls he mentioned, starting to smoke than health warnings on cigarette packets, which might include the rigorous control of the supply and availability of cigarettes for that age group?

Mr. Atkinson: I agree and thank my hon. Friend for that positive contribution. No doubt there are more effective ways, which the House could pursue, to discourage young people in particular from taking up smoking. We have one such opportunity today, upon which we will be obliged to make a judgment shortly, and it deserves the fullest possible support from the House.

I was saying that we all have many friends, relatives and colleagues who unfortunately died because of smoking. My children will never forget the agony of a grandmother who died in that way. As the hon. Member for Worsley pointed out, she was of a generation that was denied the warnings on tobacco products that the Bill would only enhance. The first suspicions about tobacco's role in the cause of various diseases were not confirmed until the 1950s, with all the doubts dispelled in a report to the Royal College of Physicians in 1962 and another to the US Surgeon General in 1964.

Today, there can be no excuse for not appreciating that smoking kills and that it is a very painful way to die. The Bill will get that message across more clearly than ever before. That must be of interest to the tobacco companies that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) represents and I see that he wants to intervene on their behalf. I will let him.

Mr. John Carlisle: My hon. Friend must say what evidence, if any, he has to suggest that a larger label—to give the warnings that he rightly outlined—will prevent more deaths. Is he questioning the intelligence of the British people and their decision whether to smoke? Is he telling the House that there would be fewer deaths if a larger warning appeared on the packet? If he is saying so, please will he give us the evidence?

Mr. Atkinson: Although I am fond of my hon. Friend, common sense suggests that it is self-evident that the clearer the warning, the more effective the message.

Mr. Carlisle: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Atkinson: No, I have just responded to my hon. Friend's point, although I know that he does not accept my response. It is in the interests of tobacco companies—I understand that my hon. Friend has some interest in such companies—

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend has not declared an interest.

Mr. Atkinson: He may have an opportunity to do so later in the debate. Tobacco companies will come under increasing pressure of being sued by their customers, with the help of legal aid, for failing to put clear warnings on their products that smoking kills.

I should have liked to ask the hon. Member for Worsley what thought he has given not just to the size of the warning on cigarette packets but to the content of the message. Only recently have coroners been allowed to state that smoking was the cause of death. That must result in including new, more persuasive information in the clearer message that the hon. Gentleman seeks to promote.

I welcome the Bill and, despite what my hon. Friend the Minister said, I believe that it complements existing measures introduced by the Government, including ever higher taxation, to discourage smoking. I thought and hoped that it would avoid opening up arguments with the vested interests, but the reaction of several of my hon. Friends has dissuaded me from that. The Bill merely seeks to invoke the simple message that, like lead, asbestos and drugs, tobacco is lethal and that smoking is the largest preventable cause of death, especially among young people. I wish the Bill every success.

1.56 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I shall be brief, as an awful lot has already been said from both sides of the argument. I suspect that, in these days of transparency, one should always declare any interest that one has. Mine is that I recently enjoyed hospitality from the tobacco industry, during which time I was briefed. Between enjoying watching England thrash France on the rugger field, I received the main, all-important message, which is that the Bill is not about dissuading people from smoking.

Mr. Barron: It's not cricket.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Gentleman is quite right; nor was it rugby league.

There should be no doubt that we all wish to reduce smoking among children and young people—and among adults. I have not smoked for 17 years. I say that because it seems to be a roll of honour in this debate to declare whether one smokes. My wife had a serious brush with cancer in 1990 and freely admits that it was probably due to the fact that she smoked until that time. So I am no friend of the tobacco industry nor a lover of tobacco or smoking. Indeed, I find the habit foul and revolting. However, the Bill's serious impact on employment should be considered. I tried to make the point in an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) that, once jobs are lost, they will not return. I shall return to that point in a moment.

There has been much contention during this debate about whether smoking among young people has increased or decreased over certain periods.

Mr. Bendall: Much of this morning's debate has been about smoking by young people. We all know

that it is illegal for tobacconists to sell cigarettes to young people and I sometimes wonder how young people manage to get tobacco. Do tobacconists sell to them illegally? It has always been illegal to sell cigarettes or tobacco to young people. Are not parents responsible for warning young people under the age of 16 that tobacco is harmful?

Mr. Couchman: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. The number of parents who now smoke has dropped dramatically. In 1972, 52 per cent. of men smoked but in 1992, only 29 per cent. did so. In 1972, 41 per cent. of women smoked but by 1992, the figure was 28 per cent. Parents have clearly accepted the message. Young people are well aware of the dangers of smoking and it is for them to decide, in maturity, whether they wish to continue smoking. I have two children who have never smoked, to their eternal credit.

The House agrees that since 1984, smoking among young people declined but that from 1988 there appears to have been a slight upturn. In an intervention, I suggested that smoking among young people may have increased recently as a form of rebellion against the heavy anti-smoking campaigns of the past six or seven years. It is in the nature of young people that they will often try something that they have been told is bad for them.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): People of my generation were given free cigarettes while serving for His Majesty in certain parts of the world. It was inevitable that most of my compatriots smoked, but I never did.

Mr. Couchman: I admire the strong will that my hon. Friend showed in those days.

Mr. John Marshall: This morning, we may have heard a most unusual confession—that a Scotsman was offered something for nothing and turned it down.

Mr. Walker: I would not want anyone to think that I did not turn that situation to some advantage. We also received air crew sweet rations, which were a good swap for cigarettes.

Mr. Couchman: That was a splendid further intervention from my hon. Friend. My constituency contained the former Royal Naval base at Chatham, many of whose sailors would have enjoyed free cigarettes. They were those dreadful RN brand that one had to keep in the horizontal rather than the vertical, otherwise all the tobacco fell out.

Mr. John Carlisle: Such anecdotes, which are relevant to the Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If they had not been relevant, I would have called the hon. Members to order.

Mr. Carlisle: If I may be allowed to expound, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps then you can make a judgment. I am glad that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) has arrived in the Chamber. It is said that she used to smoke—I know not whether she does now—because in her fine acting career, she was offered cigarettes as part of her job. I do not know whether she refused, but the serious point is that when smoking is part of a person's job or cigarettes are offered by Her Majesty's services, it is difficult to stop smoking. All credit to those people, probably including the hon. Lady, who give up smoking at the end of the day.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I have by no means given up smoking, but my interest in the Bill stems from my awareness of the addictive nature of smoking. I would not want any young person to follow the trail that I am still on.

Mr. Couchman: Clearly the hon. Lady is less strong-willed than my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker).

The Bill would require packets containing tobacco products to carry health warnings of much greater size than required by the EU directive, which was introduced, agreed and implemented by all member states as a single market measure. Its function was to harmonise and to remove impediments to the operation of the internal market. That is confirmed in the directive's preamble, which states that it is necessary to approximate the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of member states concerning tobacco product labelling; eliminate possible barriers to trade; and prevent impediments to the establishment and operation of the single internal market.

I take a rather different view of the single internal market from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner), which he explained in his long and interesting speech. The common rules in the directive take due account of public health protection. The directive states that its beneficial effect would be increased if it were coupled with health education programmes in schools and with information and public awareness campaigns. Who could disagree with that?

The Minister said that we continue to make considerable efforts to dissuade young people from taking up the smoking habit. We shall continue to do so, and that is to be applauded. It is part of "The Health of the Nation" initiative and I am sure that we all applaud the efforts by the Department of Health in that matter.

The requirement is for packets to carry warnings of at least 4 per cent. of the surface area or 6 per cent. if there are two languages in the member state. Three languages require 8 per cent. of the surface area of the packet to be taken up by a health warning. Only in Belgium, which has three languages, is there a necessity for 8 per cent. All member states have chosen to comply only with the directive's minimum requirement, which is 4 per cent. of the back and the front in states with a single language such as ours. In Britain, the Government chose to exceed that requirement by 50 per cent., and 6 per cent. of the area is covered by the warning.

I looked at a packet of cigarettes this morning—the first time for many years that I have done that—and I noted that the warning is quite clear and is couched in stark terms. It states: "Smoking causes cancer". That could not be plainer. Anyone who has ever had a packet of cigarettes and proposes to smoke will have read that warning and will choose whether to ignore it.

The regulations that give effect to the 6 per cent. warning are made under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and impose rigorous requirements. As a result, the clarity and impact of health warnings in the United Kingdom are greater than they are anywhere else in the EU. The European Commission is reviewing national compliance with the directive and I understand that it is

[Mr. Couchman]

unlikely to be satisfied on full compliance by a number of member states. However, let there be no doubt that the United Kingdom is implementing the terms of the directive in full.

While I am on the subject of the directive's terms, I should like to highlight the provisions of article 8, which are of great relevance and have been mentioned in the debate. The article states that member states cannot for labelling reasons prohibit or restrict the sale of tobacco products which comply with the terms of the directive. Member states may, as provided for by the treaty of Rome, set down requirements for the import, sale and consumption of tobacco products which the member state deems necessary to protect the public health, but such requirements must not imply any changes to the labelling regime established by the directive. That means that, provided imported tobacco products meet the requirements of the labelling directive, their import into, and sale in, a member state cannot be prohibited.

If the Bill became law, it would require cigarettes manufactured in the United Kingdom for sale here to carry health warnings covering 25 per cent. or more of the front and back of the packet. However, under the terms of the directive the United Kingdom would be unable to prohibit the import and sale of cigarettes carrying health warnings which complied with legislation enforced in the member state in which they originated. The Minister confirmed that.

The Bill rather grudgingly accepts that because clause 1(5) states that the regulations may provide for an exemption from the Bill's provisions for products imported into the UK from other member states. There is no choice whatever. Like it or not, the Bill must recognise that imported products would be able to carry much smaller warnings complying with legislative requirements elsewhere and would be beyond the terms of any UK legislation.

That cold fact alone makes a mockery of the claim that the Bill would help to reduce the problem of smuggled tobacco. It is almost certain that the Bill would in fact increase dramatically the amount of cigarettes that come into this country from other member states, which would tend to camouflage rather than highlight smuggled packets of cigarettes—those that are part of the enormous bootlegging trade.

It is interesting that Customs and Excise, in its recent appropriation accounts which were revealed to the Public Accounts Committee the other day, makes it clear that there appears to be a shortfall of about £100 million—

Mr. Lewis *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 92, Noes 1.

Division No. 76] **[2.9 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Barron, Kevin
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Burden, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maitland, Lady Olga
Michael, Alun
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Rathbone, Tim
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trimble, David
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and
Mr. Harry Barnes.

NOES

Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir George Gardiner and
Mr. Vivian Bendall.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It appearing that fewer than 100 Members voted in the majority in support of the motion, the Question is not decided in the affirmative.

Debate resumed.

2.20 pm

Mr. Couchman: Before we were rudely interrupted, I was saying that it would become impossible to determine which cigarettes were being imported legally and which were being smuggled in to be sold on the bootleg market. I was mentioning the fact that Customs and Excise has recently revealed that a revenue shortfall of approximately £100 million between 1992-93 and 1993-94 has become evident. The Treasury must be worried that it will hit a point of diminishing returns on its substantial revenue from tobacco. That is extremely worrying. Although the decline in revenue may suggest to some people that the smoking habit is declining, it is much more the case that a substantial proportion of cigarettes is being imported, legally or illegally.

Mr. John Carlisle: Part of the sadness of this morning's debate is that no one has said what a substantial

contribution taxpayers make to the Revenue, albeit that they are using a product that may be harmful to their health. We have not yet heard—we may in the limited time now available—about the proportionately small amount that has to be spent on treating the smoking-related diseases of those who fall foul of the habit. Perhaps my hon. Friend can enlarge on that point.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend is right. While he was taking a well-earned break, we heard that the ratio of revenue to the Treasury against revenue from the Treasury to treat smoking-related diseases is about 9:1.

Mr. Key: My vow of silence is over now that we have had the vote. I taught economics for 16 years and I am familiar with the maxim that there are lies, damned lies and statistics. I have been unable to find any evidence about the balance between tax revenue and expenditure on the health service. I am interested to hear my hon. Friend's figures. He has defied the economists of the past decade.

Mr. Couchman: I apologise to my hon. Friend because I may be falling into the trap of taking an hon. Friend's figures as correct. The revenue to the Treasury is undeniable. The figures are available in volume XII of the 1993-94 appropriation accounts at paragraphs 24 to 30. My hon. Friend may care to look them up. They were the subject of a recent interrogation of the head of Customs and Excise by the Public Accounts Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark spoke about United Kingdom manufacturing; he has a particular constituency interest in that. I made the point that manufacturers might decide to take their production to another member state. That is a sinister possibility. To the extent that the consumers' choice of brand or product might be affected by the Bill, so imports would be advantaged and the United Kingdom industry would be damaged. All that would happen for no good reason according to those of us who want tobacco products to become a fast-declining purchase, as it is already.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Couchman: I should just like to finish this section of my speech.

Mr. Carlisle: Give way.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friends. My hon. Friends have fallen into the trap of the argument about the export of jobs. I believe that the employment argument is the weakest of all the arguments deployed in the debate. I would take the tobacco lobby more seriously if it came clean and admitted to people that tobacco accounts for a small part of most of its business empires and conglomerates. Gallaher, for example, has 150 subsidiaries ranging from videos to whisky. B.A.T Industries has an interest in everything from insurance down to jewellery.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is becoming a speech rather than an intervention.

Mr. Couchman: I am tempted to join my hon. Friend in comparing the figures.

I received the annual report of Hanson plc, which reveals that sales by Imperial Tobacco, a Hanson subsidiary, were worth £3.25 billion last year. Imperial Tobacco is obviously an important part of Hanson's business. It manufactures cigarettes in Nottinghamshire, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newark.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) wants another reason why we should be cautious about the exportation of British jobs and British manufacturing, he should note that the British tobacco industry gives us a positive trade balance of £500 million. Nowadays, we have to worry about all our exports and trade, so we should not be willing to throw away that money. Not only would we throw away a positive trade surplus, but we would be likely to incur a substantial deficit in terms of imported tobacco products, which would flood in as a result of the loss of cigarette manufacturing from this country. I do not want to overdo that point, but I am conscious of the passionate contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who is worried about his constituents' jobs. We should not dismiss that concern lightly.

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend should overdo that point, because our hon. Friends who have seen fit to reject the Bill have the jobs of our constituents and those of other relevant Members at heart. One of the most distressing factors of the debate has been the way in which its supporters, especially Opposition Members, have totally dismissed the Bill's likely effect on jobs. That is a disgrace.

Mr. Couchman: The supporters' arguments—

Mr. Harry Greenway: Opposition Members advocated that my constituents should lose their jobs. If any hon. Member is not passionate in defence of the jobs of his constituents, he is not much of a Member.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend is right.

The problem of smuggling has been taken up on more than one occasion with Customs and Excise.

Mr. Illsley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Couchman: I must continue, because I have been almost as generous in giving way as the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) was when he began his speech at 9.30 am, which seems an awfully long time ago.

The only way to deal effectively with smuggled tobacco is to harmonise tax levels within the European Community. I hope that it is clear to the House that the Government's policy on combating tobacco consumption is working well. I hope that it is also clear that the labelling directive is a single market measure to prevent the distortion of trade and I hope that the House recognises that, of all European Union member states, no one has implemented the terms of the directive more strictly and effectively than the United Kingdom.

I also want to draw the attention of the House to the graphic illustration of how important the directive is as a single market harmonisation measure. We heard earlier that three new nations have just come into the European Union—Finland, Austria and Sweden. I am entirely in favour of that development. I wish to see the European Union broadened and access to the treaty—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 3 March.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

TOBACCO SMOKING (PUBLIC PLACES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 March.

PRISONERS (RETURN TO CUSTODY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 February.

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 February.

HOME RULE (SCOTLAND) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Not moved.

NATURAL DISASTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 February.

PREVENTION OF FRAUD (REGISTRATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 February.

INSURANCE COMPANIES (RESERVES) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [27 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 24 February.

LAND REGISTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 24 February.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 22nd February, the Speaker shall—

(1) put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer relating to the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land), (Construction of Buildings), (Protected Buildings), (Input Tax) (Amendment) and (Payments on Account) (Amendment) Orders 1995 not later than one and a half hours after the first such Motion has been made; and

(2) put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Tony Blair relating to the Education (Mandatory Awards) and (Student Loans) Regulations 1994 not later than one and a half hours after the first such Motion has been made; and the said Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS SHIPPING SERVICES

Ordered,

That the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 84 (Constitution of standing committees), paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of standing committees) and Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) shall apply to the draft Undertaking by the Secretary of State for Scotland with the consent of Her Majesty's Treasury and of Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd. as if it were a draft statutory instrument; and that the said draft Undertaking be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (4) of the Sessional Order [19th December] relating to Sittings of the House (Private Members' Business), on the last Wednesday before any adjournment of the House for more than four days, the subject for debate on the motion for the adjournment between Ten o'clock and One o'clock shall be 'matters to be considered before the forthcoming adjournment'.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East) *rose—*

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can it possibly be right for Opposition Members, and in particular the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), to object to the Second Reading of my Bill which is designed to bring safety and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Lady knows that that is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Ainsworth: I welcome the opportunity to raise this issue in the House. I want to explore with the Minister policies to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and to review at some length programmes that are supposed to deliver those reductions. I want to elicit clear answers from the Minister about his current targets and his exact up-to-date plans to put his programmes back on track. I want to raise some of the social consequences of the Government's method of implementing their programme and to question their sincerity and real priorities.

I shall first deal with some facts. The Government signed the Rio convention and committed themselves to reducing CO_2 emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. They accepted the need to address that important environmental issue, but there are criticisms of the Government's record on reducing CO_2 to which I shall refer.

The targets that the Government have set for themselves are very modest. The 6 per cent. cut in emissions compares very poorly with other European countries, some of which have pledged cuts of up to 20 per cent. The President of the Board of Trade, when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, said that he believed that 20 per cent. cuts could easily be achieved. The targets were not ambitious.

My final complaint on targets is that there are still no long-term targets. In his previous life as Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), wrote a report a principal recommendation of which was that

"by the end of 1995 a rolling programme of targets should be developed and strategies outlined for achieving longer term goals for the years up to 2010."

I was disappointed that the hon. Gentleman will not reply today, as he obviously has much sympathy with my point of view. Perhaps that is why he has been kept away. However, as he is in the Department, I hope that he can persuade the Government and his hon. Friend the Minister, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), to act on that recommendation. I hope that the Minister will tell us if and when that will happen.

On policy and policy failures, "Climate Change: the UK Programme" said:

"the centrepiece of the programme is the set of measures designed to limit emissions of CO_2."

The centrepiece of the centrepiece, therefore, was the Energy Saving Trust. It was set up in 1992, with the task of delivering 25 per cent. of the Rio target. Lord Moore was put in charge of it and sent away to devise a plan. He came back claiming that, to achieve its target, the trust would need £1.5 billion to spend by 2000. That money was to be supplied predominantly by the electricity and gas industries in equal parts. When Lord Moore was reminded by the then Chairman of the Environment Select Committee that the electricity companies anticipated putting in only £100 million, he said:

"My job is to try to be objective on this. I am saying that . . . to achieve the 2.5 million tons of carbon emission reductions, that [£1.5 billion] is what I believe we will need."

He continued that, if the view of the regulators was that the money would not be forthcoming, he would fail to reach the target that had been set.

Let us remember that we are not talking about a loony green-fringe activist. Lord Moore is an ex-Tory Minister, and he should not be the type to cause too much trouble.

On Lord Moore's prediction, we will not reach the target set. After a number of run-ins with the electricity and gas regulators, the Energy Saving Trust is woefully underfunded. Recent questions suggest that, if current funding is sustained until 2000, the total spend will be £158 million, a mere 10 per cent. of Lord Moore's requirements. Lord Moore, when he met the Environment Select Committee on Wednesday, confirmed that because of that he will achieve only 10 per cent. of his target savings.

On Thursday 9 February, Clare Spottiswoode's rejection of the vast majority of the Energy Saving Trust's latest proposals confirmed the continuing funding crisis. That came, by the way, after a delay of seven months in assessing the proposals, which has led to a formal complaint being lodged with the citizens charter unit by Andrew Warren of the Association for the Conservation of Energy. However, the Government appear to be totally incapable of preventing that unelected appointee from continuing to frustrate their policy, and unable to do anything about the social problems that arise from the decisions that she takes.

Spottiswoode has rejected every single proposal from the Energy Saving Trust aimed at helping poorer households with their fuel bills. That is an indication of the ideology that steers the Government and the individuals whom they appoint to their quangos.

The second major policy aimed at reducing emissions was VAT on fuel. The effectiveness of the measure was always questioned, with many analysts believing that low price elasticities would mean that rising costs would have only a small effect on consumption. Green groups said that the tax would work only if the barriers to energy efficiency were brought down. European research suggests that energy prices would have to be trebled to have a lasting effect on fuel use.

The Association for the Conservation of Energy claimed that a 10 per cent. rise in prices would lead to just a 1 per cent. drop in energy use. However, the Government claimed that they would deliver 15 per cent. of their targets. For the sake of argument, let us accept that figure. I simply want to know how the Government intend to fill the gap that has been left since they were prevented from introducing the second tranche of VAT on fuel. They were prevented from doing so because they showed no concern for the consequences that it would

[Mr. Ainsworth]

bring for ordinary people. People saw through the Government and realised that they were hiding their tax-raising priorities beneath a green veneer. The Association for the Conservation of Energy calculates that the lower VAT rate will produce savings of 0.6 million tonnes of carbon against a target of 1.5 million tonnes—close to my simple calculation that half the tax hike will deliver half the savings.

Other policies, including the policy to encourage combined heat and power generators, are not delivering planned savings. In 1990, there was 2,000 MW of capacity of combined heat and power. To reach the target of 5,000 MW, new CHP schemes must be built at a rate of 300 MW a year—but only half that rate has been achieved over the past five years. I suspect that the 1 million tonne savings target will not be reached. Matters are getting worse. Last year, only 94 MW were built—a mere one third of what is needed.

Between 1990 and 1993, we achieved 221 MW of new renewable capacity—an increase of 74 MW a year. At that rate, we shall achieve only half the target of 1,500 MW of new renewable capacity by the year 2000. That casts doubt on the 0.5 million tonnes of carbon saving that the Government said that they intended to deliver in that way.

Improved building regulations are to be introduced too late. The aim was for new building regulations to be published in early 1994 and introduced later that year. Those measures are now to be introduced in July 1995—a year late—but the Government have not altered their estimate of the CO_2 savings that were supposed to flow. Logically, the savings will be 20 per cent. under the 0.25 million tonne target that they announced, as houses built before the regulations are introduced will not conform to them.

To do their bit for the environment, Government Departments were to cut their energy use by 15 per cent. over the five years up to 1995-96, but some Departments are still not producing figures and the figures that are produced show that overall progress towards those targets is being made at only half the rate necessary to achieve them.

Health authorities were set targets for energy savings of 15 per cent. over the five years to 1995-96. With just one year to go, they have managed only 7.9 per cent. It was also announced that longer-term targets were to be set, but that has not happened. That part of the programme was due to provide 1 million tonnes of carbon savings, but it appears that only half that amount will be achieved.

The policy on domestic appliance standards appears to have been almost completely abandoned. In their original plans, the Government expressed support for EC standards to raise the efficiency of domestic appliances by 40 per cent. by the year 2000—to save 0.5 million tonnes of carbon emissions. They are now relying on joint voluntary initiatives in some sectors. They talk about continuing assessment of energy labelling and other policies, but make no reference to setting targets, and that represents a considerable retreat from policy. We can only assume that the target will not be met.

Research from the United States research agency, D.R.I. McGraw Hill, shows that the targets will be missed and UK CO_2 emissions will increase over the period by 4.1 per cent. Despite all that, I have little doubt that the Minister will say that he is still confident that CO_2 emissions in the year 2000 will be the same as those in 1990, as promised at Rio. That seems surprising, given that Government policies now lie in tatters. He must be keeping something from us if he can be so confident. It is rumoured that the secret is that the Department has calculated that none of these programmes is necessary as emissions will stay constant without any effort from the Minister.

The Government have reached that conclusion for two reasons. First, they have changed their estimate of the proportion of electricity generated using gas and nuclear power, which lowers their prediction of CO_2 emissions for the year 2000 without needing to reduce the total amount of electricity used. Energy paper 59—this was after consultation with the national grid—stated that 12 GW of gas-fired capacity was predicted for the year 2000. Energy paper 65 will predict, it appears, that 18 GW of gas-fired capacity will be reached. To reach that figure, 6.9 GW of capacity—it is only just past the first planning stage—has been included. Much of that will probably never be built, and still less is likely to be part of the national grid base load.

Similarly, it appears that problems with the nuclear generating capacity are being ignored. Dungeness and Heysham 1 have both been closed down since the end of last year and could be offstream for a long time yet. These two huge reactors represent about 30 per cent. of Britain's nuclear capacity. Yet Government figures rely on all this capacity being up and running in the year 2000. This great reliance on some broken-down reactors and a load of rather old Magnox stations staggering on into the next century is certainly cause for concern.

Secondly, it has been rumoured that the assumption of medium growth, which was used in deciding a target of 10 million tonnes, is to be altered to a low-growth assumption, meaning that CO_2 emissions will not rise as high as first thought.

It is refreshing that the Government are being slightly more candid about the lack of success with their economic policies, but having to lower a target which would have reduced CO_2 output by 6 per cent. shows a serious lack of commitment to the environment. Surely the Minister should be continuing to pursue policies aimed at reducing emissions by at least 6 per cent., which the programmes were supposed to deliver, and treating any additional savings from continuing slow growth as an environmental bonus. After all, he is not relying on better weather than usual in the year 2000. He should not rely on fickle energy markets and poor economic performance. We should remember that many experts always considered that the 10 million tonne target was very conservative. Halving the target would make it laughable.

I shall make three allegations. I hope that the Minister will respond to them by telling us what his future plans now are. First, the programmes for the environment targets have never been allowed to affect the Government's policy of privatisation. The privatisation of the gas and electricity industries has systematically taken priority over the environment. The sale of the generating companies and grids and the introduction of competition into the gas market continue to worsen the shambles. The Government are more concerned to sell energy producers than to conserve energy.

Secondly, the Government's ideology has led them to attempt to meet their targets without offering any assistance to people on low incomes. They have not invested money sensibly in energy conservation. They have done the reverse in trying to bolster their own revenues by dressing up their taxes in green clothes. That is what led to the value added tax fiasco.

Thirdly, the Government have been happy to set targets without the means of achieving them. They have sought to kick the political football up the field to a time, as it were, when they feel that they will not be in office and, therefore, not responsible to answer for their failures.

Having made three allegations as a humble seeker of the truth, I shall pose some questions. How does the Minister intend to break the funding deadlock of the EST? Will he introduce legislation? Will he use gas legislation to force the regulator to fund environmental projects? Will he act on the recommendations of his colleague in the Department, the Under-Secretary of State, and issue regular bulletins setting out the performance of individual programmes and setting rolling targets for CO_2 emissions beyond the year 2000? If so, when will that happen? Can he confirm that the Government continue to be dedicated to reducing CO_2 emissions by 10 million tonnes by promoting energy efficiency? What does he intend to do to make up the shortfall—I estimate that it will be about 40 per cent.—caused by the failure of his present programmes?

Finally, and most interestingly, how can Ministers continue to be so brazenly confident about achieving 1990 levels of CO_2 by the year 2000, as they sit surrounded by their failed policies? What is the secret?

2.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Some people manage to read out Christmas carols and make them sound like a funereal dirge. To use a similar analogy of a football, I am afraid that when the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) kicked it, it went flat. The reality is that the Government are firmly committed to meeting the challenge of sustainable development. I shall try to answer as many of his questions as possible, but I will have to write to him on any that I fail to answer and I am sure that he will understand as the minutes available have been eaten into severely.

We are committed to meeting the challenge of sustainable development, including the threat of global climate change. A great deal of progress has been made since the publication last January of the sustainable development strategy, the climate change programme and other associated documents.

The United Kingdom has played a leading role in the international negotiations, under the United Nations climate change convention. While the scientific evidence of human-induced global warming is not yet conclusive, it is clearly right for us to take precautions now to safeguard our future.

The challenge is global, but the onus must initially be on those countries that have the scientific and industrial base to take effective action, which includes us. We must make changes and demonstrate what can be done, so that others in developing countries can follow. That is why the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of international action under the United Nations climate change convention.

The convention's ultimate objective is to achieve stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations at levels that would prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. As a first step, the convention commits developed countries to take measures aimed at returning emissions of CO_2 and other greenhouse gases to their 1990 levels by the year 2000.

We were the first country to present our national programme under the convention and the first to publish a detailed programme demonstrating how we were aiming to meet those commitments, and we are fully committed to fulfilling our obligations under that convention.

The United Kingdom climate change programme was published in January 1994. The centrepiece is the set of measures to limit CO_2 emissions. It was based on the Government's energy projections, published in 1992, which suggested that—on the basis of a central scenario without any new measures—CO_2 emissions would be about 10 million tonnes of carbon above the 1990 level by the year 2000.

The CO_2 programme is based on a partnership approach, and was drawn up following extensive consultation, which included representatives of all sectors of the economy. The programme was developed on the basis of that detailed discussion and debate of the most cost-effective options. During the consultation process, many organisations expressed a willingness to play their part by taking action to improve their own energy efficiency and helping others to do so—a genuine partnership approach.

The CO_2 programme contains a balanced package of measures covering all sectors of the economy. We want to achieve energy savings as cost-effectively as possible. Our priority is to exploit the potential that exists for improving energy efficiency. That can bring social and environmental benefits, as well as reducing CO_2. The programme is aimed, therefore, at ensuring that both individuals and organisations exploit the considerable scope for taking action that is cost-effective in its own right.

We are encouraging action through the climate change programme. The Government have provided the framework for change, but it is the decision makers in households and businesses, including the energy suppliers, who will take the action that will lead to lower emissions. Thus, a key element in the programme, the dissemination of advice and information on action that we can all take to achieve savings, is vital.

The domestic energy campaign, "Helping the Earth Begins at Home", which we have run for the past few years, has successfully increased awareness of global warming. We have now introduced a new phase, called "Wasting Energy Costs the Earth", which will encourage domestic consumers to turn that awareness into cost-effective action in their homes.

We seek the maximum co-operation from the private sector in the campaign, and it was recently launched with an initial promotion on low-energy light bulbs. That was very successful and met its target of increasing sales of those light bulbs by a million units, which alone is expected to save 98,000 tonnes of CO_2.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

Implementation of the programme is still in its early stages but there is already evidence of the success of a number of the measures that it contains.

First, the "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign encourages top management in organisations in the private and public sectors to make a commitment to energy efficiency. Some 1,800 organisations have signed up, and a recent survey showed that their energy management performance is significantly better than that for businesses generally. The campaign is succeeding by changing board-level attitudes.

Secondly, as part of our programme to stimulate the development of new and renewable energy technologies, the third renewable non-fossil fuel obligation order was announced last December. It is expected to double the capacity of electricity from renewable sources already operational under the first two rounds. It keeps the Government on course as we work towards 1,500 MW of new and renewable generating capacity in the United Kingdom by the year 2000.

Thirdly, new building regulations to come into effect in July are expected to improve the energy performance of space and water heating in new homes by 25 to 35 per cent. compared with current standards. We expect similar improvements in the non-domestic sector.

Fourthly, as part of the long-term strategy of increasing fuel duties in the transport sector by at least 5 per cent. a year above the rate of inflation, duties were increased recently by 8.6 per cent. in real terms. That also provides an incentive to improve the fuel efficiency of vehicles and of driving patterns.

There are additional measures which, although primarily aimed at achieving other benefits, have been effective in contributing to reductions in CO_2 emissions. For example, the home energy efficiency scheme has already provided grants and free advice to improve the energy efficiency of a million homes since it began in its present form three years ago. The budget for the scheme in the current financial year has been increased by a further £8.6 million, bringing the total available for grant to £77 million. In each of the next three years, the sum available for grants will be increased again to around £100 million—enabling about 600,000 homes a year to be insulated. Those improvements to the housing stock are long lasting and will benefit future occupiers of the homes and contribute to long-term CO_2 reductions.

The hon. Gentleman touched on one or two other points, which I shall try to pick up as I go along. For instance, he mentioned combined heat and power. Considerable progress has been made in the use of combined heat and power, which has been encouraged since the privatisation of the gas and electricity industries. We now have 3,000 MW installed CHP capacity in the United Kingdom on more than 1,100 sites. I opened such a site on a housing estate north of London, which is using redundant tank engines. That is an interesting turn-round, considering the international situation.

The scorn which the hon. Gentleman poured on the public sector was utterly unjust because we accept that the public sector, particularly central Government, has a special role to play—if for no other reason than to set an example. The Government are fully committed to an ambitious target of improving energy efficiency on their own estate by 15 per cent. over the five years ending in March 1996. The 1993 results are being analysed, but the 1992-93 CO_2 emissions per square metre and CO_2 total emissions had reduced by 6 per cent. and 3 per cent. respectively. After March 1996, further targets will be set to take Government estate energy use to well below 80 per cent. of 1990 levels by the year 2000.

On efficiency standards for appliances, the Government have always supported the European Commission in developing measures to bring about improvements in the energy efficiency of domestic appliances. A directive covering the mandatory energy labelling of refrigerators and freezers came into force in the UK on 1 January. Further directives are under way covering the mandatory labelling of washing machines and tumble dryers, and progress has clearly been made in that direction.

Clearly, with an innovative programme of that scale, it is crucial that we monitor the progress towards achieving our overall target. Our programmes have quantitative targets. We monitor and report on them, for example, in an annual White Paper. We are also questioned on them regularly in the House. The hon. Gentleman is vigorous in doing so.

It is inevitable that some elements of the programme will save more CO_2 than expected, and others will save less. Continuous monitoring is, and will continue to be, an essential part of the process of developing a response within the flexible programme that the Government have laid out. I have already mentioned some elements of the programme where we have carried out some adjustments.

Some items in the programme are more experimental than others and further adjustments must be made. I accept that the Energy Saving Trust had a difficult and uncertain year. I am abundantly aware of that because Lord Moore was my predecessor as Member of Parliament for my constituency and lives just down the road. On Monday, my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry announced that the Government will take powers to contribute to the trust's running costs. That will enable the trust to reconsider its plans, and it represents an important first step in establishing funding for the trust and the schemes that it brings forward.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the role of the regulators. Their independence is an important principle. They must balance their various duties, and the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment on legislation that is not yet before this House and that is not for my Department.

Our monitoring shows that we are currently on course. Provisional figures for 1993 show a reduction of 6 million tonnes of carbon compared with 1990 levels. With the economy beginning to grow again, we cannot afford to be complacent, and we are currently considering whether further measures will be needed in the light of recent developments. We will draw our conclusions from that review as soon as possible.

The convention represents an important first step in tackling the threat of climate change, but it is only a beginning. The adequacy of existing commitments will be reviewed at the first conference of parties to the convention that starts next month in Berlin. It is expected that the conference will set in place the machinery for agreeing further far-reaching commitments.

The Government will support the position of the European Union, agreed at the meeting of the

Environment Council in December, which calls for the current commitments in the climate change convention to be strengthened and extended. The conference will begin to examine what more could or should be done under the next phase of the convention.

Our programme sets out possible options for further measures beyond the year 2000, and we will examine them carefully, taking into account the national conference to look beyond 2000 that was held last year. We will also take account of the new energy projections, to ensure that the UK is well placed to contribute towards achieving the convention's ultimate objective.

The Government emphatically remain fully committed to fulfilling their obligations under the climate change convention. The threat of climate change is a global problem and must be solved by global action. That is why we remain committed to active participation in the international process under the climate change convention and to fulfilling our own obligations. We will continue to monitor and review our programme, taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure that we remain on course to meet our commitments.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 6 February 1995

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will reassess the performance criteria of permanent, deputy and under secretaries within the civil service.

Mr. David Hunt: No. My Department completed work to identify the core criteria for grades 1 to 3 in March 1994. A new annual performance review system for grades 2 and 3 was introduced from 1 January 1995 which included assessment against these criteria. The arrangements proposed for determining permanent secretaries' pay will also involve a system of formal annual appraisal.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will consider introducing policy target agreements and individual fixed term contracts for permanent, deputy and under secretaries within the civil service.

Mr. David Hunt: Senior managers in executive agencies work within the framework of the key targets set out in the organisation's framework document, while in core departments, senior managers work within the framework of policy objectives set out in each Department's published annual report.

In the Command Paper, "The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change" (CM 2748), the Government stated that they would proceed with the introduction of written contracts of employment for members of the new senior civil service. The Government do not favour using fixed term contracts generally for senior civil servants, a view which is shared by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in its report, "Role of the Civil Service".

Performance Criteria

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps are being taken to clarify performance criteria and establish a clear division of responsibility between Ministers and their officials.

Mr. David Hunt: Framework documents for executive agencies and organisations working on next steps lines describe the division of responsibilities between Ministers and officials. Taken together with an agency's corporate and business plans they also set out the indicators and targets used to assess performance. Sixty-two per cent. of the home civil service work in agencies and the executive structures of the two Revenue departments. Another 17 per cent. are in functions identified as definite or possible agency candidates.

In core departments, published annual reports already set out departmental aims, objectives and achievements against previous plans or targets. "The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change" (Cm 2748) builds on the arrangements already in place in sets out the Government's view that there should be an increasing emphasis on extending, throughout the civil service, many of the principles of next steps, including maximum clarity about objectives and targets.

Ministry of Justice

Mr. Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the grounds for rejecting proposals for a Ministry of Justice.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government consider that existing arrangements continue to be effective.

A variety of proposals for a Ministry of Justice have been made, but the Government are not convinced that any of them have made a case for the significant and complex constitutional change which would be involved.

Public Bodies

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many non-departmental public bodies are currently in existence; and when the annual list of such bodies will be published.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: On 1 April 1994 there were 1,345 non-departmental public bodies—a fall of 44 since 1993. Since 1979, the number of non-departmental public bodies has been reduced by 38 per cent. from 2,167. Details can be found in "Public Bodies 1994" published today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Committee on Standards in Public Life

Sir Giles Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library a copy of the evidence he has submitted to the Committee on Standards in Public Life; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: A copy of my evidence has been placed in the Library of the House.

The Government are committed to the principle that selection for public appointments should be made on merit by the well-informed choice of individuals who through their qualifications, experience and qualities match the needs of the public body and the post in question. The arrangements in place and the reforms already introduced by a range of Departments are all designed to emphasise, against a background of many different kinds of appointments, this overriding principle. It was, however, a concern that central guidance to Departments should be clearer and firmer on these issues that led the Prime Minister last May to request a review of the guidance on these matters.

That review has now been completed by the Cabinet Office public appointments unit and I have submitted a copy of its report to the committee. The "Review of Guidance on Public Appointments" explains the varied nature of public appointments, the majority of them unpaid; describes a number of the initiatives which are being taken by Departments to improve procedures; and recommends ways in which best practice can be extended. The main focus of improvements is on greater openness about, for example, who holds posts and how people can apply for them, including the greater use of advertising. It also concentrates on arrangements to demonstrate probity; on sustained measures to promote equal

opportunities; and on reflecting citizens charter principles for accountability and responsiveness.

The Government have accepted the recommendations of the review and I have asked that work be set in hand straight away to implement the review as we revise the central guidance. I have asked the committee for its views on the review and the new central guidance will be issued as soon as the Government have been able to consider its comments.

Although I did not wish to anticipate or pre-judge the committee's deliberations on issues of conduct and propriety, I have provided in my evidence an overview of Government public service reforms as they apply to public bodies; and emphasised the high standards of impartiality, objectivity and financial integrity, including through codes of conduct for board members in public bodies and the national health service.

The committee has written separately to the Cabinet Secretary about gifts and hospitality for Ministers and the rules which govern the employment of officials when they leave the civil service, and he has replied. I have also placed a copy of this correspondence in the Library of the House.

I am making my evidence and the committee's correspondence with Sir Robin Butler generally available to interested parties.

Research Councils

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the amount of Government assistance granted to research councils for each year since 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Government grant-in-aid to the research councils from the science budget since 1986–87 was as follows:

£ million

	AFRC	*ESRC*	*MRC*	*NERC*	*SERC*
1986–87	57.1	23.8	128.3	70.3	316.2
1987–88	54.9	24.8	139.8	73.3	357.5
1988–89	61.1	27.0	149.6	91.9	367.6
1989–90	74.3	31.5	176.3	115.0	406.2
1990–91	88.4	36.6	185.7	135.2	440.8
1991–92	96.6	35.6	202.9	122.6	456.4
1992–93	105.4	45.9	227.6	129.7	523.0
1993–94	109.4	53.2	262.7	140.3	583.5

Estimated outturn in 1994–95 is as follows:

£ million

BBSRC	146.9
EPSRC	367.9
ESRC	58.9
MRC	269.3
NERC	153.5
PPARC	180.1
Swindon Research Councils Pensions Scheme	30.1

The allocations of the science budget for 1995–96 will be announced on 2 February.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. David Hunt: The Departments for which I have ministerial responsibility are not responsible for any regulation legislation and have, therefore, not withdrawn any such legislation in the last 12 months.

Citizens Charters

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the sections of all citizens charters in operation which cover the public services used by elderly people.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Public services should be accessible to all those who need them, including elderly people. The 40 charters issued by public services are intended to help raise the standards and responsiveness of those services to all their customers, which include elderly people.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to establish a charter for the retired covering all services used by retired people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: There are no plans to introduce such a charter. Public services should be accessible to all those who need them, including retired people. In drawing up or revising a charter, a service provider should consult its customers and, as far as possible reflect their particular needs in the service standards and commitments which that charter sets.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electric Shock Equipment

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences have been granted for the export of electric shock equipment since 1988, for which countries and for how many devices.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether export licences have been granted for the transfer of electric shock equipment to Saudi Arabia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: It would be possible to establish whether any export licences had been sought for such exports only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what stocks of shock batons were supplied directly of indirectly to Saudi Arabia *(a)* under the Al Yamamah programme and *(b)* in any other transaction in the period (i) three years before and (ii) six years after the signing of the Al Yamamah deal (1) by the British Government, (2) by British companies or (3) by arrangement with any company with offices in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* Both British Aerospace and the Ministry of Defence have denied that any electric batons were supplied under the Al Yamamah programme. It would be possible to establish whether any export licences had been sought for such

exports only at disproportionate cost. Deals not involving export from the UK require no licence.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department has had with ICL Technical Plastics about the sale or export of electro-shock equipment; and what support his Department has provided.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* There is no record of support to ICL Technical Plastics for this purpose. My officials have spoken to representatives of the company who have denied the allegations in the Channel 4 television programme "Dispatches" on 11 January 1995.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the export of electric shock batons and other equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am aware of the allegations made in the channel 4 television programme "Dispatches" on 11 January 1995. The companies concerned have made public denials of the allegations.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department has had with BAe Royal Ordnance about the sale of electric shock batons to *(a)* Saudi Arabia and *(b)* other countries.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My officials contacted British Aerospace following the screening of the Channel 4 television programme "Dispatches" on 11 January 1995. The company has denied the allegations made in the programme.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his criteria for judging whether an anti-personnel mine reaches sufficiently high standards to be judged self-destructing of self-neutralising so as to be allowed to be exported.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Decisions on whether or not to grant a licence for the export of such mines would involve a number of considerations, only one of which would be an assessment of failure rates. The munitions lists in part III group 1 of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 are modelled on the former COCOM munitions list headings and contain no standards for land mines; all mines are controlled.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications he received in 1994 for export licences for self-destructing or self-neutralising anti-personnel mines; by whom they were manufactured; which applications were approved; and for which countries the mines were destined.

Mr. Ian Taylor: None.

Unsolicited Mail

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from Birmingham city council about unsolicited direct mail offering business opportunities, profitable gambling or football pool plans and other money-making schemes, purporting to offer substantial profit from very little effort or expenditure; and whether he will seek to amend the Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971 and its amendment of 1975 to prohibit the distribution of such unsolicited literature.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have received no such representations. I have no plans to amend the Unsolicited Goods and Services Acts to prohibit the distribution of unsolicited literature.

Lloyd's

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what timetable he envisages for the 1995 solvency test for Lloyd's of London

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In previous years the statement and certificates demonstrating Lloyd's solvency, which are required by part IV of the Insurance Companies Act 1982, have normally been received towards the end of August. I have no reason to expect the timetable to be different this year.

Ferries, Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to revisit the inquiry into ferry fares and services to and from the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Director General of Fair Trading is due to review the market for the supply cross-Solent ferry services this year, as requested by the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in 1992 following publication of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report.

Arbitration Bill

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received during the consultation period that followed the publishing of the White Paper on the draft Arbitration Bill of February 1994; and what conclusions he has drawn as a result of these representations.

Mr. Heseltine: Some 158 often extremely detailed submissions were received during the consultation period that followed the publication in February 1994 of the consultation document on the draft Arbitration Bill. These are currently being considered. A Bill taking account of the responses will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A list of those rules and regulations withdrawn in the past 12 months follows. The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed. The implications for the Department's overall manpower will not be significant, and will be taken into account in the Department's MINIS round, the results of which are published annually.

Rules and Regulations withdrawn in the last twelve months

The Insolvent Partnerships Order 1986 (SI 1986/2142)

The Insolvency Regulations 1986 (SI 1986/1994 amended by SI 1987/1959, SI 1988/1739, SI 1991/380)

The Insurance Companies (Amendment) Regulations 1992 (SI 1992/445)

The Insurance Companies (Cancellation No. 2) Regulations 1993 (SI 1993/1092)

The Insurance Companies Regulations 1981 (SI 1981/1654)

The Insurance Companies (Amendment) Regulations 1982 (SI 1982/675)

The Insurance Companies (Advertisements) Amendments (No. 2) Regulations 1983 (SI 1983/396)

The Insurance Companies (Amendment) Regulations 1985 (SI 1985/1419)

The Insurance Companies (Amendment) Regulations 1988 (SI 1988/673)

The Insurance Companies (Legal Expenses Insurance) (Applications for Authorisation) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/1160)

The Insurance Companies (Credit Insurance) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/1181)

The Insurance Companies Regulations 1981 (Amendment) Regulations 1991 SI (1991/1999)

The Insurance Companies (Linked Contracts) (Amendment) Regulations 1991 (SI 1991/2511)

The Dangerous Substances and Preparations (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 1985

The Dangerous Substances and Preparations (Safety) Regulations 1980

The Plugs and Sockets etc. (Safety) Regulations 1987

The Low Voltage Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 1989

The Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946 Section 36(2)

Weights and Measure Act 1963 (Dentifrices) Order 1974

The Benzene in Toys (Safety) Regulations 1987

The Novelties (Safety) Regulations 1980

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to its clients' interests.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* In so far as we have been able to establish there were no meetings between departmental officials and representatives of Ian Greer Associates on 26 January.

Recruitment

Mr. Donhoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* The Department of Trade and Industry, and its executive agencies, spent £554,959 recruiting 108 staff during 1994.

Business Link

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set up an independent evaluation of the progress to date on the business link network.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* The Department of Trade and Industry is currently commissioning an independent evaluation of the business link network. The evaluation will begin in March and is due to be completed in autumn 1995.

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *299*, if the United Kingdom company that is licensed to explore for oil and gas in the East Timor gap has been granted an export licence under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1981.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* It has been the practice of successive Governments not to reveal details of export licences or applications for licences unless the requirements of confidentiality are outweighed by the public interest.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 8 December, *Official Report*, column *299*, if the United Kingdom company that is licensed to explore for oil and gas in the East Timor gap requires an export licence under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1981.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* A licence is required under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended, to export from the United Kingdom goods identified in the schedules to that order, unless the goods are specified in article 3(b) to (e) of the order.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Ellesmere Port Magistrates Court

Mr. Miller: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what plans he has to replace the Ellesmere Port magistrates court;

(2) what representations he has received regarding the suitability of the Ellesmere Port magistrates courts.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The provision of magistrates courthouse accommodation is a matter for the magistrates courts committee concerned in conjunction with the local paying authority; there is no requirement of notification or representation to the Lord Chancellor. A local authority that is aggrieved by a decision of the magistrates courts committee to close a courthouse has the right of appeal to the Lord Chancellor. In the absence of such an appeal the Lord Chancellor has no locus in the matter.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Miller: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to allow private sector funding for the development of magistrates courts.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Accommodation for magistrates courts is the responsibility of local authorities albeit substantially funded by central Government grants. The decision whether to use private sector funding is therefore primarily a matter for individual local authorities. My Department is, however, keen to support the private finance initiative, and for PFI solutions to be followed where practicable.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for each of the area

advisory committees on justices of the peace in the Greater London area, how many applications were received to become a JP in each of the last three years for which statistics are available; how many of these applications were from ethnic minority applicants; how many of the total applications were accepted; how many of these were from ethnic minority applicants.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The figures for each of the advisory committees on justices of the peace in the Greater London area for the last three years are as follows:

Area Advisory Committee	*Number of applications received*			*Number of appointments*			*Number of ethnic minority applicants appointed*		
	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Inner London	140	173	149	75	88	72	9	21	11
City of London	23	23	12	10	10	6	2	0	1
South west London	93	84	73	24	32	35	4	3	1
South east London	96	71	83	33	19	23	3	2	3
North east London	166	132	111	37	48	42	8	9	8
Middlesex	262	103	162	97	29	56	4	11	16

No figures are available to show how many of the total applications were from ethnic minority applicants.

Community Charge Payers

Mr. David Young: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recourse to compensation exist for those community charge payers wrongly committed to prison; and what action is to be taken against the magistrates who committed them.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Legal proceedings may be taken against a magistrate only if he has acted outside his jurisdiction and if it is proved that he has acted in bad faith. The Lord Chancellor does not intervene in judicial matters and there are no grounds for him to take action.

Posthumous Pardon

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will list the main principles governing the release of documents held in the Public Record Office relating to the trials and executions for murder in British gaols on application by next of kin or their legal representatives for the purpose of pursuing a case for posthumous pardon;

(2) what is his Department's policy in relation to the application of the 75-year-rule, and requests made for reducing it with regard to papers held in the Public Record Office relating to the trial and execution for murder in British gaols, by the next of kin for the purpose of pursuing the case for a posthumous pardon; what policy his Department has on charging for photocopying of such records for such purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: All assize records over 30 years old and closed for 75 years are being re-reviewed in line with the provisions of the White Paper on open government, chapter 9. Dependent on the nature of the inquiry from the next of kin, documents are either made available to them, or they are invited to visit my Department to read the file. Public Record Office charges for photocopies from files and my Department follows the same course of action. After review, and where sensitivity has passed, files are being released into the public domain.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when his Department received the application to supply copies of the papers relating to the trial for the murder of Lily Volpert, and execution in Cardiff gaol in 1952 of Mahmood Hussein Mattan: on what date the records were located at the Cardif Public Record Office; and on what date the Mattan family and their solicitor were informed of their existence.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A letter dated 2 September 1994 was received by the Court of Appeal on 6 September 1994, and passed to my Department's record section for action. They requisitioned Mattan's case file from the Public Record Office at Kew on 8 September 1994, and supplied copies of documents from the file to the solicitors under cover of a letter dated 16 September 1994.

Legal Aid Fund (Barristers' Fees)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will name those barristers paid more than £200,000 from the legal aid fund in 1992–93 and 1993–94 and the amount each individual was paid in each year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Berry: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) what steps he takes to avoid a statutory instrument *(a)* being made or *(b)* coming into force before the making of any separate statutory instrument without which it would be ultra vires;

(2) what steps he takes to avoid a statutory instrument being approved before the approval of any separate statutory instrument without which it would be ultra vires.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The guidance in "Statutory Instrument Practice" reminds Departments of the need to ensure that provisions in subordinate legislation are intra vires.

ENVIRONMENT

Objective 1 Funding

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place a copy of the final agreement

programme for objective 1 for Merseyside in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have placed a copy of the objective 1 single programming document for Merseyside in the Library today.

The programming which the single programme's document sets out provides an important opportunity for Merseyside. It includes a broad range of measures which will improve the competitiveness of local industry, increase the skills and employment opportunities for local people and enhance the quality of life. These measures give effect to a strategy agreed with the European Commission and prepared in partnership between the Government and others active locally: the local authorities, the training and enterprise councils, statutory agencies such as English Partnerships and the Merseyside development corporation and participants from institutions, further and higher education and the voluntary sector. I welcome the constructive and pragmatic spirit in which all concerned in the local partnership have driven forward planning for the Merseyside objective 1 programme, which will continue to have the Government's full support.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies have been carried out by his Department into the long-term storage of radioactive waste.

Mr. Atkins: Since 1981 my Department has carried out the following studies into the long-term storage of radioactive waste. These are available through the Library of the House:

A Design Study of Long Term Storage and Underground Disposal System for Highly Active Waste.

W. R. Burton and J. R. Griffin

Pre-disposal Storage, Transport and Handling of Vitrified High-Level Waste.

T. F. Kempe and A. Martin

Surface Storage of Vitrified High-Level Radioactive Waste in Reinforced Concrete Casks.

H. Beale, M. W. George and T. Robertson

Implications of Long-term Surface or Near-Surface Storage of Intermediate and Low Level Waste in the United Kingdom.

N. Murray, D. Vande Putte and R. J. Wade.

Long-term Storage of Radioactive Solid Waste Within Disposal Facilities.

M. Wakerley and J. Edmunds

Assessment of Best Practicable Environment Options (BPEOs) for Management of Low and Intermediate-Level Solid Wastes.

In addition, over the same period, there have been a number of studies into short-term storage.

Local Referendums

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of giving powers to local authorities to hold local referendums.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend has made no such assessment.

Coastal Protection

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds are available through his Department in the current financial year for coastal protection and repair.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department has no specific funds in respect of work on coastal protection and repair.

Where the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food expect to issue credit approvals for capital expenditure in respect of such work these credit approvals will be taken into account in calculating standard spending assessments. Consequently local authorities will receive a contribution through the revenue support grant towards the borrowing costs associated with the balance of capital costs of approved schemes net of other grants.

Local authorities also receive contributions through their revenue support grant entitlements in respect of revenue expenditure which they undertake for coastal protection and repair.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has regarding legislation or other action to ensure that the needs of the disabled are provided for in decisions on planning applications.

Sir Paul Beresford: Guidance on access issues is contained in my Department's planning policy guidance note 1 "General Policy and Principles" and in planning policy guidance note 3, "Housing". This guidance encourages developers and local authorities to consider access issues at an early stage in the design process. In general, however, the needs of disabled people to have access to buildings are secured through the Building Regulations. Part M of these regulations now define the access requirements to all storeys of non-domestic buildings and to most extensions. On 12 January, my Department issued a consultation paper proposing that the scope of the regulations should be extended to cover access for disabled people to all new dwellings.

Education Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the figures for the education standard spending assessment for Hertfordshire for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 and the percentage change between the two years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The figures are:

£ million

1994–95 Unadjusted *a.*	*1994–95 Adjusted*[1] *b.*	*1995–96* *c.*	*Change (b/c) per cent.* *d.*
351.155	361.089	371.417	+2.9

[1] The adjusted figure takes account of net income from recoupment in 1994-95, so as to make it broadly comparable with the SSA for 1995–96.

Homelessness

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what recent consultations he has undertaken on proposals to reform homelessness legislation; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what further consultations he plans in advance of legislation on homelessness; and if he will undertake to consult all the responders to the Green Paper "Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies".

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We consulted extensively during the early part of last year, and our conclusions were announced to the House on 18 July 1994 by my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction. Since then my Department has sought views on certain matters of detail from a number of key organisations interested in this subject. The policy remains as announced last July, and we have no plans for any further general consultation.

Regional Offices

Mr. McAllison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific tasks and objectives each senior regional director and staff member of Government offices for the regions have been and will be set for the years ending 31 March 1995 to 31 March 1996.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government have given the Government offices for the regions the role of working in partnership with local people to maximise the competitiveness, prosperity and quality of life of each region. The central objectives of the offices are to:

Meet the operational requirements of Departments and Ministers

Contribute local views and experience to the formation and communication of Government policy

Promote a coherent approach to competitiveness, sustainable economic development and regeneration using public and private resources and through the exercise of its statutory responsibilities.

Develop the skills of staff and methods of working to achieve these objectives and to demonstrate their success in doing so

Develop partnerships with and between all the local interests to promote and secure these objectives

Provide a single point of contact for local people and deliver high quality services on citizens charter principles.

Detailed objectives for the offices for 1995–96 will be set out in GO-MINIS management planning documents which will be published in the spring.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Sir Paul Beresford: The following list shows the 27 statutory instruments revoked by this Department during 1994.

The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed. The manpower implications will be taken into account in the Department's central manpower plans which will be published in the Department's annual report in March.

DOE Regulations revoked during 1994

The Billing Authorities (Alteration of Requisite Calculations) (England) Regulations 1992 SI 1992/2429

The Housing Renovation etc., Grants (Reduction of Grant) Regulations 1990 SI 1990/1189

The Housing Renovation etc., Grants (Reduction of Grant) (Amendment) Regulations 1991 SI 1991/897

The Housing Renovation etc., Grants (Reduction of Grant) (Amendment) Regulations 1992 SI 1992/705

The Housing Renovation etc., Grants (Reduction of Grant) (Amendment) Regulations 1993 SI 1993/551

The East Anglian Water (Capital Powers) Order 1972 SI 1972/2050

The East Anglian Water (Capital Powers) Order 1977 SI 1977/295

The East Anglian Water (Capital Powers) Order 1985 SI 1985/240

The Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988 SI 1988/1562

The Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Amendment Regulations 1988 SI 1988/1790

The West Hampshire Water Order 1919 1919c.cix

The Building (Prescribed Fees etc.) Regulations 1985 SI 1985/1576

The Building (Amendment of Prescribed Fees) Regulations 1986 SI 1986/2287

The Building (Amendment of Prescribed Fees) Regulations 1988 SI 1988/871

The Building (Amendment of Prescribed Fees) Regulations 1989 SI 1989/1118

The Building (Amendment of Prescribed Fees) Regulations 1990 SI 1990/2600

The Building (Prescribed Fees etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 1992 SI 1992/741

The Building (Amendment of Prescribed Fees) Regulations 1992 SI 1992/2879

The Compulsory Purchase of Land Regulations 1990 SI 1990/613

The Oil Fuel (Sulphur Content of Gas Oil) Regulations 1990 SI 1990/1096

The Local Government (Publication of Manpower Information) (England) Regulations 1983 SI 1983/8

The Valuation for Rating (Plant and Machinery) Regulations 1989 SI 1898/441

The Central Rating Lists (Regulations 1989 SI 1989/2263

The Central Rating Lists (Amendment) Regulations 1990 SI 1990/502

The Central Rating Lists (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1990 SI 1990/1566

The Central Rating Lists (Amendment) Regulations 1993 SI 1993/166

The Opencast (Compulsory Rights and Rights of Way) (Forms) Regulations 1987 SI 1987/1915

Community Charge

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities that have illegally prosecuted people unable to pay the community charge; and what action his Department will take to compensate those concerned.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Community Charge (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989 include provision for an authority to apply for a warrant of commitment against a debtor where other enforcement measures have been unsuccessful. It is for the magistrates court to consider any such application. The court may issue a warrant only after it has inquired of the person's means, and is satisfied that the failure to pay is the result of wilful refusal or culpable neglect. It has discretion to remit all or part of the outstanding amount.

Gipsy Sites

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount provided by his

Department for the construction of gipsy sites in Devon in each year since 1993; and how much will be provided in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996-97.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department has neither made nor will make any payment of gipsy site grant for sites in Devon in the financial years 1993–94 to 1996–97, because no local authority application for grant for sites in that area has received or is awaiting approval to proceed to tender.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will allow Devon county council to use the grant from his Department, originally designated for a gipsy site at Tamerton Foliot, for an alternative gipsy site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The application from Devon county council for gipsy site grant for a site at Tamerton Foliot was rejected by my Department on the ground of excessive cost. No grant has therefore been allocated for that site. Section 80 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which came into force on 3 November 1994, repealed the Secretary of State's power to approve grant other than for applications received before commencement date.

Regional Operations

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in the latest available year; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department currently employs the following number of staff in each of the Government offices for the regions:

	Number
Government Office for the North East	99
Government Office for the North West	164
Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside	134
Government Office for Merseyside	65
Government Office for the West Midlands	120
Government Office for the East Midlands	104
Government Office for the Eastern Region	71
Government Office for the South West	77
Government Office for the South East	90
Government Office for London	131

These figures exclude regionally based Property Holdings, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and rent assessment panel staff.

Information about the cost to my Department of running each office, the activities carried out by the offices and the programme budgets of each office was given in my replies to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), *Official Report*, 25 January 1995, columns *210-12.*

Countryside Stewardship Sites

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by county for countryside stewardship sites, the date when each site was designated and the date when each site's designation is due to be terminated.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The countryside stewardship scheme is operated by the Countryside Commission. Agreements under the scheme begin on 1 October of the relevant year, and normally run for ten years. Information supplied by the Countryside Commission on the sites currently under agreement in each of their administrative areas, together with the date of the commencement and termination of each agreement, is given in the table. Information on agreements entering the scheme in 1994 is provisional.

Countryside commission regions and counties	*Number of countryside Stewardship agreements, and period of agreements (1994 figures provisional)*			
	1 October 1991–30 September 2001	*1 October 1992–30 September 2002*	*1 October 1993–30 September 2003*	*1 October 1994–30 September 2004*
Eastern				
Bedfordshire	9	20	15	11
Cambridgeshire	22	37	22	18
Lincolnshire	17	29	46	21
Norfolk	43	44	48	19
Suffolk	37	36	31	25
Midlands				
Derbyshire (part also in North West region)	35	49	29	22
Hereford and Worcester	11	43	23	28
Leicestershire	9	26	11	22
Northamptonshire	9	41	23	15
Nottinghamshire	5	8	10	12
Shropshire	15	12	20	23
Staffordshire	6	15	15	11
Warwickshire	6	5	6	11
West Midlands	2	4	5	3
Northern				
Cleveland	3	2	4	10
Cumbria	41	33	21	39
Durham	8	18	9	16
Northumberland	33	51	47	30
Tyne and Wear	2	0	5	5

Countryside commission regions and counties	Number of countryside Stewardship agreements, and period of agreements (1994 figures provisional)			
	1 October 1991–30 September 2001	1 October 1992–30 September 2002	1 October 1993–30 September 2003	1 October 1994–30 September 2004
North West				
Cheshire	14	19	19	30
Greater Manchester	6	7	6	10
Lancashire	26	39	46	72
Merseyside	4	1	3	5
South East				
Berkshire	7	8	9	11
Buckinghamshire	18	18	10	15
East Sussex	16	18	9	10
Essex	23	18	8	16
Greater London	4	10	8	9
Hampshire	30	18	27	24
Hertfordshire	13	16	4	11
Isle of Wight	15	13	8	12
Kent	21	36	33	46
Oxfordshire	10	17	8	21
Surrey	11	15	8	13
West Sussex	22	13	5	4
South West				
Avon	8	24	15	6
Cornwall	46	73	35	9
Devonshire	35	100	52	55
Dorset	38	30	10	1
Gloucestershire	26	33	20	6
Somerset	27	25	20	8
Wiltshire	43	32	18	4
Yorkshire and Humberside				
Humberside	20	20	23	15
North Yorkshire	76	102	50	10
South Yorkshire	1	14	10	1
West Yorkshire	2	10	15	3

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crime Victims

31. **Mr. Heald:** To ask the Attorney-General to what extent victims are taken into account when a decision to prosecute is taken by the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Solicitor-General: When taking a decision to prosecute, the interests of the victim are an important factor in determining the balance of the public interest.

Appeals

34. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the procedure of ensuring equity to people who appeal against a decision of an earlier court.

The Solicitor-General: The procedures are well established and effective in ensuring justice.

Combat 18

35. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Attorney-General what action he is taking in respect of members of Combat 18.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has not yet received a report from the Metropolitan police, whose investigation into Combat 18 continues.

Asil Nadir

36. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the handling by the Serious Fraud Office of the Asil Nadir case.

The Solicitor-General: A warrant has been issued for the arrest of Asil Nadir. The Crown is ready to proceed when he returns or is returned to the jurisdiction.

Departmental Review

37. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make it his policy to instigate an independent review of the administration of his Department to facilitate decision making and accountability.

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to commission such a review.

Serious Fraud Office

38. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to review the operation of the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: On 1 February 1995, I received the report of the consideration of merger group on the merits and feasibility of merging all or part of the fraud divisions of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office. I shall take my decision after consulting colleagues.

Electro-shock Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if he will seek to prosecute ICL Technical Plastics for breaches of section 5(1) (b) of the Firearms Act 1968 for selling electro-shock equipment;

(2) if he will seek to prosecute ICL Technical Plastics for breaches of section 5(1) (b) of the Firearms Act 1968 for manufacturing electro-shock equipment without his authority;

(3) if he will seek to prosecute ICL Technical Plastics for breaches of section 5(1) (b) of the Firearms Act 1968 for the possession of electro-shock equipment.

The Attorney-General: Decisions about prosecution can be taken only on the basis of evidence gathered during the course of a criminal investigation. It is for the relevant chief officer of police to decide in relation to the alleged offences whether such investigation is warranted. I understand that the Strathclyde police are investigating certain matters arising from a recent television documentary programme about ICL Technical Plastics Limited, which is a Glasgow-based company. Any evidence which may justify the institution of criminal proceedings will be considered by the independent prosecuting authorities.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the numbers, role and cost of European Union monitors in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Goodlad: There are 60 EU monitors in Bosnia, of whom five are British. Their primary role is to monitor political opinion, military capabilities, humanitarian aid supplies, human rights and the economic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In 1994 the total budget for the EU monitoring mission in former Yugoslavia was D28 million or £11.6 million.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the objectives, time scale, staff and budget of the EU administration of the city of Mostar; and what plans there are for similar initiatives elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Goodlad: The European Union was asked by the Bosnian-Croat and Muslim communities to administer the city of Mostar for two years, beginning July 1994. The EU's objective is to foster reconciliation and reunite the divided city. The EU administrator is Mr Hans Koschnik—German—who has a multi-national staff of experts to assist him, including several British nationals. This year's budget is 32 million ecu or £25 million. Next year's budget is still to be finalised.

Land Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what opinion of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in respect of land mines has been conveyed to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The Secretary-General of the United Nations has called for a complete ban on the use, production and transfer of anti-personnel land mines in his proposals for an agenda for development and an agency for peace which were published recently.

No detailed discussions of the Secretary-General's proposals have yet taken place at the United Nations.

Inhumane Weapons Convention

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if United Kingdom policy at the review of the United Nations inhumane weapons convention supports the mapping and marking of minefields in all circumstances.

Mr. Goodlad: We support a prohibition on the emplacement of anti-personnel land mines without a self-destructing capability outside perimeter-marked areas monitored by military personnel. We also support proposals for the location of all minefields and mined areas to be recorded.

Sexual Offences (Children)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens have been prosecuted for sexual offences involving children outside the United Kingdom for each year since records have been kept.

Mr. Baldry: There have been 135 reported cases of British citizens prosecuted outside the United Kingdom for sexual offences since 1974. Our records do not show which of those cases involved children.

Year	*Number of cases*
1974	1
1981	1
1982	1
1983	2
1986	2
1987	15
1988	24
1989	17
1990	15
1991	17
1992	16
1993	15
1994	9

Anti-personnel Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of countries which have announced their support for an international ban on the production, stockpiling, sale and use of anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Baldry: The following countries have announced their support for an international ban on the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel land mines: Australia, Belgium, Cambodia, Columbia, Ireland, Mexico and Sweden.

The 49th session of the General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution supporting further international efforts to seek solutions to the problems caused by

anti-personnel land mines, with a view to their eventual elimination.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the International Committee of the Red Cross in respect of United Kingdom proposals to control the international use of anti-personnel mines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: No such representations have been received.

Bosnia

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Jovan Zametica is covered by the travel curbs imposed by the United Nations on the Bosnian-Serb leadership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The list of those Bosnian Serbs whose movements would be restricted under Security Council resolution 942 remains under consideration in the UN Sanctions Committee. We cannot comment on which individuals might be included until the Committee's consideration is completed.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those persons included in the travel curbs imposed by the United Nations on Bosnian-Serb leaders and others residing in Pale; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The list of those Bosnian Serbs whose movements would be restricted under SCR 942 remains under consideration by the UN Sanctions Committee.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those persons who have been permitted to represent in the United Kingdom the interests of the Bosnian Serbs led by Dr. Radovan Karadzic over the past four years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The Bosnian Serbs have no official representation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how often, and on what basis, Jovan Zametica has communicated with General Sir Michael Rose during the past eight weeks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: UNPROFOR is in regular contact with all parties, including the Bosnian Serbs. Mr. Zametica, as a spokesman for the Bosnian Serbs, is a regular interlocutor.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Baldry: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office issues very few rules and regulations. Secondary legislation is made by Order in Council. In 1994 at least 27 orders were revoked. The majority of these related to the lifting of the United Nations arms embargo on South Africa. There were no implications for the Department's manpower. The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed.

Humanitarian Medical Treatment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 1 February, Official Report, column 1069, what arrangements have been made to assist Llandugh hospital with suitable security arrangements for the duration of the treatment of defected Iraqi army Major Safa Al-Battat for thallium poisoning.

Mr. Goodlad: We wrote to Llandugh hospital on 31 January following an inquiry from it about arrangements for press interviews for Major Al-Battat, the victim of thallium poisoning by the Iraqi regime. We discussed access for the press with the hospital administration, and recognised that it was for the hospital to judge whether the media should be allowed access to the patient.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 1 February, Official Report, column 1069, if he will list the general principles governing Her Majesty's Government's approach to requests for urgent humanitarian medical treatment for those injured in civil wars or uprisings against *(a)* the Iraqi regime and *(b)* other conflicts.

Mr. Goodlad: All cases are considered on their individual merits.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 1 February, Official Report, column, 1069, if he will provide details of the arrangements for the acceptance on urgent medical humanitarian grounds of entry clearance of defected Iraqi army Major Safa Al-Battat for anti-poisoning treatment at Llandugh hospital, South Glamorgan.

Mr. Goodlad: We condemn the Iraqi regime's efforts to poison Major Al-Battat. This is another example of the continuing brutality in Iraq, and yet more evidence that the regime is still involved in terrorist activities. We are therefore glad to have been able to help the Iraqi National Congress arrange Major Al-Battat's treatment here, and to ensure that his visa application was given prompt consideration in accordance with normal immigration rules.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 1 February, Official Report, column 1069, what representations he has received concerning that arrangements for the treatment at Llandugh hospital, South Glamorgan of defected Iraqi army Major Safa Al-Battat for thallium, poisoning.

Mr. Goodlad: We discussed the arrangements for media access to Major Al-Battat with the hospital administrators and officials in the Welsh Office.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid

41. **Mrs. Anne Campbell**: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of overseas aid.

Mr. Baldry: The aid budget for the current year is some £2.2 billion.

Know-how Funds

42. **Mr. Heald**: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the contributions of British know-how funds relative to other aid given to the former Soviet Union and central and eastern Europe.

Mr. Baldry: The know-how fund is an important contributor to the transition process in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. The fund has a deservedly enviable reputation in the region.

45. **Mr. Harry Greenway**: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what work is being undertaken by the know-how fund in Albania.

Mr. Baldry: The know-how fund is supporting a range of activities in Albania. At present the main emphasis of the programme is health care and local government reform. Projects are also under way in many other fields, including agriculture, small business and the environment.

World Bank

43. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the work of the World bank inspection panel.

Mr. Baldry: The World bank's independent inspection panel became operational last August. To date, it has received one request for an inspection. We hope the panel will prove a useful addition to the existing systems of control provided by the board of directors and by bank management.

Reproductive Health Care

44. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what work the Overseas Development Administration is doing to improve reproductive health care.

Mr. Baldry: The Overseas Development Administration's strategy to improve reproductive health is expressed in its children by choice, not chance policy. It focuses on improving access to good quality contraception; helping to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infection, including HIV; and making pregnancy and childbirth safer. The ODA expects to have committed at least £100 million over 1994 and 1995 to reproductive health programmes.

Indonesia

46. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial support he is giving to the democratic trade union movement in Indonesia.

Mr. Baldry: Our aid programme to Indonesia does not include any financial support to the trade union movement.

Sri Lanka

47. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the present amount of aid funding being given to Sri Lanka.

Mr. Baldry: On present plans we expect to spend some £8.94 million on bilateral aid projects for Sri Lanka in 1994–95.

Baltic States

48. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to widen the scope of aid to the Baltic states.

Mr. Baldry: The know how fund will continue to provide rapid and flexible assistance to the reform process in the Baltic states. The countries concerned very much welcome our support.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the outcome of the United Nations development programme-sponsored conference on Rwanda in Geneva that has just concluded; how much was pledged by each of the participants; and for what purposes.

Mr. Baldry: Participants at the UNDP round table welcomed the priorities set out in the Government of Rwanda's programme of national reconciliation and socio-economic rehabilitation and recovery. They pledged almost $583 million in support of the programme and related activities. Individual pledges are set out in the table. The United Kingdom has also pledged a further £4 million to the United Nations consolidated inter-agency appeal for Rwanda, to meet emergency needs within Rwanda and in the region. Since April 1994, Britain has committed £66 million in emergency and rehabilitation assistance bilaterally and through the EU to help Rwandans affected by the crisis.

Round table conference for Rwanda
UNDP summary of funds pledged (US millions of dollars)

Donor	*Sub-Programme 1*	*Sub-Programme 2*	*Sub-Programme 3*	*Outside round table document*[1]	*Total*
Bilateral					
Austria	n/a	n/a	n/a	—	1.7
Belgium	12.4	2.7	20.5	—	35.6
Canada	7.7	—	9.5	—	17.2
France	—	—	—	—	amount to be determined
Germany	—	14.0	66.0	—	80.0
Ireland	0.6	n/a	n/a	—	1.6

Round table conference for Rwanda
UNDP summary of funds pledged (US millions of dollars)

Donor	*Sub-Programme 1*	*Sub-Programme 2*	*Sub-Programme 3*	*Outside round table document*[1]	*Total*
Italy	—	—	—	—	to be announced
Japan	—	22.5	—	—	22.5
Netherlands	19.5	—	13.5	—	33.0
New Zealand	—	—	—	—	to be announced
Russia	—	—	—	—	to be announced
Spain	n/a	—	4.5	—	9.5
Sweden	n/a	n/a	n/a	—	3.0
Switzerland	0.8	—	12.0	—	12.8
United Kingdom	1.5	—	1.5	—	3.0
USA	6.5	—	35.0	18.3	59.8
Sub-total	49	39.2	162.5	18.3	279.7
Multilateral					
African Development Bank	20.0	—	30.0	—	50.0
European Union Commission	49.2	—	68.4	9.6	127.2
International Fund Agricultural Development	—	—	15.0	—	15.0
International Monetary Fund	13.0	—	—	—	13.0
Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries	—	—	—	12.9	12.9
United Nations Agencies	—	—	10.0	—	10.0
World Bank	45.0	—	30.0	—	75.0
Sub-total	127.2	—	153.4	22.5	303.1
Total-funds pledges	176.2	39.2	315.9	40.8	582.8
Funds requested	189.6	273.7	300.9	—	764.1

Notes
[1] Government of Rwanda's programme of national reconciliation and socio-economic rehabilitation and recovery.
Sub-programme 1: financial support.
Sub-programme 2: reintegration of refugees and displaced—some duplication with consolidated inter-agency appeal.
Sub-programme 3: rehabilitation/development.
Pledges by Austria, Ireland, Spain and Sweden remain to be allocated into specific sub-programmes.
Thus the total of funds allocated to sub-programmes do not add up to the total.

Dams (Ecological Effect)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what study his Department is making of the ecological effect of dams.

Mr. Baldry: The only study which the ODA has in progress concerns the prediction of reservoir sedimentation rates. Guidance on how to take account of the ecological effect of dams is covered in the ODA's "Manual of Environmental Appraisal", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

Gynaecological Departments

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses there are in gynaecological out-patient and in-patient departments in the Northumberland health authority and Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital.

Mr. Sackville: The information available centrally is shown in the table. For more information the hon. Member may wish to contact the vice-chairman of Northumberland health authority, Mr. David Wright, and the chairman of Cheviot and Wansbeck NHS trust, Mr. Roger Baker.

Nursing and midwifery staff (excluding agency) in the gynaecology area of work as at 30 September 1992

Whole-Time Equivalents
Cheviot and Wansbeck Hospital*
Northumberland District Health Authority 10
Source:
PD(Stats)B non-medical workforce census.
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.
*denotes values of 5 and under.

Cosmetic Surgery

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met the Royal College of Surgeons to discuss the regulating of cosmetic surgery.

Mr. Sackville: We have had no such meeting.

Mental Illness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many physical assaults on staff and patients, including self-inflicted injuries, occurred on psychiatric wards in London in the last year that figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: National health service trusts and other providers of in-patient psychiatric services will collect information on assaults and self-inflicted injuries by patients to help them monitor the quality of service they provide. Health authorities and other purchasers can

obtain details through the contracting process. We do not require information to be submitted to the Department.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the bed occupancy rate for psychiatric wards in national health service hospitals and trusts in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham and *(c)* Manchester; and what is the method by which the bed occupancy rate is measured.

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities and providers of acute psychiatric services are familiar with the concept of bed occupancy and the Department has not sought to specify the method they should use to calculate occupancy rates. Average bed occupancy rates can be agreed as part of the contracting process and will relate to local circumstances. We do not require information about bed occupancy rates to be submitted to the Department.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what mechanism her Department monitors the effectiveness of mental health care services in London, Birmingham and Manchester; how often data are collected; what measurements are used; and how long after any data are collected they are published.

Mr. Bowis: The North Thames and South Thames, West Midlands and North West regional offices of the National Health Service Executive monitor the effectiveness of mental health services in London, Birmingham and Manchester respectively by working closely with district health authorities which are responsible for assessing the health needs of their local population and securing an appropriate range of services to meet those needs.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency departments there are in the United Kingdom at present; and what was the corresponding figure in each year since 1986.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have had accident and emergency facilities in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the table. Since 1991–92 information has been collected on the basis of national health service trusts and directly managed units with accident and emergency facilities. Before that, information was collected on an individual hospital basis. Comparable information for earlier years is not therefore available.

Trusts[1] and directly managed units with Accident and Emergency departments[2] England

Year	*Number*
1991–92	238
1992–93	226
1993–94	218

[1] A trust or a directly managed unit may consist of a number of hospitals each with its own A and E department.
[2] With medical staff on site and where the intention is to open 168 hours per week.

The provision of information about accident and emergency services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the functions currently carried out by regional health authorities; and who will be responsible for each function after the implementation of the Health Authorities Bill.

Mr. Malone: The transfer of functions currently carried out by regional health authorities has already been determined in all but two significant areas, in which detailed discussions are still under way.

National Health Service Executive headquarters, with advice from regional offices, will set the strategic framework, make revenue allocations to the new health authorities and make appointments to health authorities and NHS trusts. NHS Executive regional offices will be responsible for performance management of health authorities and NHS trusts and for admissions to the general practitioner fundholder scheme and allocations to GP fundholders. Regional offices will also be responsible through postgraduate deans for commissioning postgraduate medical education and training, for medical work force planning and for GP vocational training.

Consortia of health authorities and NHS trusts will take on responsibility for commissioning non-medical education and training and for non-medical work force planning. They will be supported, especially initially, by the regional offices and by a national strategy set by headquarters. Health authorities will take on purchasing of most specialised services and most public health functions, often on a lead purchaser basis or in consortia. Health authorities will also take on supervision of midwifery practice and responsibility for current RHA functions under the Mental Health Act 1983.

The contracts of junior doctors are under discussion with the profession. Future arrangements for handling complaints will be announced shortly in the light of the Government's response to the report of the Wilson committee.

Full details are contained in the Government document "Managing the New NHS—Functions and Responsibilities in the new NHS" published in July 1994.

NHS Treatment (Non-UK Citizens)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the cost to the NHS of providing NHS treatment to non-UK citizens who are not entitled to receive it.

Mr. Sackville: Guidance issued to health authorities and national health service trusts sets out the procedures to be followed in obtaining payment where patients are not exempt from charges for NHS hospital treatment under the NHS (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989 (as amended). Those who believe they have evidence of such fraudulent behaviour should contact the chief executive of the NHS unit concerned.

Private Sector Contracts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts have been awarded by *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* local authority social services departments to the private sector in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend

the Secretary of State for the Environment for information on local authority social services department contracts with the private sector.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she gives to local health authorities for the treatment of myalgic encephalomyelitis; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The production of guidance on the treatment of what is increasingly being referred to as chronic-fatigue syndrome is a matter for the health care professions and not for the Department. The Department may however commend to purchasers guidelines which have been accepted by all the professional bodies.

The national task force on CFS/PVFS—post-viral fatigue syndrome—ME which is autonomous of the Department of Health, has produced a report. With a view to securing progress and promoting the development of a professional consensus, the chief medical officer has invited the conference of colleges to consider the report. A response from the conference is not expected until spring.

Maternity Wards

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many maternity wards have been provided in hospitals in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Information about the number of maternity wards is not available centrally. However, data on the number of available beds in maternity units are contained in the publication "Bed Availability for England—Financial Year 1993–94", copies of which are available in the Library.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fundholders have overrun their budgets; and by what level.

Mr. Malone: In 1992–93, the latest year for which audited information is available, 147 general practitioner fundholders overspent their budgets. The overspend was £9.8 million or 1.2 per cent. of total fundholder budgets.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of general practitioner fundholding practices and the total number of general practitioners who are fundholders.

Mr. Malone: There are currently 2,040 general practitioner fundholding practices and 8,760 general practitioner fundholders in England.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average budget for fundholders in 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 and the comparable budget held by district health authorities for non-fundholders in those years.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply the then Minister for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 20 June 1994, columns 26–27.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the average waiting times for fundholders and non-fundholding general practitioners' patients; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: It is not possible to calculate separate average waiting times for patients from general practitioners fundholders and non-fundholding GPs from centrally held data.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time taken for the London ambulance service to arrive at the scene following an emergency 999 call.

Mr. Sackville: London ambulance service figures show that following an emergency call the average time taken for an ambulance to arrive at the scene is 14.5 minutes.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the rules and regulations in her Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which her Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on her Department's manpower.

Mr. Sackville: We withdrew three sets of regulations in 1994 relating to medicines control. A good deal of deregulatory activity consists of amending or replacement regulation, or new and better guidance, rather than withdrawal. For example, we have amended regulations to allow more medicines to be sold over the counter without the need for a prescription; issued new guidance on welfare inspections of independent boarding schools and on regulation of day care for young children, reduced the number of boarding schools required to register as children's homes; and widened choice of venue for people getting married. The Department is continuing to consider rules and regulations for possible withdrawal or simplification. Details will be announced as and when consultations are completed.

There are no manpower effects for the Department, but we are committed to reducing staffing in the central Department by 21 per cent. by April 1997.

NHS Trusts (Borrowing)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those trusts that have received either *(a)* a loan from her Department or *(b)* an overdraft guarantee in each year since their inception, indicating (i) the amount concerned and (ii) the reason for its allocation.

Mr. Sackville: Information on loans and guarantees will be placed in the Library. No information is available on the reasons why loans are drawn. Trusts borrow principally to support their capital investment activities, but may also borrow to cover working capital requirements. All the borrowing detailed was within agreed limits. Trusts use overdrafts to cover very short-term working capital requirements. The purpose of overdraft guarantees is to reduce the cost of this borrowing from the trusts' bankers.

Health Care, East Anglia

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what savings she expects to result from the

abolition of the Anglia and Oxford regional health authority; and how many of those savings will be put into health care in East Anglia.

Mr. Malone: By 1997–98, total annual savings from the abolition of regional health authorities are expected to be around £100 million. These substantial savings will be retained by the national health service and thus will be available to be reinvested in patient care.

Dental Services

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the regulations concerning the provision by the NHS of out-of-hours dental cover for *(a)* patients registered with an NHS dentist and *(b)* patients not registered with an NHS dentist; and if she will make a statement on the content of those regulations.

Mr. Malone: The regulations concerning the provision of out-of-hours emergency dental cover, for both registered and unregistered patients, are contained in the National Health Service (General Dental Services) Regulations 1992.

The terms of service for general dental practitioners contained in these regulations require dentists to make reasonable arrangements to ensure that patients registered with them for capitation or continuing care can get treatment in an emergency.

Regulation 14 of these regulations enables family health services authorities to make arrangements for treatment in urgent cases of patients who have difficulty obtaining treatment. FHSAs organise emergency sessions at health centres at weekends and bank holidays, mainly for unregistered patients.

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by family health services authority the arrangements which exist for emergency dental cover out of hours; and what procedures are in place to monitor the extent and quality of these arrangements.

Mr. Malone: Emergency dental services for registered patients are the responsibility of their dentists. For non-registered patients, information about emergency dental services is obtained in an annual survey of family health services authorities in England and Wales. The results for 1993–94 are available in the Library. It is for each FHSA to manage the general dental service locally, and this will include monitoring the extent and quality of such emergency arrangements.

Cervical Smears

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the percentage of United Kingdom women being offered cervical smears three-yearly or less.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally for England. Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued to hospitals in respect of charging for cervical smears if done more frequently than every five years; and what is the recommended charge.

Mr. Sackville: None. It is for individual health authorities to negotiate contracts with hospitals to provide a cervical screening service for their resident population, in accordance with national guidelines.

Computerisation

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure on computerisation in primary care in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Reimbursement of the costs for computerisation in general practice are shown in the table. The amount reimbursed in 1990–91, when the scheme was introduced, includes claims for the years 1989–90 and 1990–91.

Year	*£ million*
1990–91	17.5
1991–92	34.0
1992–93	40.2
1993–94	38.4

Drug Dispensing (Qualifications)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what qualifications are required for staff dispensing drugs in a general practitioner's dispensing practice.

Mr. Malone: The responsibility for ensuring the competence of staff dispensing drugs in general practitioners' practices lies with the doctor who is subject to the enforcement provisions of the Medicines Act 1968.

General Practitioners (Administrative Costs)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the administrative costs of all general practice per general practitioner.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has on the maximum waiting time for repair of an aortic aneurysm.

Mr. Malone: It is not appropriate to have a maximum waiting time for repair of an aortic aneurism. Each case is different and it must be for the clinician to decide whether surgical treatment is appropriate and when surgery should be performed. Patients are placed on a waiting list only if, in the opinion of a clinician at the time of assessment, their condition is judged to be stable.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total of days patients have waited in each of the last five years for treatment in NHS hospitals.

Mr. Malone: The information requested cannot be derived from waiting time data available centrally.

Resuscitation Facilities

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the availability of resuscitation facilities at *(a)* King's College hospital and *(b)* other hospitals while invasive cardiac investigations and treatments are being undertaken.

Mr. Sackville: Full resuscitation facilities are available at King's College hospital, Denmark Hill, in all areas

where invasive cardiac investigations are undertaken. Full resuscitation facilities are also available on the King's College hospital, Dulwich, site although no invasive cardiac procedures are carried out there. Resuscitation facilities are generally available in other specialist hospital departments where risk of cardiac arrest is high.

Infectious Material (Postal Services)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evidence she has that human tissue and infectious material sent through the post has posed a health hazard; how many cases arose in the last year; and what the hazardous material was;

(2) what guidance she has on the packaging of human tissue samples and infectious material when sent through the post; and what status this guidance has.

Mr. Sackville: No such cases were reported last year. There is a range of measures to safeguard against infection as a result of the postal transport of pathology specimens. There is no evidence that these measures are inadequate. The Post Office guide sets out the requirements under the Post Office Telecommunications Act, 1969—revised 1981—for sending specimens through the post, and carriage by rail or road is covered by new Health and Safety Executive regulations on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous goods for carriage by road and rail, 1994. The transportation of certain pathogens listed in the Health and Safety (Dangerous Pathogens) Regulations 1981, all the provisions of which have been subsumed into the new Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994, requires prior notification to the Health and Safety Executive which will notify the appropriate Health Minister. The Health and Safety Commission's health service advisory committee guidance on safe working and the prevention of infection in clinical laboratories 1991 refers to the procedures which laboratories should observe in dispatching material. In all work situations, the potential for exposure to infection from material either in transit or under examination has to be assessed under COSHH and the appropriate safe working procedures adopted.

Prescribing Costs

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the prescribing costs of *(a)* a dispensing general practitioner and *(b)* non-dispensing general practitioner.

Mr. Malone: Information is contained in the annual report of the Prescription Pricing Authority for the period 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994, copies of which are available in the Library.

Accumulated Assets

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total amount of accumulated assets of trust hospitals and directly managed units in each year since 1989.

Mr. Sackville: District health authorities did not account for fixed assets, and there were no trusts, prior to 1991–92. Information for 1991–92 to 1993–94 is shown in the table.

Accumulated assets

	DMUs[1] £	*NHS trusts* £
1991–92	15,028,465,000	2,651,111,000
1992–93	12,268,968,000	6,465,354,000
1993–94	Note 1 refers	12,464,800,000

Source: NHS Summarised accounts.

[1] Directly Managed Units.

Notes:

1. In 1993–94 district health authorities were not required to provide a separate figure for DMUs.
2. The 1993–94 figures are provisional.
3. The figures represent the total assets employed by DMUs and NHS trusts—fixed assets plus net current assets.

Care in the Community

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what distinction she makes between *(a)* community care and *(b)* care in the community; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Community care, as used in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, refers to the provision of services and support which people who are affected by problems of aging, illness or disability need to be able to live as independently as possible in their own homes, or in residential care. Care in the community is a term used specifically to refer to policies for mentally ill people and people with learning disabilities which enable them to live as full, independent and normal lives in or as near to the community as possible.

Bereaved Relatives

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is available for the treatment of relatives of patients who die within *(a)* King's College hospital and *(b)* other hospitals; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Guidance, which applies to all hospitals, is contained in HSG(92)8, copies of which are available in the Library.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff her Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in the latest available year; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested on staff employed in each of the standard English regions is shown in the table. Information about departmental running costs by region is not available. Details of the Departments' gross running costs are provided in the Department's annual report for 1994–95, Cm 2512.

Region	
Scotland	—
Northern	14
Yorks and Humberside	896
North West	679
East Midlands	55
West Midlands	120
Wales	—
East Anglia	—

Region	
South East	2,894
South West	19
Northern Ireland	—
Overseas	—

Source: MANDATE returns to Treasury from Chessington Computer Centre.

Notes:

1. Figures include inward loans and secondments, fixed term appointments and staff in Agencies.
2. Figures exclude casual and industrial staff and outward loans and secondments.

Closures

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list the hospitals or trusts in respect of which she has been formally consulted about partial or complete closure in the last three years;

(2) pursuant to her answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *983*, what information is held regarding the number of accident and emergency departments currently threatened with closure or that have closed since April 1991;

(3) what information is provided to her Department by district health authorities, trusts, regional health authorities and NHS Executive on *(a)* hospital closures, *(b)* ward closures, *(c)* accident and emergency department closures, *(d)* reducing NHS beds and *(e)* increasing private beds and bed units;

(4) pursuant to her answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *983*, how many hospital closures in England since April 1991 are known to her Department following objection to a proposed closure from a community health council;

(5) pursuant to her answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *983*, what information her Department does not collected which is collected by the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland offices on the number of hospitals closed since April 1991 or the number of accident and emergency departments currently threatened with closure.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The Department does not routinely collect information on hospital, ward or accident and emergency department closures. Information is available centrally on proposals to close, or change the use of, health service facilities which are referred to Ministers for decision following objections from a community health council. A list of such proposed closures referred to Ministers in the period 1992–94 is available in the Library.

The Department collects information on the number of national health service beds which is published annually in the booklet "Bed Availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library. Information on private beds in NHS hospitals is not collected centrally. However, information on the number of private non-NHS beds is collected and published annually in "Private Hospitals, Homes and Clinics Registered Under Section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1994", copies of which are also available in the Library.

Information collected by the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland offices on hospital closures and accident and emergency departments threatened with closure is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

DEFENCE

Operation Granby

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what indications there were that *(a)* chemical and *(b)* biological weapons were used by the Iraqi forces, or anyone under their command, during Operation Granby.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, dated 6 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what indictions there were that (a) chemical and (b) biological weapons were used by the Iraqi forces, or anyone under their command, during Operation GRANBY has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. There are no indications or evidence to suggest that the Iraqi forces or anyone under their command used chemical or biological weapons against the British Armed Forces during Operation GRANBY.

Correspondence

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to reply to the letter of 7 December 1994, from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, concerning the death of Fusilier G. Riley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My noble friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will reply shortly.

Land, Scotland

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many acres of land are currently occupied by *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Royal Navy in Scotland; what proposals he has to acquire more land, in Scotland; for any of the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: At 31 March 1994, the latest date for which records are available, the land occupied by the Armed Forces in Scotland was *(a)* the Army—20,883 acres *(b)* the Royal Air Forces—9,482 acres and *(c)* the Royal Navy—16,116 acres. There are no proposals to acquire more land in Scotland at this time.

HMS Andromeda

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for HMS Andromeda; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: It is planned to sell HMS Andromeda and initial negotiations, by the Disposal Sales Agency with a friendly overseas navy, are in train. It is not our practice to discuss details of such negotiations in the interests of customer confidentiality.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last refit of HMS Andromeda took place; and what was its cots.

Mr. Freeman: The last refit of HMS Andromeda was undertaken between August 1990 and December 1991 at a total cost of some £27 million.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent valuations have been placed on HMS Andromeda.

Mr. Freeman: Valuations of HMS Andromeda form part of the negotiations being considered on her sale. It is not our practice to discuss details of such negotiations in the interests of customer confidentiality.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Freeman: My Department is playing a full part in the deregulation initiative. As a non-regulatory Department, the Ministry of Defence has focused its efforts on relieving unnecessary administrative burdens on its suppliers; streamlining contracts procedures; and improving communications with industry.

Whitehall Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total annual expenditure on Whitehall organisations included in the Defence budget, for each year since 1979, expressed in 1994 prices and broken down by organisation.

Mr. Soames: The information is not available in the form requested and could not be compiled without disproportionate cost.

Trident

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the potential savings which would be made by reducing the number of warheads developed, purchased and maintained for the Trident nuclear weapons programme, to the average of the number of Polaris-based nuclear warheads deployed between 1984 and 1990.

Mr. Freeman: None. Our plans are based on sustaining through the life of Trident, the minimum deterrent capability required for the security of the United kingdom.

Army Reserve

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the *(a)* total manpower and *(b)* the cost of supporting the United Kingdom Army Reserve for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Soames: The total manpower of the United Kingdom Army Reserve for each year since 1979 is as follows.

The costs of supporting the United Kingdom Army Reserve are spread out among a wide variety of budgets and cannot therefore be identified in the form requested.

Strength of the Army Regular Reserves (Male and Female)

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*Thousands 1986*
Regular Reserves	126.9	133.1	137.4	140.1	138.2	143.2	150.2	153.9
Territorial Army[1]	59.4	63.3	69.6	69.1	72.8	71.4	73.7	77.7
Ulster Defence Regiment[2]	7.6	7.4	7.4	7.2	7.1	6.7	6.4	6.5
Home Service Force[3]	—	—	—	—	0.3	0.3	0.9	3.0

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*Thousands 1994*
Regular Reserves	160.4	167.7	175.3	183.5	187.7	188.6	190.1	192.5
Territorial Army[1]	78.5	74.7	72.5	72.5	73.3	71.3	68.5	65.0
Ulster Defence Regiment[2]	6.6	6.3	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.0	—	—
Home Service Force[3]	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.3	2.9	0.2	—

Falkland Islands

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the annual level of defence expenditure relating to the protection of the Falkland islands for each year since 1983; and what is his estimate of the current annual level of defence expenditure per household for *(a)* the Falkland islands and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: The annual cost of defence expenditure relating to the protection of the Falkland islands is as follows:

	£ million
1983–84	637
1984–85	644
1985–86	572
1986–87	402
1987–88	229
1988–89	102
1989–90	68
1990–91	66
1991–92	72
1992–93	58
1993–94	67

The cost to each United Kingdom household of defence expenditure in the Falkland islands was approximately £2.90 in 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available.

The total defence cash limit for the United Kingdom in 1994–95, is £22,735,585,000 representing a cost to each United Kingdom household of approximately £981 this financial year.

No statistics are held by the Ministry of Defence that would enable the calculation of Defence Expenditure per household in the Falkland islands.

Telephone Line Rentals

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was paid in advance to BT for telephone line rentals in each of the last five years; if his Department included in its calculations the interest lost in this process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: As reported in paragraph 63 of the report, entitled "Ministry of Defence: Management of Telephones" (HC 637), some £30,000,000 a year was paid in advance to BT for telephone line rentals in the period prior to financial year 1993–94. This practice of paying yearly in advance was discontinued in 1993–94, and such bills are now paid quarterly in advance, representing a substantial saving to the Exchequer in additional cost of borrowing that would otherwise have been required.

Inhumane Weapons Convention

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *842*, what proposals for additions to the inhumane weapons convention have been made; by which other countries; and what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of each of these proposals.

Mr. Soames: Sweden and the International Committee of the Red Cross have proposed that the revised UN weaponry convention include a new protocol on blinding weapons. Sweden has also proposed a new protocol on naval mines; and Switzerland has proposed a new protocol on small calibre munitions. Our main aim remains the strengthening of the restrictions on the use of anti-personnel landmines, and we would not wish to see discussion of proposed new protocols detract from that objective. However, the United Kingdom is studying each of these proposals closely, and will make a final decision on them in good time for the review conference later this year.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *548*, if he will give details of the experiments carried out under *(a)* mild, *(b)* moderate, *(c)* substantial and *(d)* unclassified project licences currently in effect at his Department's establishments; if he will identify the animals involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The types of studies carried out under the project licences currently in effect at the Department's establishments by categories are as follows:

(a) mild: These include studies of the influence of stress on the toxicity of potential CW agents, the effectiveness of skin protectants and decontaminants, the use of transdermal techniques to administer medical countermeasures and the acceleration of healing in chemical warfare agent induced injury.

(b) moderate: These include studies of the mechanism of action, pharmacology and treatment of chemical and biological warfare agent poisoning and infection, detection and identification of biological agents, the control of infection in wounds, improved techniques for military surgery and trauma studies and exposure to different pressures of air or oxygen for varying durations.

(c) substantial: These include studies of the mechanism of action and treatment of chemical and biological warfare agents.

(d) unclassified: These include studies of the attenuation of impact loads.

It would involve a disproportionate amount of effort to identify the animals involved.

Otterburn Training Area

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which civil servants or military personnel have met representatives from the campaign against the national park regarding the Otterburn training area in the Northumberland national park.

Mr. Soames: Although civil servants and military personnel from my Department come into contact with members of the campaign against the national park, no official meetings have been held with the organisation.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial or other support has been given by his Department or the Army to the campaign against the national park regarding the Otterburn training area in the Northumberland national park.

Mr. Soames: None.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken or will take to ensure that all interested local authorities as well as individuals and groups fully understand the proposed developments regarding possible new military training at the Otterburn training area in the Northumberland national park.

Mr. Soames: While formal consultation about the proposals which are eventually to be submitted by my Department will be a matter for the local planning authority, our environmental consultants have already sought the views of statutory bodies as well as a large number of voluntary sector groups and local people. In addition, my officials have provided general briefings to all local parish councils as well as Tynedale and Alnwick district councils.

Conducted tours of the ranges have also been provided to, amongst others, the Council for National Parks, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, the Northumberland and Newcastle Society, the Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Northumberland National Park and the Northumberland National Park Committee. The national park officer has also been briefed on my Department's AS90 and multi-launch rocket system proposals for Otterburn training area.

Finally, arrangements are in hand to provide a static exhibition which explains fully our proposals. The exhibition, which we expect to be available in the spring, will be placed in a number of key locations in the local area.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by how many the number of civilian posts at the Otterburn training area is expected to rise or fall *(a)* if the proposed development regarding the AS90 and multi-launch rocket system proceeds and *(b)* if the proposed development does not take place.

Mr. Soames: We do not expect there to be any change in the number of staff employed at Otterburn training area if my Department's current proposals regarding the AS90 and multi-launch rocket system do not proceed. Up to 15 additional staff may be required, however, if the training area is developed as proposed.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are involving the cessation of military training at the Otterburn training area.

Mr. Soames: Otterburn training area provides essential training facilities which could not be dispensed with or easily replicated elsewhere. Consequently, we have no plans to reduce or phase out military training at the Otterburn training area.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions he has met representatives of the campaign against the national park regarding the Otterburn training area in Northumberland national park; whether he has been invited to any meeting on the issue; and when representations regarding this organisation and its aims were made to him and by whom.

Mr. Soames: No official meetings have taken place with members or representatives of the campaign against the national park and no invitations have been received from the organisation. My officials received a request from the CANP last year for a briefing on AS90 and the multi-launch rocket system, in relation to the proposed developments at Otterburn.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department or the Army have been consulted by the campaign against the national park regarding the Otterburn training area in the Northumberland national park.

Mr. Soames: The campaign against the national park is one of a number of organisations which have made representations to my Department expressing their views about our proposals for the Otterburn training area.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what benefits have been offered by his Department or the Army to their tenant farmers at the Otterburn training area on the basis of the proposed developments involving the AS90 and multi-launch rocket system proceeding.

Mr. Soames: None.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many full-time and part-time civilian posts exist at the Otterburn training area in Northumberland.

Mr. Soames: One hundred and ten full-time and 10 part-time civilian personnel are employed by my Department at Otterburn training area, together with 14 contractor's full-time personnel.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to reduce or phase out military training at the Otterburn training area should the proposed development concerning the AS90 and multi-launch rocket system not take place.

Mr. Soames: Otterburn training area provides essential training facilities which could not be dispensed with or easily replicated elsewhere. Consequently, we have no plans to reduce or phase out military training at the Otterburn training area if the proposed development does not take place.

Service Doctors

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of doctors serving in the armed forces in the rank of wing commander or equivalent and in each of the ranks higher than wing commander or equivalent.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is provided in the following table:

Doctors in the Armed Forces medical services

	Royal Navy	*Army*	*RAF*
Surgical Commander/ Lt. Colonel/Wing Commander	80	118	99
Surgical Captain/Colonel/ Group Captain	23[1]	35	21
Surgical Commodore/Brigadier/ Air Commodore	—	11	11
SRA/Major General/ Air Vice Marshall	1	2	2
SVA/Lt. General/Air Marshall	1	—	—
Total	105	166	133

[1] The Royal Navy rank of Surgical Commodore is an appointment only—all are counted as Surgical Captain.

Notes:

1. Figures as at 1 February 1995.

2. Figures include all doctors i.e., in clinical appointments (primary and secondary care), specialist staff, training and administrative/ HQ functions.

Medical Consultants

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the projected number of medical consultants in surgery and anaesthesia to be employed by his Department in *(a)* two years' time, *(b)* five years' time and *(c)* 10 years' time.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The reorganisation of Defence secondary care recommended by "Front Line First" is due to be completed by April 1996. From that time, there will be a total of 74 posts for consultant surgeons, that is, burns and plastic surgery, ENT/ORL surgery, ophthalmology, oral surgery, general surgery, orthopaedic surgery and urology, and 36 for consultant anaesthetists. No further changes to the number of consultant posts are planned.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical consultants in surgery and anaesthesia have been newly appointed to the services in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The information requested is provided in the table.

	Anaesthetists			*Surgeons*		
ASCAB[1]	*Royal Navy*	*Army*	*RAF*	*Royal Navy*	*Army*	*RAF*
1994	—	4	2	1	4	2
1993	2	1	—	—	—	1
1992	1	2	1	1	1	1
1991	—	—	1	1	4	3
1990	1	4	—	3	3	1
1989	1	3	—	—	1	—
1988	1	2	2	2	2	—
1987	1	3	—	—	4	—
1986	—	3	—	2	3	—
1985	—	1	—	1	1	1

[1] Armed Services Consultant Advisory Board

Notes:

1. Surgery includes the following specialisations: burns and plastic surgery, ENT/ORL surgery, ophthalmology, oral surgery, general surgery, orthopaedic surgery and urology.

2. Information relating to numbers of consultant surgeons and anaesthetists is not held centrally but has been extracted manually from single Service sources. Figures relating to earlier years may not be precise.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical consultants in surgery and anaesthesia have left the services in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The information requested is provided in the table:

	Anaesthetists			*Surgeons*		
Year	*Royal Navy*	*Army*	*RAF*	*Royal Navy*	*Army*	*RAF*
1994	3	3	—	4	1	4
1993	2	2	3	2	5	1
1992	2	3	2	1	1	2
1991	2	6	2	6	3	1
1990	—	3	—	2	—	4
1989	1	—	1	2	2	2
1988	—	—	—	—	—	—
1987	—	—	2	1	—	1
1986	—	—	—	—	—	2
1985	—	2	1	—	—	1

Notes:

1. Surgery includes the following specialisations: burns and plastic surgery, ENT/ORL surgery, opthalmology, oral surgery, general surgery, orthopaedic surgery and urology.

2. Information relating to numbers of consultant surgeons and anaesthetists is not held centrally but has been extracted manually from single Service sources. Figures relating to earlier years may not be precise.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical consultants in surgery and anaesthesia have applied for employment to his Department in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* One only, an anaesthetist who applied to the RAF in both 1992 and 1993—he was selected but did not take up his commission.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical consultants in surgery and anaesthesia have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The information requested is provided in the table:

	Anaesthetists			*Surgeons*		
Year	*Royal Navy*	*Army*	*RAF*	*Royal Navy*	*Army*	*RAF*
1994	8	18	8	18	29	21
1993	8	17	11	19	26	20
1992	8	18	11	21	31	21
1991	8	18	12	24	31	21
1990	10	25	11	23	30	21
1989	9	23	9	24	27	22
1988	8	20	9	22	28	22
1987	8	13	6	20	26	22
1986	8	9	6	21	22	22
1985	8	7	7	19	19	22

Notes:

1. Surgery includes the following specialisations: burns and plastic surgery, ENT/ORL surgery, ophthalmology, oral surgery, general surgery, orthopaedic surgery and urology.

2. Information relating to numbers of consultant surgeons and anaesthetists is not held centrally but has been extracted manually from single Service sources. Figures relating to earlier years may not be precise.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Bodies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people sit on non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland;

(2) what is the current number of non-departmental public bodies operating in Northern Ireland; and what is their combined annual budget;

(3) how many people sit on two or more non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: There are currently 2,329 people sitting on 104 non-departmental public bodies operating in Northern Ireland.

The total gross expenditure of non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland for 1993–94 was £2,300.4 million while the total budget funded by Government for 1993–94 was £1,856.2 million.

Some 180 people sit on two or more non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland.

Agricultural Census

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the rate of response in each of the past five years to the June agricultural census in Northern Ireland; and when was the last prosecution for failure to return the June census forms.

Mr. Ancram: The rate of response in each of the past five years to the June agricultural census was:

Year	*Response rate (Per cent.)*
1990	78
1991	78
1992	79
1993	77
1994	78

No prosecutions for failure to return the June census form have been brought during the past 25 years. Nor am I aware of any prosecutions before this but to check the relevant records would entail disproportionate cost.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs have been provided in the district councils areas of *(a)* Down and *(b)* Newry and Mourne in each of the past five years as a result of assistance from the Industrial Development Board; and when the Industrial Development Board last arranged a visit to each of these council areas by a potential inward investor.

Mr. Ancram: Information on jobs promoted with assistance from the Industrial Development Board in the Down district council and the Newry and Mourne district council areas is set out in the table. The last visit by potential inward investors, arranged by the IDB, was on 8 December 1994 in the case of Down district council and on 18 November 1994 to Newry and Mourne district council area.

Jobs promoted with IDB assistance

	Down	*Newry and Mourne*
1990–91	—	79
1991–92	—	—
1992–93	—	75
1993–94	50	364
1994–95 (to 31 December)	—	18
Total	50	536

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Ancram: A list of the statutory rules and regulations revoked in the 12-month period ending December 1994 has been placed in the Library.

Work is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed.

The manpower implications are taken into account in the central manpower plans which will be published in the Northern Ireland expenditure plans and priorities in March.

Irish Language Schools

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what plans he has to establish schools that will teach through the medium of the Irish language or to support such schools set up by other bodies;

(2) what plans he has to set up bilingual schools in English and Irish in Northern Ireland or to support similar institutions set up by other bodies.

Mr. Ancram: The Government have no power to establish directly any type of school. However, they are prepared to consider soundly based proposals from other bodies for either Irish language or bilingual schools. As is the case with any new school, that consideration will, however, have to be in the context of ensuring effective and efficient use of resources.

Three Irish-medium primary schools are presently in receipt of 100 per cent. recurrent and capital grants.

Private Clegg

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration was given to charging Private Clegg with manslaughter; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

Careful consideration was given by the prosecuting authority to the appropriate charges in this case. It was concluded that in relation to the death of Karen Reilly the proper charge on the available evidence was murder.

EDUCATION

Education Assets Board

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the decisions taken by his Department following recommendations from the Education Assets Board relating to the educational establishments listed in his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, columns *513–14*; and when those decisions were made.

Mr. Robin Squire: Since 18 January 1994, my right hon. Friend has issued final directions in respect of the

following cases that were referred by the Education Assets Board:

Grant-Maintained Schools

Wymondham College, Norfolk

Direction: that a debit balance in the authority's books of account did not transfer to the governing body of the school.

Date: 22 February 1994

Epsom and Ewell High School, Surrey

Direction: that the liability for a leasing agreement did not transfer to the governing body of the school.

Date: 20 December 1994

Higher Education Institutions

University of West of England/Bath College of HE

Direction: no provision in the loan agreement to be concluded between the Avon Authority and the EAB in respect of the institutions concerned for the loans to be secured. No amendment relating to the repayment period and the terms on which the loans are repaid.

Date: 25 February 1994

In addition, my right hon. Friend has issued "minded to" directions in respect of the following cases:

Grant-Maintained Schools

Great Barr School, Birmingham—26 September 1994

Dartford Grammar School for Girls, Kent—11 November 1994

Abbotswood School, Hampshire—25 November 1994

Pate's Grammar School, Gloucestershire—23 January 1995

Further Education Institutions

Lincolnshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture—September 1994

A further referral from the Education Assets Board involving a dispute between Thamesview school and Kent county council was withdrawn as a result of the parties involved reaching agreement.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the membership of the Education Assets Board and indicate whether its deliberations and reports are made public.

Mr. Robin Squire: The membership of the Education Assets Board is as follows:

Mr. R. Suddards CBE, DL (Chairman)
Mr. B. Arthur CBE
Mr. K. Bridge
Ms K. Buckley
Mr. H. Couch
Mr. M. Edwards CBE, QC
Miss A. Lees
Mr. P. Lewis
Mrs. M. Ryding
Mr. A. Soames
Mr. A Salomons
Mr. S. Hoare (Chief Executive and ex-officio member)

The board's deliberations are not made public. Its decisions are reported to the parties directly concerned. There is nothing to prevent them from making the board's decisions public.

Bath University

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what representations she has received about her Department's decision to withdraw funding from the postgraduate translation and interpretation course at Bath University; and how many of these included offers of funding from commerce and industry;

(2) what considerations underlay the withdrawal of funds from the postgraduate translation and interpretation clause at Bath university; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received three letters about the withdrawal of bursary support for students undertaking the postgraduate diploma in language studies—interpreting and translating—course at Bath university. No offers of funding from commerce or industry have been received.

The decision to withdraw funding was taken as part of the review of public expenditure for 1995–96 in which my right hon. Friend takes account of demands and priorities for spending.

Staffordshire Local Education Authority

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the annual increase in central Government payments to Staffordshire local education authority in each of the past 10 years; what would have been the increase required to remove the effect of inflation; and what approximate savings he expects to have arrived as a result of the transfer of schools to local management.

Mr. Robin Squire: The system of local government finance before 1990–91 was different in structure and coverage to the present system of standard spending assessments on which central Government payments to Staffordshire county council are mainly based. The table sets out the annual underlying change in each of the years since 1990–91 in Staffordshire's education standard spending assessment, after allowing for local authority changes of function and inflation. Savings which schools and local education authorities may have made specifically as a result of the introduction of local management of schools are not readily quantifiable by the Department.

Year	
1990–91 to 1991–92	increase of 9.3 per cent.
1991–92 to 1992–93	increase of 2.6 per cent.
1992–93 to 1993–94	decrease of 0.5 per cent.
1993–94 to 1994–95	increase of 0.6 per cent.
1994–95 to 1995–96	decrease of 2.0 per cent.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the rules and regulations in her Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which her Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on her Department's manpower.

Mr. Boswell: The Department has not withdrawn any rules and regulations in the last 12 months, other than through the legal process of revocation and replacement. We have, however, reduced the amount of detailed prescription in the revised national curriculum to be introduced from August 1995 and have amended the assessment arrangements to reduce the amount of time required of teachers for this purpose.

The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed.

The manpower implications are taken into account in the Department's manpower plans which will be published in the Department's annual report in March.

Nursery Education

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her estimate of the annual cost of extending nursery provision to all three and four-year-old children in the United Kingdom based on the current average cost of such provision; and what provision there is within her Department's budget for such an extension of nursery education for each of the years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99.

Mr. Forth: Costs would depend on the type of provision and the balance between full-time and part-time provision. Funding will be determined as part of the development of detailed proposals on how to achieve the target for expansion of pre-school provision set by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

The Department's expenditure plans for 1995–96 do not include provision for the extension of nursery education. Provision for future years will be considered during the 1995 public expenditure survey.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans the Student Loans Company has to purchase a new computer facility; what companies have been invited to tender; what advantages the new system will have over the existing system; what is the estimated cost of the new system; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Regional Operations

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many staff her Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in the latest available year; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department as currently constituted does not operate on a regional basis; its headquarters functions are carried out in offices in London and Darlington. The Department's only executive agency, the Teachers Pensions Agency, which is responsible for administration of the teachers' superannuation scheme, also operates from the Darlington site.

In 1993–94, the latest year for which firm figures are available, the Department's overall staff number—including the TPA—was 2,101 of which 1,214 were based in London and 887 in Darlington.

In 1993–94, the total net provision for running costs was £94.3 million, with final outturn of £88.4 million. Of this expenditure, approximately £59 million was attributed to London and £29.4 million to Darlington.

Ofsted

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what costs have been incurred in furniture and fittings at Ofsted's new offices in London; and what were the removal costs from its old offices.

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

TRANSPORT

European Union

13. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will next meet his counterparts in the European Union; and what is on the agenda for the meeting.

Dr. Mawhinney: I expect to meet my European colleagues at the Transport Council in Brussels on 13 and 14 March. The Council will cover a range of transport issues, primarily in the rail, road and maritime sectors.

Buses

14. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding standardisation of buses within the European Union and the implications for passengers.

Dr. Mawhinney: My Department has received a number of representations, mainly from manufacturers and operators, about the implications for the United Kingdom bus industry and its customers of an EC proposal for a draft directive on bus construction.

Red Routes

15. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made with red routes in London.

Mr. Norris: The red route pilot scheme in north and east London has been running since 1991. The traffic director is progressively implementing the rest of the 315-mile red route network with the objective of having it operational by the year 2000.

29. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the cost of red routes.

Mr. Norris: The total cost of design, development and implementation of red route measures is estimated to be around £130 million at 1995–96 prices. This is in addition to the expenditure of some £5 million at outturn prices on the pilot red route.

A34

17. **Sir David Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his plans for the provision of a bypass for Newbury on the A34.

Dr. Mawhinney: The scheme for an A34 bypass of Newbury remains in the road programme. However, against the background of continuing public concern I wish to be quite sure that the present proposal is the right one. I have therefore put the scheme on hold and asked the

Highways Agency to look again at the plans for relieving congestion at Newbury and to report back as soon as possible.

Relief Road, Birmingham

18. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the implications of the standing advisory committee on trunk road assessments report on the Birmingham northern relief road project.

Mr. Watts: After considering the Government's response to the SACTRA report on generated traffic and the Department's formal guidance, the BNRR public inquiry has been provided with a statement identifying how the Department views the impacts of SACTRA's findings. It is now for the inspector to consider that statement and the results of the on-going work which it identifies.

I am satisfied that the inquiry is the proper forum to consider any implications.

Rail Privatisation

19. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the impact rail privatisation will have on the Network SouthEast, south central division.

Mr. Watts: Privatisation is designed to halt and reverse the decline in railway use. For the first time there will be a contractual commitment to specified levels of service. Details of passenger service requirements for Network SouthCentral will be released later this year.

20. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that bids by private sector organisations to operate train services are considered with efficiency and speed by his Department, the Rail Regulator and the Franchising Director.

Mr. Watts: The consideration of proposals from private sector organisations to operate train services is primarily the responsibility of the Rail Regulator and, for franchised services, of the Franchising Director. Both are aware of the need to deal efficiently and quickly with proposals, subject to taking the steps necessary to fulfil their statutory functions and duties.

27. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the directors of Scotrail to discuss the proposed privatisation plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend met directors of British Rail's 25 train operating units, including Scotrail, on 27 January. He has no immediate plans for further meetings with Scotrail.

Cross-border Rail Services

21. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with British Rail regarding cross-border services between Scotland and England.

Mr. Watts: Anglo-Scottish rail services is one of a number of subjects which have been discussed at regular meetings with British Rail.

A41

22. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the A41 Aston Clinton bypass.

Mr. Watts: Recently we have received the inspector's report following a small public inquiry at the end of November 1994. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment are considering the inspector's recommendations and will announce their joint decision in due course.

Northern Line

23. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Northern line will be provided with renewed signalling and electrical apparatus.

Mr. Norris: The timing of individual schemes within their overall investment programme is a matter for London Underground. I understand that both these items are in the future programme, and that detailed design work for a new signalling system is under way.

Railway Development, Stratford

24. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last visited Stratford in east London to discuss railway developments.

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the Stratford promoter group on 2 February. It is my intention to visit Stratford in response to the hon. Member's invitation.

Road Safety

25. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what review he has undertaken of the relative contributions to road safety from *(a)* wire-rope and *(b)* solid motorway central barriers.

Mr. Norris: The wire rope safety fence and the solid motorway central barrier—that is, the vertical concrete safety barrier—have performed satisfactorily, both in trial testing and in-service, contributing to the overall safety of road users.

No specific comparative review of the two systems has been carried out as the two designs are not equivalent alternatives in total performance terms. The deployment of any type of vehicle restraint system is dependent on the requirements and constraints of the particular site, and this may also include consideration of prevailing weather and environmental conditions. The Highways Agency, however, has a continuing commitment to keep their performance under review.

London Underground

26. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the final route for the new Chelsea to Hackney underground line.

Mr. Norris: I understand that London Underground Limited plans to consult on alternative options for the line. Following consultations, it may then apply to the Secretary of State to amend the route as currently safeguarded.

Heathrow

28. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had on the implications of a proposed terminal 5 at Heathrow airport for the inhabitants of south west London.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Highways Agency has consulted local authorities, residents and other interested organisations on trunk road improvements which it considers necessary if the proposed Heathrow terminal 5 goes ahead. I have had no other consultations on implications of the proposed terminal.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what responsibilities he has in relation to the Forth rail bridge.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack assumed responsibility for the Forth rail bridge when it was established as a Government-owned company.

Nuclear Waste Shipments

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make an assessment of the relevance for the future shipment of vitrified high level radioactive waste to Japan of the report, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Norris: The report is being considered.

Interlogic Control Engineering

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what dates there have been meetings, correspondence or telephone conversations between British Rail officials and civil servants in his Department about *(a)* the privatisation of Interlogic Control Engineering and *(b)* the closure of Interlogic's York office.

Mr. Watts: Department of Transport officials are in touch with counterparts at the British Railways Board from time to time to discuss a range of issues, including businesses such as Interlogic Control Engineering.

British Rail Redundancies

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* compulsory and *(b)* voluntary redundancies have been made by BR in each of the last five years; and how many it expects to make in 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Watts: The number of redundancies made in each of the last five years was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1989–90	1,505
1990–91	792
1991–92	670
1992–93	7,951
1993–94	7,273

All the redundancies were voluntary. Around a further 5,000 voluntary redundancies are expected by the end of 1994–95. There are no figures available for 1995–96.

Agricultural Vehicles

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the regulations currently in force to prevent of agricultural vehicles from leaving large amounts of mud on public roads.

Mr. Norris: Sections 148 and 161(1), of the Highways Act 1980 make it an offence to deposit any thing, including mud and manure, on roads. Section 149 of the Highways Act 1980 enables highway authorities to take action against anyone who deposits anything on the highway that constitutes a nuisance or danger. Section 6 of the Road Traffic Act 1991 makes it an offence to cause anything to be left on the road if it would be obvious to a reasonable person that to do so would be dangerous.

Coaches

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *588*, what will be the baseline for the comparative casualty data.

Mr. Steven Norris: Detailed data relating to accidents on motorways for at least the last 10 years are kept in the national accident database. The precise baseline is likely to include the years 1994 and 1995 but a longer time series is available, if needed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *588*, if he will estimate the fatal and serious injuries relating to the risks of lane changes, and of the incidence of harsh braking for crashes in the outside lane of two lane, three lane and four lane carriageways.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost. A detailed examination will be made in due course as part of the assessment of the outside lane ban.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, column No. *588*, if the Wootton Jeffrey report has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Airports

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ease pressure on Heathrow and Gatwick by *(a)* extending existing airports or developing new ones in the south-east and *(b)* transferring traffic to existing regional airports.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 2 February at column *861-62*.

Vehicle Excise Prosecutions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the changes to the procedures for VED prosecutions over the last six months; and if he will list the vehicle registration office areas to which these changes apply.

Mr. Norris: There have been no changes to procedures for VED prosecutions over the last six months.

Health and Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *881*, how many employees of his Department *(a)* have applied for facility time to attend health and safety courses, and *(b)* have applied for facility

time to act as health and safety representatives in the financial years (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94 and (iii) 1994–95 to date.

Mr. Norris: The Department does not keep a central record of health and safety representatives and those who have attended training courses. Duly appointed safety representatives are permitted time off with pay to attend basic training facilities approved by the TUC or further training similarly approved where such training is necessary to meet changes in relevant legislation.

The Department also permits duly appointed safety representatives to take such time off with pay during working hours as is necessary for performing their functions under section 2(4) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Safety Representation and Safety Committee Regulations 1977, as amended.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *881,* if he will *(a)* list and *(b)* place in the Library all documents which refer to the reduction of stress levels and sick absences amongst his staff.

Mr. Norris: The complete information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I will, however arrange for the following departmental documents to be placed in the Library:

— "What everyone should know about stress"

— "Coping with stress—a guide for line managers"

— "Coping with change"

— "Coping with a major personal crisis"

— "Stress: recognising and coping with stress"

— Departmental Notices 19/92 and 19/94—Managing Sickness Absence

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *881,* if he will list the programmes listed under DVLA which apply to the vehicle registration offices.

Mr. Norris: The following health initiatives are available to staff working in the agency's vehicle registration offices:

health screening

smoking cessation help

interest free loans for the purchase of bicycles for home to office travel.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *881,* if he will list for the financial years *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94 the funds his Department spent on the "Look After Your Heart" programme; and if he will list the amounts he has allocated for this programme in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97.

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport's spending on the "Look After Your Heart" programme was £6,645 in 1992–93 and £2,317 in 1993–94.

A total of £6,500 was allocated in 1994–95 and £5,500 provisionally allocated in each of 1995–96 and 1996–97.

In addition, between 1992 and 1995 the Department spent £80,527 on health screen programmes.

Train Stations

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when the results of the risk assessment study conducted by Her Majesty's railway inspectorate relating to the large stepping distances between the platform and train at certain stations with some vehicles will be published.

Mr. Watts: This work is expected to be completed by mid-1995. The results of the research will then be assessed to indicate what further action should be taken.

Vehicle Registration Office

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the process by which casual staff are recruited in the vehicle registration office network.

Mr. Norris: Once a need has been identified, casual staff are recruited through the local job centre which supplies suitable candidates for interview by vehicle registration office managerial staff.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by vehicle registration office, the number of VED offences submitted for prosecution for each week from 1 October 1994 to 31 December 1994, and for the corresponding period in 1993.

Mr. Norris: Records are kept only on a monthly basis. The following tables show the figures for the last quarter of 1993 and 1994. They include a number of cases returned unheard by the courts and unsuccessful prosecutions which together represent less than 7 per cent. of the overall total.

Vehicle Registration Office	*1993*			*1994*		
	October	*November*	*December*	*October*	*November*	*December*
Manchester	512	525	442	498	701	413
Sheffield	363	254	161	251	187	86
Liverpool	275	233	299	275	211	114
Bangor	395	243	176	191	418	252
Chester	259	250	254	278	147	153
Huddersfield	156	85	132	82	87	25
Leeds	484	683	383	392	509	346
Preston	421	686	519	309	405	282
Hull	151	212	114	172	170	128
Aberdeen	45	42	29	33	50	48
Inverness	40	46	41	12	45	16
Dundee	62	131	133	143	117	187
Middlesbrough	385	302	263	372	349	267
Newcastle	491	553	393	499	546	377
Carlisle	97	77	73	89	138	76

Vehicle Registration Office	1993 October	1993 November	1993 December	1994 October	1994 November	1994 December
Edinburgh	317	322	226	245	179	434
Glasgow	654	537	560	301	281	238
Luton	413	332	401	457	624	493
Ipswich	240	327	241	268	252	201
Chelmsford	1,041	1,040	910	1,164	982	836
Norwich	240	267	209	256	367	246
Haverfordwest	49	73	43	72	57	73
Cardiff	641	954	597	634	934	631
Swansea	148	279	277	383	349	373
Taunton	124	131	81	82	117	72
Truro	98	131	98	67	66	72
Gloucester	223	250	169	254	185	260
Exter	446	301	289	306	483	364
Bristol	474	379	514	299	465	391
Worcester	208	166	180	202	157	91
Swindon	333	404	395	243	244	189
Reading	184	301	219	247	238	147
Portsmouth	476	589	530	541	495	393
Oxford	220	161	163	153	139	150
Brighton	467	415	289	399	508	447
Maidstone	285	471	359	371	538	365
Guildford	286	241	249	370	191	281
Bournemouth	165	192	138	196	146	130
Stoke	441	416	405	343	585	369
Leicester	373	434	226	439	442	115
Lincoln	477	229	281	532	394	357
Nottingham	500	356	318	670	487	501
Peterborough	302	341	239	259	343	207
Northampton	297	303	346	271	317	304
Birmingham	716	864	1,622	1,299	1,159	1,080
Coventry	278	266	314	275	214	165
Dudley	95	—	—	—	—	—
Shrewsbury	140	159	168	224	96	72
London Enforcement Office (LEO)	3,631	3,587	2,786	3,797	3,870	2,943

Disabled Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the initiatives his Department is to undertake for disabled staff.

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport has a programme of initiatives for staff with disabilities. For 1995 the programme will include:

—the continued provision of a budget for the purchasing of aids and equipment for staff;

—publicity to ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities under the OPSS "Programme for Action to Achieve Equality of Opportunity in the Civil Service for Disabled People";

—the maintenance of a register detailing the access arrangements and facilities available for staff in buildings used by the department;

—the use of the Department's Disability Information Package in 1995 training events;

—the facility to offer written information in braille or on audio cassette.

Transport Research Laboratory

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to move or to alter the library of the Transport Research Laboratory.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend will be considering the future of the library at the Transport Research Laboratory with his financial and other advisers in preparing the transfer of the laboratory to the private sector.

Railway Stations (Disabled Access)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many railway stations in the United Kingdom are inaccessible to wheelchair users.

Mr. Watts: The facilities available for disabled passengers vary from place to place. The leaflet "British Rail and Disabled Travellers" is designed to help disabled passengers plan their rail journeys and gives contact details for British Rail managers who will provide passengers with information about their nearest suitably designed and equipped station. A copy of this leaflet is available in the House Library.

"London Direct"

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many copies of "London Direct" published by London Transport with the *Evening Standard* of 23 January, have been purchased by his Department.

Mr. Norris: None, apart from those included with copies of the *Evening Standard* purchased by the Department's library and press office.

Coventry Airport

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *98*, what considerations underlie the decision to allow the resumption of flights containing calves from Coventry airport before the completion of the inquiry into breaches of the Air Navigation Order of

flights containing calves from that airport in November and December 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: In view of concern about the safety of flights carrying calves from Coventry airport as a result of the Air Algerie crash on 21 December 1994, the Department has taken additional steps to monitor the safety of any aircraft wishing to perform similar flights. Before considering any application, the Department has requested the Civil Aviation Authority to carry out an inspection of the aircraft in order that a check can be made to ensure that the aircraft can operate safely into Coventry airport and that the aircraft will be operated in accordance with international safety standards.

Two applications for the carriage of calves have been received since the crash of the Air Algerie aircraft. Neither of these applications involved airlines which are the subject of the current inquiry being conducted by the Department into possible breaches in November and December of article 88 of the Air Navigation Order 1989. Before the Department considered these applications, the CAA was asked to inspect the aircraft to be used for the flights. In the first case, involving a Nigerian Boeing 707 aircraft owned by ADC Airlines, my Department decided not to grant any further applications by ADC Airlines until it had discussed the CAA's findings with the Nigerian authorities. In the second case, involving AN26 aircraft operated by a Russian airline Atlant Soyuz, a permit was granted only after some modifications had been made to the aircraft and the Department had been satisfied that the airline had met all the Department's normal requirements for cargo charter flights.

Regional Operations

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in the latest available year; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used.

Mr. Norris: The numerical and financial information requested is contained in the following table.

The regional programme budget is used for statutory advertising associated with orders under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (£430k); provision of venues for public inquiries into orders under TCPA 1990 (£20k); and consultancies and studies (£1,300k).

		Financial year 1994–95	
Regional Government Offices (Transport programmes)	*Staff numbers*[1]	*Running costs budget (£k)*	*Programme budget (£k)*
Government Office for the Eastern Region	10	302.5	405.0
Government Office for the East Midlands	9	243.9	197.0
Government Office for Merseyside	3	77.1	55.0
Government Office for London	58	2,460.0	550.0
Government Office for the North East	21	518.8	56.0
Government Office for the North West	7	243.1	135.0
Government Office for the South East	13	472.5	82.5
Government Office for the South West	9	288.1	13.0
Government Office for the West Midlands	9	299.4	105.0
Government Office for Yorkshire & Humberside	8	274.1	45.0
Programme Budget held centrally in reserve	—	—	106.5
Totals	147	5,179.5	1,750.0

[1] According to personnel records.

Travel Pass

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects an agreement to be reached between the London boroughs on details for a new travel pass for London's pensioners and disabled people; what details of it he can disclose; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *416*.

Dartford M25 Crossing

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when and by what means his Department ascertained the expected additional traffic movements of cars and lorries using the Dartford M25 crossing following the opening of the international station planned for Ebbsfleet in Kent.

(2) what is the estimated number of additional car and lorry movements which are expected to use the Dartford M25 crossing in each of the first five years following the opening of the international station planned for Ebbsfleet, Kent.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* Expected additional traffic flows on the Dartford-Thurrock river crossing on the M25 resulting from the opening of an intermediate station at Ebbsfleet were set out on Ove Arup and Partners' final report on Ebbsfleet traffic impacts, which was published in January 1994 at the same time as Union Railways' report to the Government on the channel tunnel rail link. I regret that the report does not provide the information in the form requested but the following figures show the number of traffic movements, additional to expected levels of traffic, generated by a station at Ebbsfleet:

	AM peak	*PM peak*
2001:		
To Crossing	77 (+1.4 per cent.)	154 (+3.3 per cent.)
From Crossing	135 (+3.7 per cent.)	173 (+3.8 per cent.)
2011:		
To Crossing	103 (+1.6 per cent.)	205 (+3.8 per cent.)
From Crossing	180 (+4.1 per cent.)	231 (+4.3 per cent.)

The expectation is that these movements will be almost entirely from non-lorry traffic.

Channel Tunnel Security

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who are the inspectors in his Department whom he referred to in his oral statement of 30 January on channel tunnel security, *Official Report*, columns 685–90; what are their terms or reference; under what powers they are appointed; and what are their statutory powers and responsibilities.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has, under the terms of the Channel Tunnel (Security) Order 1994, authorised officials from the transport security division of this Department to inspect the security arrangements in place to ensure that the required standards are, and continue to be, met. The responsibilities and powers of the inspectors are set out in article 28 of the order.

InterCity

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many InterCity trains currently run daily each way Monday to Friday between *(a)* Paddington and Cardiff and *(b)* Paddington and Swansea; and how many will be guaranteed under the passenger service requirement for Great Western.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The frequencies are set out in the table:

	Current timetable	*Draft PSR*
Paddington-Cardiff weekday services		
Westbound	20	at least 17
Eastbound	20	at least 17
Paddington-Swansea weekday services		
Westbound	17	at least 14
Eastbound	18	at least 14

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many InterCity trains will run *(a)* to Carmarthen and *(b)* to Fishguard daily under the passenger service requirements for Great Western; and how many currently run to those stations.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The future level of InterCity services to Carmarthen and Fishguard will be determined by the Great Western franchisee.

The current number of InterCity trains to Carmarthen and Fishguard daily are set out in the tables:

Current timetable	*Number*
Paddington-Carmarthen	
Weekdays:	
Westbound	1
Eastbound	1
Saturdays:	
Westbound	1
Eastbound	1
Sundays:	
Westbound	0
Eastbound	1

In addition on summer Saturdays Carmarthen will be served by westbound and eastbound trains to Pembroke Dock.

The Franchising Director will include regular services between Swansea and Carmarthen in the PSR for Regional Railways South Wales and West. These trains will provide good connections at Swansea with InterCity services to London.

Current timetable	*Number*
Paddington-Fishguard:	
Winter Sunday-Monday (October to late May):	
Westbound	Note 1
Eastbound	1
Summer weekdays:	
Westbound	1[1]
Eastbound	1[2]
Summer Sundays:	
Westbound	1
Eastbound	2

Note 1: Through service operated on 12 days in the Christmas/New Year period.

[1] Between mid July and early September

[2] 2 between mid July and early September

Accompanied Baggage

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what accompanied baggage restrictions will be placed on passengers travelling from Paddington to Fishguard following privatisation.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Regulations relating to the carriage of passengers' baggage on trains are set out in the conditions of carriage. These conditions are currently being revised to maintain and improve passengers' rights on rail services provided by private sector operators.

Trans-European Network

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Fishguard to Paddington railway line forms part of the Trans-European route network.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Yes.

Bicycles

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bicycles may be carried on behalf of passengers on trains running between Paddington and Fishguard.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* British Rail currently allows the carriage of three bicycles per Great Western high speed trains serving Fishguard and one bicycle per train on other trains serving Fishguard.

BR Networker

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the principal subcontractors adversely affected by the cancellation of British Rail Networker order for 1995.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* There has been no cancellation.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what tonnage of freight was carried on the inland waterways of the United Kingdom *(a)* in 1984 and *(b)* in 1994.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Non-seagoing freight carried on inland waterways in the United Kingdom was 7 million tonnes in 1984 and 6.4 million tonnes in 1993, the latest year for which figures are available.

A40(M)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what noise abatement measures have been taken to protect the residents of Ickenham from noise pollution at the point where the A40 (M) Western avenue passes between the junction of Long lane, Hillingdon, and Uxbridge circus; and what further measures are planned.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency and I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Michael Shersby, dated 6 February 1995:

The Minister for Transport in London, Steven Norris, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport what noise abatement measures have been taken to protect the residents of Ickenham from noise pollution at the point where the A40(M) Western Avenue passes between the junction of Long Lane, Hillingdon, and Uxbridge Circus; and what further measures are planned.

There were a number of measures taken to reduce the level of traffic noise from the improved A40 trunk road near Hillingdon Circus. These were included in the design and were:-

i) putting the new trunk road in deep cutting;

ii) erecting a noise barrier between residential properties and the trunk road carriageway north of the new road;

iii) providing noise insulation where properties qualify under the Noise Insulation Regulations; and

iv) surfacing the new road in tarmac rather than concrete.

Planting to soften the environmental effect of the new trunk road on its surroundings will be carried out this spring.

Residents who consider that their property has depreciated in value as a result of increased traffic noise from the use of the new road, may be able to claim compensation under Part 1 of the Land Compensation Act 1973. The claim period starts in May this year when notices will appear in the local press.

TREASURY

European Monetary Institute

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total capital and revenue cost of establishing and running the European Monetary Institute at the latest date for which figures are available; and how much of that cost has been incurred by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Nelson: Article 16 of the protocol on the statute of the European Monetary Institute—EMI—annexed to the Maastricht treaty, provides for member states' central banks to make contributions towards the capital resources of the EMI. The resources will be used to generate an income necessary to cover the expenditure of the EMI. The share of the EMI's resources paid by each central bank is calculated according to each member state's population and GDP.—as set out in article 29 of the protocol on the statute of the European system of central banks.

In accordance with article 16 of the EMI protocol, the Council of the EMI has determined that the total capital requirement needed to generate income sufficient to cover the EMI's budgeted expenditure is 615.6 million ecu. The Bank of England's share is 15.35 per cent. The Bank has accordingly contributed 94.5 million ecu—£72.7 million at the end-December 1994 exchange rate. Prior to the capital requirement being established by the council of the EMI the Bank contributed 3.0 million ecu—£2.4 million at the end-December exchange rate—towards the EMI's set-up and running costs during 1994.

The Bank of England made its contribution to the EMI out of its own resources. The central banks of Germany, France and Italy have made larger contributions than the Bank of England.

The budget for the EMI will be published in its annual report in April 1995.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations the Government have undertaken with the European Monetary Institute as provided for in article 109f(6) of the treaty on European Union.

Mr. Nelson: In accordance with article 109f(6) of the EC treaty the Government have notified the European Monetary Institute of a number of amendments to the Building Societies Act 1986, which are to be made by an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the European Commission and the European Monetary Institute to report to the European Council as required by article 109j(1) of the treaty on European Union; and what discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the Commission and the EMI on the preparation of the report in respect of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: No date has been set for the reports from the Commission and EMI required by article 109j(1) of the treaty. But for the Council to make the decisions set out in article 109j(3) by 31 December 1996, reports will need to be prepared earlier that year. Her Majesty's Government have had no discussions with the Commission or the EMI about the reports they will prepare.

Own Resources

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and which EEC members have ratified the own resources decision according to their respective constitutional timetables; and what information he has about the likely ratification dates of the remainder.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the replies which I gave to the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) on Thursday 19 January, *Official Report*, column *606*. Since then, I understand that Greece adopted the own resources decision on 29 December 1994 and the Republic of Ireland on 20 January 1995, in accordance with their constitutional requirements.

Monetary Union

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number and grade of staff in his Department who are currently working on single currency issues.

Mr. Nelson: The number of officials involved in European monetary issues varies from day to day. No officials work exclusively on these issues.

Private Finance Panel

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the members and main interests of the private finance panel; what expenses or other remuneration are offered to its members; and what is the frequency of meetings.

Sir George Young: The members and main interests of the private finance panel are:

Mr. Malcolm R. Bates
Deputy Managing Director, GEC; Non-executive Director, Enterprise Oil.

Sir Christopher Bland
Chairman, NFC plc, Life Sciences International plc and Hammersmith Hospitals trust

Mr. Howard J. Davies
Director General, CBI; Director, GKN plc; Member, NatWest International Advisory Board; Director, BOTB and Business In The Community.

Mr. Allan Gormly CBE
Chairman, Royal Insurance Holdings plc; Joint Deputy Chairman, Trafalgar House plc; Director, National Grid Co. plc, BPB Industries plc, Brixton Estate plc, Eurorail Ltd.

Mr. Hugh R. Jenkins
Chief Executive, Prudential Portfolio Managers; Director, Prudential Corporation; Member, DoE Property Advisory Group.

Mr. Pen Kent
Executive Director, Bank of England.

Ms Sheila V. Masters
Partner, KPMG Peat Marwick; Non-executive Director, Bank of England; Non-executive Member, Inland Revenue Management Board and NHS Policy Board.

Sir Alastair Morton
Co-chairman, Eurotunnel; Chairman, Kent TEC, National Youth Orchestra, and East Kent Initiative; Non-executive Director, National Power and Lucas Industries.

Sir Brian Pearse
Chairman, The Housing Corporation, Lucas Industries, British Invisibles and Young Enterprise; Director, Smith and Nephew plc, Financial Reporting Council, BOTB, London First Centre.

Mr. Neville Simms
Group Chief Executive, Tarmac plc; Non-executive Director, Courtaulds plc.

Mr. Bob Dobbie
Head of Industrial Competitiveness Division, Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Colin Reeves
Director of Finance, NHS Executive.

Mr. Peter Mackay
Secretary, Scottish Office Industry Department.

Mr. Steve Robson
Director (Finance, Regulations and Industry), HM Treasury.

Mr. David Rowlands
Principal Finance Officer, Department of Transport.

Mr. Philip Fletcher
Deputy Secretary (Housing and Urban), Department of the Environment.

No expenses or other remuneration have been offered to panel members for their duties in connection with the panel.

There is no set frequency for meetings of the panel, but there have been three meetings in the last six months.

Revenue Adjudicator

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases have been referred to the revenue adjudicator as complaints arising out of the taxpayers charter; in how many cases the revenue adjudicator has upheld the complaint; what has been the total compensation awarded by the revenue adjudicator following complaints; and what actions have been taken by the adjudicator to monitor and improve the performance of the office in which complaints have been upheld.

Sir George Young: The adjudicator has received 3,794 complaints since her office opened on 1 May 1993. She has taken up 717 of these for full investigation. Of the 359 cases she has settled, she has found wholly or partly in favour of the complainant in 195 cases. She has recommended that the Inland Revenue pay compensation in 90 of these. The total compensation recommended was £37,181. The Inland Revenue has accepted all these recommendations. The adjudicator meets senior Inland Revenue managers on a regular basis to discuss her recommendations and views.

It is for Inland Revenue managers to decide what actions need to be taken to improve performance in any particular area in the light of adjudicator's recommendations and views. The Revenue has assured me that it does attach great importance to improving performance where they have been at fault.

The 3,077 cases which the adjudicator did not take up for full investigation were mainly ones where the complainant had not first tried to sort out the complaint through the Inland Revenue's own complaints system. In these cases, the adjudicator put the complainant in touch with the right person in the Inland Revenue, and where necessary helped the complainant clarify the terms of the complaint.

Scotch Whisky

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total receipts which have accrued to the Exchequer in each of the last five years from sales of Scotch whisky *(a)* abroad and *(b)* in the domestic market.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Firm data on duty receipts are available only for total spirits. Estimates can be made for all home-produced whisky and these are as follows:

Estimated duty and consequential VAT on whisky/whiskey

	£ million
1989–90	748
1990–91	835
1991–92	856
1992–93	814
1993–94	847

Duty and VAT are not charged on sales of Scotch whisky abroad.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of expected receipts to the Exchequer from sales of Scotch whisky *(a)* abroad and *(b)* in the domestic market for the financial year 1994–95.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Firm data on duty receipts are available only for total spirits. The current spirits forecast for the financial year 1994–95 is £1.7 billion, this cannot be broken down to Scotch whisky.

The Exchequer receives no income from sales of Scotch whisky abroad.

Credit Unions

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to modify the legislation and regulations governing *(a)* the management of credit unions, *(b)* their accountability to members and *(c)* the amounts of money loaned to members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The Government announced two proposals on credit unions in January 1994. One extends categories of membership; the other increases the limit on the size of individual shareholdings and loans. A consultation document will be issued on these and other related measures. Subject to the response, the intention is to implement them through an order under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

Power Generators (Share Sales)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the costs incurred so far on the proposed sale of Her Majesty's Government shares in National Power and PowerGen; and if he will estimate future costs associated with this sale.

Sir George Young: The costs of the National Power and PowerGen share offer will be reported to Parliament after the sale has been completed. Sales proceeds will be appropriated-in-aid of the expenses of the sale. Because a large proportion of the costs are dependent upon the strike prices obtained for the shares in the international offers, it would be potentially misleading to the House for me to estimate the total costs for this sale at this point.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the solicitors, banks, brokers, advertising agencies and public relations companies appointed to advise on the sale of Her Majesty's Government shares in National Power and PowerGen, with a statement of fees incurred so far in each case.

Sir George Young: The table shows, in the order of their appointment, the appointments of solicitors, banks, brokers, advertising agencies and PR companies made by HM Government for the National Power and PowerGen share offer. Fees paid to firms as part of the privatisation programme are treated as commercially confidential. The National Audit Office expects to examine the sale in due course. If it does so and a report is published by the Comptroller and Auditor General, the total fees paid to advisers will be quantified.

National Power and PowerGen share offer—solicitors, banks, brokers, advertising agencies and public relations companies appointed

Month of appointment	*Company*	*Role(s)*
March 1994	Barclays de Zoete Wedd[1]	Financial Adviser
	Kleinwort Benson[1]	Global co-ordinator Global lead manager
March 1994	Slaughter and May[2]	Legal advisers
April 1994	Dewe Rogerson	PR/Marketing adviser
May 1994	Davis, Polk and Wardwell[2]	US legal advisers
July 1994	WCRS[3]	Advertising agency
July 1994	Lloyds Bank	Lead receiving bank
July 1994	Royal Bank of Scotland	Receiving bank
November 1994	Lloyds Bank	Interim registrar (National Power)
November 1994	Royal Bank of Scotland	Interim registrar (PowerGen)
December 1994	Tsunematsu Yanase and Sakine[2]	Japanese legal advisers
December 1994	Stikeman, Elliott[2]	Canadian legal advisers
December 1994	Barclays de Zoete Wedd	International manager
December 1994	Kleinwort Benson	International manager
December 1994	Cazenove	International manager
December 1994	Paribas	International manager
December 1994	UBS	International manager
December 1994	SG Warburg	International manager
December 1994	Goldman Sachs	North American manager
December 1994	Merrill Lynch	North American manager
December 1994	JP Morgan	North American manager
December 1994	NatWest Markets	North American manager
December 1994	RBC Dominion	North American manager
December 1994	Argentaria	Rest of World manager
December 1994	Robert Fleming	Rest of World manager
December 1994	Lehman Brothers	Rest of World manager
December 1994	Mediobanca	Rest of World manager
December 1994	Nikko	Rest of World manager
December 1994	West LB	Rest of World manager
January 1995	Bank of New York	Interim depositary

Notes:[1]
Firms act jointly
[2] Appointed by the Treasury Solicitor
[3] Appointed by the Central Office of Information

International Terminal, Ebbsfleet

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he, other Ministers or former Ministers or officials in his Department discussed matters relating to the international terminal at Ebbsfleet with representatives of Decision Makers at any function at No. 11 Downing street in June or July 1993.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* There is no record of any function at No 11 Downing street in June or July 1993 at which representatives of Decision Makers were present.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Ministers in his Department formally or informally met Mr. Mark Pennington and discussed Ebbsfleet.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* According to Treasury records, no Treasury Ministers have met Mr. Mark Pennington and discussed Ebbsfleet.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* The severance payments for which special advisers are eligible are related to their salaries. The salaries of advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings and are confidential. The total severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years year are summarised in the table.

Year	*£*
1990	105,771
1991	28,078
1992	188,803
1993	34,446
1994	56,131

Tax Loopholes

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the loss of revenue to the Exchequer resulting from exploitation of the capital gains tax loophole identified in clause 43 of the Finance Bill 1995; and; how much revenue annually he estimates would accrue following its closure.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The known level of avoidance up to the closure of the loophole identified in clause 43 of the Finance Bill 1995 was low and the revenue loss is estimated to be negligible. However if not closed, this loophole would result in the loss of a significant amount of tax as the level of avoidance is expected to escalate once the loophole becomes well known. This loss could amount to many tens of millions of pounds.

SCOTLAND

Council Housing

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are on waiting lists for council houses in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole; and what steps he is taking to provide public housing for such persons.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Reliable information on waiting list applicants is not held centrally. Substantial resources have been made available to local authorities to enable them to meet housing needs in their areas. In addition, Scottish Homes, through its development programme, supports the provision of new and improved houses by housing associations, housing co-operatives and private sector developers across Scotland.

Psychiatric Beds

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many acute psychiatric beds are needed in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole to achieve an average bed occupancy of 85 per cent.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is for health boards to determine levels of bed provision for their population based on consideration of local assessments of need.

The information requested is shown in the following table:

NHSiS—Psychiatric beds[1]; by area; year ending 30 September 1994

	Actual		*Estimated*
	Average available staffed beds	*Percentage occupancy*	*Average available staffed beds required for 85 per cent. occupancy[4]*
Scotland	14,399	88.8	15,043
Strathclyde[2]	6,228	90.3	6,613
Inverclyde[3]	268	87.9	277

[1] Comprises mental illness, psychogeriatrics, child psychiatry, adolescent psychiatry, mental handicap.
[2] Comprises hospitals in Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Greater Glasgow, Lanarkshire health board areas.
[3] Comprises Inverclyde royal hospital and Ravenscraig hospital.
[4] Assuming the number of patients on average is the same as in the year ending 30 September 1994.
Source:
Information Services Division

Private Patients

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the income generated by the treatment and care of private patients in each trust hospital in 1993–94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is provided in the following table:

NHS Trust	*£000*
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals	504
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare	0
Caithness and Sutherland	1
Dundee Teaching Hospitals	45
Grampian Healthcare	37
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals	0
Moray Health Services	26
North Ayrshire and Arran	46
Raigmore Hospital	114
Royal Alexandra Hospital	2
Royal Scottish National Hospital and Community	0
South Ayrshire Hospitals	69
Southern General Hospital	417
Stirling Royal Infirmary	33
Victoria Infirmary	17
West Lothian	29
Yorkhill	49

NHS Trusts

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what surplus or loss has been accumulated by each NHS trust.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The surplus or loss accumulated by each trust to December 1994 is detailed in the table:

Accumulated surplus/loss of each NHS trust to December 1994

Name of NHS Trust	*£000*
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals	211
Angus	798
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare	1,903
Caithness and Sutherland	560
Central Scotland Healthcare	104
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals	1,520
Dundee Healthcare	908
Dundee Teaching Hospitals	3,403
East and Midlothian	1,304
Edinburgh Healthcare	2,156
Edinburgh Sick Children's	–43
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	1,645
Fife Healthcare	2,294
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University	3,419
Grampian Healthcare	7,499
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services	835
Hairmyres and Stonehouse	879
Highland Communities	669
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	1,785
Kirkcaldy Acute	447
Law Hospital	756
Monklands and Bellshill	1,994
Moray Health Services	441
North Ayrshire and Arran	4,634
Perth and Kinross Healthcare	1,574
Queen Margaret Hospital	1,270
Raigmore Hospital	3,001
Renfrewshire Healthcare	2,903
Royal Alexandra Hospital	1,674
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	2,840
South Ayshire Hospitals	426
Southern General Hospital	3,351
Stirling Royal Infirmary	1,455
Stobhill	2,481
Victoria Infirmary	–4,021
West Lothian	3,658
Western General Hospitals, Edinburgh	864
West Glasgow Hospitals University	1,602
Yorkhill	1,159
Total	64,358

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount of accumulated assets of NHS trusts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The net assets of each NHS trust as at 31 December 1994 are detailed in the table:

Net assets of NHS trusts as at December 1994

Name of NHS trust	*£000*
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals	136,383
Angus	45,595
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare	55,902
Caithness and Sutherland	17,059
Central Scotland Healthcare	97,682
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals	29,600
Dundee Healthcare	56,971
Dundee Teaching Hospitals	127,995

Net assets of NHS trusts as at December 1994

Name of NHS trust	*£000*
East and Midlothian	62,688
Edinburgh Healthcare	116,675
Edinburgh Sick Children's	13,949
Falkirk and District Royal University	41,232
Fife Healthcare	69,557
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University	141,467
Grampian Healthcare	189,569
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services	138,752
Hairmyres and Stonehouse	50,813
Highland Communities	64,378
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	33,729
Kirkcaldy Acute	37,428
Law Hospital	34,118
Monklands and Bellshill	44,213
Moray Health Services	35,506
North Ayrshire and Arran	85,196
Perth and Kinross Healthcare	76,949
Queen Margaret Hospital	69,867
Raigmore Hospital	55,353
Renfrewshire Healthcare	72,021
Royal Alexandra Hospital	63,127
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	152,852
South Ayrshire Hospitals	50,789
Southern General Hospital	65,893
Stirling Royal Infirmary	46,165
Stobhill	66,434
Victoria Infirmary	43,869
West Lothian	95,528
Western General Hospital, Edinburgh	82,660
West Glasgow Hospitals University	101,757
Yorkhill	47,134
Total	2,816,885

It should be noted that some of these figures are subject to final agreement of opening balances with health boards.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will state, in respect of the appointments of NHS trusts in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole the salaries awarded, the terms of office and the number of hours such appointees are expected to work each working week;

(2) what time commitment is expected of *(a)* NHS trust chairman and *(b)* NHS trust non-executive directors.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Non-executives of NHS trust boards throughout Scotland are appointed for terms of up to four years. Chairmen are remunerated at one of three different rates—£15,125, £17,145 and £19,285 per annum—according to the size of the trust's budget. Non-executive directors other than chairmen receive £5,000 per annum. Trust chairmen are expected to commit two to three days per week to trust work and non-executive directors about three days per month, but many exceed those levels.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what hospital and related trusts have negotiated their own terms and conditions of employment, including pay, in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No hospital or trust in Scotland has yet introduced its own pay and terms and conditions of service for all its staff.

Almost half of the 39 trusts in Scotland have departed to varying extents from the centrally negotiated terms and conditions of service for some groups of their staff.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to require NHS trusts *(a)* to hold meetings in public and *(b)* to publish minutes of all such meetings; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: NHS trusts are already required to hold one public meeting each year at which their audited accounts and annual report are presented. It is a matter for trust boards to decide whether to hold more meetings in public.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the level of co-operation among hospital and related trusts in the provision of services in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* the rest of Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. The provision of services is a matter between the health boards and the NHS trusts. Providers will contract with the health board to deliver the best quality of care for the patients in the most effective, efficient and economical arrangement appropriate.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS trusts have confidentiality clauses in their contracts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Details of a contract of employment are matters for the employer and the member of staff concerned.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the NHS trusts in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole which have entered into formal agreements with Norwich Union Healthcare; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None of the NHS trusts in Scotland have entered into formal agreements with Norwich Union Healthcare.

Any advertising material which claims such agreements is inaccurate.

Long-stay Mental Hospitals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many long-stay mental hospitals have been granted trust in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: With the exception of the State hospital, all long-stay mental hospitals in mainland Scotland enjoy the benefits of NHS trust status.

Private Medical Insurance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the number of people with *(a)* private dental insurance and *(b)* private medical insurance in (i) Strathclyde and (ii) Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No information is available on private health insurance.

Life Sentences

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women currently serving a life prison sentence have been informed they will never be released from prison; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has not informed any life prisoner that he or she will never be released from prison. A mandatory life prisoner may be released only on the recommendation of the Parole Board and after consultation with the judiciary. My right hon. Friend takes into account both risk to the public and criminal justice factors in deciding whether and when to refer any case to the Parole Board for its recommendation. Any recommendation made by the sentencing judge in open court as to the minimum period the prisoner should serve, including a natural life recommendation, would be a significant but not binding factor.

Violent Assaults

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many violent assaults were inflicted upon *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors and *(c)* other members of hospital and medical centre staff in (i) Strathclyde and (ii) Scotland in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Private Nursing Homes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* private nursing homes for the elderly and *(b)* residential homes for the elderly have been closed down and for what reasons in (i) Strathcylde and (ii) Scotland as a whole in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: With regard to nursing homes, this information is not held centrally. This is a matter for individual health boards as registering authorities, which have the power under section 2 of the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938, as amended, to cancel registration at any time if they consider that standards are not being maintained.

The information on the number of residential care homes is as follows:

	Local Authority	*Registered Private and Voluntary*	*Total*
1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992			
Strathclyde	0	4	4
Scotland	4	18	22
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993			
Strathclyde	2	3	5
Scotland	4	6	10
1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994			
Strathclyde	9	2	11
Scotland	17	7	24

Information on the reasons for these closures is not held centrally. The data are not necessarily indicative of the quality of care provided. Most residential homes in Scotland maintain high standards of service provision.

Credit Unions

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many credit unions are located in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole; and what is (i) the average membership and (ii) the total membership.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: While the Scottish Office provides financial support through the urban programme for some of the credit unions operating in Scotland, the Secretary of State has no overall responsibility for credit unions. I understand however, from the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd., that in June 1994 there were 79 credit unions in Scotland, of which 65 were in Strathclyde. There was a total estimated Scottish membership of some 51,000 at that date. No separate figure for Strathclyde is available.

School Meals

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pupils aged *(a)* under seven years of age *(b)* between seven and 11 years of age and *(c)* over 11 years of age, in each local authority area in Scotland, receive school meals; and what is the total number who receive free school meals.

Mr. Lang: Information on the number of pupils receiving school meals is not available for the age breakdown requested, but in respect of each school sector. Information, in respect of school meals census day in January 1994, is detailed in the following table:

	Number of pupils receiving school meals				*Number of pupils receiving free school meals*			
Education Authority	*Nursery*	*Primary*[1]	*Secondary*[2]	*Special*	*Nursery*	*Primary*[1]	*Secondary*[2]	*Special*
Borders	—	3,432	1,535	57	—	578	130	13
Central	122	11,134	7,857	420	44	4,155	1,312	420
Dumfries and Galloway	—	7,540	5,443	17	—	1,539	546	17
Fife	220	16,767	10,198	459	133	5,642	1,951	339
Grampian	275	21,810	9,405	604	57	4,174	1,295	111
Highland	—	8,275	5,843	242	—	2,979	1,107	111
Lothian	802	27,791	13,339	1,013	337	10,951	3,200	702
Strathclyde	1,305	102,791	57,141	3,246	686	49,664	19,058	2,573
Tayside	435	15,204	8,885	408	146	4,786	1,392	408
Orkney	—	1,279	938	15	—	158	47	15
Shetland	—	1,807	1,074	15	—	174	47	15
Western Isles	—	1,519	1,119	12	—	352	201	12
Scotland Total	3,159	219,349	122,777	6,508	1,403	84,970	30,286	4,820

[1] Includes 21 nursery and 16 special departments where data has been included in primary school figures.
[2] Includes 7 special departments where data has been included in secondary school figures.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Lang: Between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1994, the Scottish Office has repealed the following regulations:

The Rabies Virus Order 1979 (No. 135).

The Control of Pollution (Licensing of Waste Disposal)(Scotland) Regulations 1977 and the Control of Pollution (Licensing of Waste Disposal) (Scotland)(Amendment) Regulations both superseded on 1 May 1994 by the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994.

The Milk Marketing Schemes (Certification of Revocation)(Scotland) Order 1994.

The Agricultural Marketing Act 1958 Part 1 (Certification of Cessation of Effect in Relation to Milk) Order 1994.

The Poultry Meat (Hygiene)(Scotland) Regulations 1976, as amended.

The Welfare and Livestock (Intensive Units) Regulations 1978.

The Welfare of Battery Hens Regulations 1987.

The Welfare of Calves Regulations 1987.

The Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1990.

The Welfare of Pigs Regulations 1991.

The Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1992.

As part of the deregulation initiative, the Scottish Office operates a continuing programme of review of the regulations, forms and rules for which it has responsibility, with a view to identifying areas where there is scope for repeal or simplification. Any proposals which arise from this process over the next 12 months will be announced as appropriate when relevant consultations are completed.

Manpower implications for the Scottish Office are taken into account in the Department's central manpower plans which are published in the annual departmental report.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each independent school in Scotland covered by the assisted places scheme in descending order the amounts which each school received for the financial year 1994–95, the number of pupils on the school's roll, the number of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme, the proportion of the school roll covered by the assisted places scheme and the fees charged by each of the schools for assisted places pupils.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[pursuant to his reply, 26 January 1995, column 351-52]:* The information requested is detailed in the following table. The assisted places scheme is administered and statistical information collected in respect of each school session and not by reference to financial years. The information provided relates to fee remission grant allocations for the 1994–95 school session and to pupil numbers in the schools in the autumn term of that school session:

School	Fee Remission Grant Allocation 1994–95 (£)	Total Numbers of pupils on school roll (i.e., Autumn 1994–95 term)	Number of Assisted Pupils	Proportion of Assisted Place pupils of Total School Roll	Fees charged for Assisted Place Pupils
				Percentage	(£ per annum)
Daniel Stewart's and Melville College and the Mary Erskine School	899,000	2,550	276	11	2,849–3,912
George Watson's College	747,000	2,044	249	12	2,802–3,876
George Heriots School	684,000	1,491	250	17	2,706–3,624
High School of Dundee	580,000	1,143	195	17	2,532–3,607.50
Hutcheson's Grammar School	452,000	1,821	146	8	3,389
St. Aloysius College	419,000	1,082	159	15	2,978
Morrison's Academy	405,000	584	140	24	3,162–3,351
Merchiston Castle School	330,000	385	65	17	5,391–6,480
Glasgow Academy	324,000	1,010	89	9	3,738–4,014
Strathallan School	299,000	Autumn claim not yet received			6,165–7,485
Kelvinside Academy	294,000	546	82	15	3,314–4,135
St. Margaret's School (Edinburgh)	260,000	73	670	11	2,939.41–3,894.69
Glenalmond College	258,000	248	41	17	5,687–7,575
The Park School	235,000	284	68	24	3,330–3,708
Keil School	234,000	214	66	31	3,795–4,479
Edinburgh Academy	233,000	902	54	6	4,935
Fettes College	220,000	475	36	8	4,584–7,305
Laurel Bank School	217,000	354	63	18	3,825–4,014
Dollar Academy	211,000	1,108	69	6	3,251.04–3,719.04
Loretto School	205,000	374	33	9	5,560–7,235
Wellington School	197,000	354	51	14	3,951–4,290
Kilgraston School	192,000	271	54	20	3,726–4,161
Robert Gordon's College	190,000	Autumn claim not yet received			3,548
Lomond School	188,000	493	52	11	4,014–4,119
Rudolf Steiner School	186,000	257	56	22	2,715–3,549
Rannoch School	173,000	250	37	15	5,490
Gordonstoun School	171,000	453	31	7	6,690
St. Leonard's School	164,000	329	37	11	4,706–5,682
High School of Glasgow	139,000	992	47	5	3,060–3,987
Craigholme School	130,000	498	44	9	3,120–3,330
St. Denis and Cranley School	120,000	174	31	18	4,203
St. Columba's School	117,000	571	33	6	3,420–3,690
St. George's School	112,000	886	29	3	3,729.30–4,097.43
Fernhill School	79,000	326	29	6	1,773–2,768
Belmont House School	73,000	382	24	6	3,121–3,522
Albyn School	66,000	415	19	5	3,432–3,536
St. Margaret's School, Aberdeen	55,000	405	20	5	3,049.56–3,353.10
Kilquhanity School	46,000	25	12	48	2,430
Beaconhurst School	45,000	238	9	4	3,990–4,095
Aberlour School	37,000	110	9	8	4,875
Crawfordton House School	27,000	45	6	13	4,542
Clifton Hall School	27,000	120	6	5	4,827
Lachallan School	27,000	120	6	5	4,662
Craigclowan Preparatory School	25,000	230	10	4	3,495
Hamilton College	25,000	742	14	2	1,968.69–2,272.79
Butterstone School	23,000	58	5	9	4,930
Cargilfield School	23,000	192	4	3	5,695
Croftinloan Preparatory School	22,000	81	4	5	5,475
Ardvreck School	22,000	147	5	3	4,588
New Park School	19,000	124	4	3	3,951
St. Mary's School	17,000	95	4	4	4,536
Belhaven Hill School	10,000	78	2	3	5,039
Drumley House School	7,000	106	2	2	4,415
Park Lodge School	3,000	No assisted place pupils as yet for 1994–95 school session			2,694

Enterprise Networks

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what annual budgets of each of the local enterprise companies were within the Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Island Enterprise networks in each of the years since these bodies were established.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* The allocation of annual budgets to local enterprise companies is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise for their respective networks. I have asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member.

PRIME MINISTER

Honours

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons were recommended for consideration for an MBE, OBE or CBE in 1994; how many were proposed by members of the public via the new procedure; and how many awards in each category were made in 1994.

The Prime Minister: Some 3,000 recommendations were considered for the new year and birthday honours lists 1994, of which around 500 were supported by members of the public. It is not possible to break down the recommendations into categories, but the number of awards made were: CBE 201 awards; OBE 493; and MBE 1,202.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers and former Ministers have given evidence to the Scott inquiry.

Mr. David Hunt *[pursuant to the reply, 24 January, column 188]:* I have been asked to reply.

I wish to add the names of the following as Ministers who have given written evidence only to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry:

The Baroness Denton of Wakefield CBE
The right hon. Richard Needham

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 January to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), *Official Report,* column *300,* what were the total costs of operating the Government Departments and next steps agencies in the economic planning regions; what is the total budget at their disposal; and to which regions they are attached.

The Prime Minister: The running costs of civil departments in the United Kingdom totalled £14.6 billion in 1993–94.

Information is not held by economic planning region and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

British Association of Sheep Exporters

Mr. Morley: To ask the Prime Minister when *(a)* he last met and *(b)* he was last contacted by the chairman of the British Association of Sheep Exporters.

The Prime Minister: I have not met representatives of the British Association of Sheep Exporters and as far as I am aware they have not asked to meet me.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ex-carers

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Government's measures to help the long-term unemployed back into work apply to ex-carers who have been claiming invalid care allowance and who may have been out of the job market for longer than two years.

Mr. Hague: An ex-carer returning to work could be eligible for:

Family Credit with the extra £10 premium if returning to work of 30 hours or more a week;

the Back to Work Bonus if they had part-time earnings while on Income Support;

the new benefit for couples and single people without children if they were within the pilot areas.

The four-week extension of housing benefit, and the one-year national insurance holiday for employers, are aimed at people who have been continuously unemployed, or a lone parent, for the appropriate qualifying periods—six months for the housing benefit extension and two years for the national insurance holiday. Present plans are that periods in which income support was received while an ex-carer was exempt from the requirement to be available for work would not count towards those qualifying periods. I am considering this particular issue and will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Child Support Agency computer system was, or is planned to be upgraded, as mentioned in his answer of 21 July 1994, *Official Report,* column *617;* what is the total number of client accounts; how many of these client accounts are in arrears; and how many arrears agreements are in force.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 6 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of client accounts and arrears of child maintenance.

The Child Support Computer System is being continually enhanced to reflect policy and operational changes and additional management requirements. Some of the information that you require is now available.

As at the end of November the Agency was dealing with a total of 165,000 accounts that had been set up following the completion of a maintenance assessment for the collection of maintenance through the Agency collection service.

In 26,000 cases the absent parent (AP) was up to date with their payments. In 58,300 they had not met their liability in full and in 70,700 no payments had been made.

There are a further 134,000 cases where an assessment has been completed and the AP agreed to pay maintenance direct to the parent with care.

In some cases, where maintenance has not been paid in full, an agreement with the AP has been reached that arrears of maintenance be rescheduled for payment at a future date. Information on the number of accounts in which there has been an agreement to re-schedule arrears is not currently available. Enhancements to the agency's information systems should provide for this information to be available by the end of the financial year.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to tackle the problems that the Child Support Agency is having in assessing and enforcing child support maintenance from absent parents who are self-employed.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 6 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about measures taken by the Child Support Agency to improve the assessment and enforcement of child maintenance from absent parents who are self-employed.

The White Paper published by the Government on 23 January ("Improving Child Support"—cm 2745) includes proposals to create a new interim assessment for the self employed, together with other measures to address problems that have arisen when dealing with these cases.

The Agency is also considering separately other options available to improve enforcement of maintenance assessments made against self employed absent parents.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many parents with care have currently been waiting *(a)* one month, *(b)* two months, *(c)* three months, *(d)* six months and *(e)* one year to receive their first maintenance payment through the Child Support Agency from the date of first application; and what percentage of applications each group represents;

(2) how many parents with care have waited *(a)* one month, *(b)* two months, *(c)* three months, *(d)* six months and *(e)* one year from the date of first application since the Child Support Act 1991 came into force to receive their first maintenance payment through the Child Support Agency; and what percentage of applications each group represents.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Clive Betts, dated 3 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the time taken for parents with care to receive their first maintenance payment through the Child Support Agency.

The precise information that you require does not need to be collected in the form that you mention, however, information that you may find helpful will soon be collected; I will write to you again once it is available.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the extra workload created by his recent proposals for changes to the operation of the Child Support Act 1991; what effect it will have on work backlog within the agency; and if he has any plans to recruit extra staff as a result.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Clive Betts, dated 2 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the impact of the recently announced legislative and operational changes to child support on the Child Support Agency.

We do not expect any effect on staffing or an increase in the overall workload or backlog of maintenance assessments following the operational improvements due for implementation in April 1995, over the year as a whole. The benefits arising from these changes are expected to balance out the extra work needed to implement them during this period. In the longer term they will have a beneficial effect on our operations.

Details of the costs arising from the proposed primary legislation will be supplied in the financial memorandum to the Bill.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the number of deduction from earnings orders that have been issued for each six-month period since the setting up of the Child Support Agency; what consultations he has had with business organisations concerning the extra work involved for employers; and what are his proposals to compensate businesses, with particular reference to particularly small businesses, for the additional burden involved in compulsory employer processings of deduction from earnings orders.

Mr. Burt: The Child Support Agency issued 2,600 deduction from earnings orders in 1993–94. This figure cannot be broken down into six-month periods. Between 1 April and 30 September 1994 11,463 DEOs were issued.

Discussions about DEOs were held with employers through the DSS employers' panel. The legislation relating to the operation of DEOs includes a provision for an employer to deduct up to £1 in respect of his administrative costs from the person's earnings each time a deduction in accordance with the DEO is made.

Maxwell Pensioners

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what contingency plans he has to assist Maxwell pensioners who have deferred pensions when the Cuckney fund runs out in 1996; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have taken a number of exceptional steps to help the Maxwell pensioners, including the setting up of the Maxwell pensioners trust, now chaired by Mrs. Jane Newell. The trust is supporting pension payments while asset recovery work continues. We hope that parties to pensions disputes will now settle them quickly, which would extend the life of the trust and safeguard the position of many deferred pensioners. However, the Government cannot assume responsibilities which properly belong to others.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Two items of legislation for which this Department is responsible and which place an obligation on business or the general public have been withdrawn—as opposed to amended or replaced—during the past 12 months:

From 10 October 1994, regulations 37, 38, 41 and 42 of the Industrial Injuries (Prescribed Diseases) Regulations 1985 were repealed. These required periodic medical examinations of people engaged in certain occupations involving a risk of pneumoconiosis. The savings to the Department was approximately £100,000 per annum in medical and X-ray costs.

The Occupational Pension Schemes (Friendly Societies) Regulations 1976 (SI 1976 No 598) have been revoked with effect from 7 February 1995. These were redundant following introduction of the Friendly Societies Act 1992 which allowed incorporated and registered friendly societies to carry out group insurance without approval.

Neither had an impact on this Department's manpower.

The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed.

Departmental Administration Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the total departmental administration costs for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table:

Expenditure since 1979–80 uplifted by current GDP deflators to 1994–95 prices

Year	*£ million*
1979–80	2,096
1980–81	2,271
1981–82	2,457
1982–83	2,488
1983–84	2,665
1984–85	2,751
1985–86	2,695
1986–87	2,835
1987–88	3,398
1988–89	3,380
1989–90	3,471
1990–91	3,562
1991–92	3,793
1992–93	4,084
1993–94[2]	4,350
1994–95[2]	4,177

Notes:

[1] Expenditure on total Departmental administration costs is included in table 1 of the Social Security Departmental Report.

[2] These figures will shortly be updated on publication of the Departmental Report in March.

[3] The figures quoted in the table include the grants to Local Authorities for Housing Benefit and Community Charge administration and payment to Department for Employment for the administration of the Unemployment Benefit Office network. These payments were £629 million in 1986–87 and are anticipated to be in the region of £944 million in 1994–95.

Benefits

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department spent or expects to spend in Scotland on *(a)* income support for mortgage interest and *(b)* housing benefit in each year between 1991–92 and 1995–96.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table. Information on expected expenditure for income support mortgage interest in 1995–96 will not be available until after the consultation exercise on the proposals announced in the Budget.

Estimated expenditure on income support mortgage interest and housing benefit in Scotland

Year	*Estimated expenditure on income support mortgage interest £ million*	*Estimated expenditure on housing benefit £ million*
1991–92	33.1	590
1992–93	32.4	650
1993–94	32.6	730
1994–95	32.6	820
1995–96	n/a	930

Notes:

Income Support Mortgage Interest figures:

1. Source: Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiries, May 1991–1993 and Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, February 1994.

2. rounded to nearest hundred thousand.

3. based on estimates on weekly amounts and number of recipients at time of survey.

Housing Benefit figures:

4. the figures underlie those that appear in the 1994 Social Security Departmental Report.

5. figures are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing (Aid)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *452*, on aid to the fishing industry in other EEC countries, if he will obtain from the commission and publish the full list of aid it has approved, along with a list of unauthorised payments it has checked or objected to.

Mr. Jack: A full list of aids to the fishing industry is compiled annually by the Commission, but not published because it contains information supplied by member states on a confidential basis. The UK has pressed for this restriction to be lifted. Some summary information is available in the Commission's periodic surveys of state aids in the European Community. The latest of these covers 1986 to 1990 and is available in the Library of the House.

The Commission does publish details of aids in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities following their approval. This also contains details of unauthorised aids which the Commission is examining under the procedure set out in article 93(2) of the treaty of Rome, and the subsequent conclusions of such examinations.

Fishing (Conservation)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *452*, on the application of conservation measures, if he will now request the Commission to progress new technical conservation measures to ban industrial fishing in British waters round the south-west and on the Dogger bank.

Mr. Jack: At the December 1994 Fisheries Council, the Commission agreed to bring forward by 30 June 1995 proposals to improve the technical conservation rules for western waters. The Commission has also been asked by the Council to review the technical conservation measures applying in the North sea. At my instigation, Community scientists are currently examining the effects of fishing and particularly industrial fishing, on the marine ecosystem.

EU Fisheries Ministers will consider the outcome of this work, and appropriate action, at future meetings. I shall consider the UK position in relation to these matters in liaison with the industry.

Coastal Protection

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what funds are available through his Department in the current financial year for coastal protection and repair.

Mr. Jack: This Department offers grant aid to coast protection authorities for new or improved defences designed to protect land from erosion or encroachment by the sea. The supply provision in 1994–95 currently stands at £26 million.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the value of food and drink stocks held by the Government and by European Community bodies as a consequence of agriculture price intervention; and what are the annual costs involved in holding such stocks, including the costs of depreciation.

Mr. Jack: Details for the Community as a whole are contained in annexes 9 and 10 of the annual financial reports of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund guarantee section. Details of intervention stocks within the United Kingdom are contained in table 13 of the 1994 Department report by the Ministery of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Intervention Board, Cm 2053. These publications have been deposited in the Library of the House.

Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total actual annual expenditure for his Department in each year since 1979 in 1994 prices; and if he will provide a breakdown of each figure to show expenditures on *(a)* price support measures and *(b)* set-aside schemes.

Mr. Jack: Information on this subject is contained in the annual appropriation accounts for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Intervention Board executive agency. Information is also available in, "Agriculture in the United Kingdom", which has been produced since 1988 and, prior to then, in the annual review of agriculture White Papers. The data can be expressed in 1994 prices using the published retail prices index information. Copies of the above publications are available in the Library of the House.

Veal Rearing Systems

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the representatives and the countries they represented that were present at the recent Agriculture Ministers meeting which agreed to bring forward the review of veal rearing systems from 1997.

Mr. Jack: The meeting in question was the January Agriculture Council and all EC member states were, as is usual, represented by their Agriculture Ministers, with the exception of Finland, which was represented by the Secretary General of its Agriculture Ministry. The European Commission was represented by Mr. Franz Fischler.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make available in full the legal advice he has received as regards the use of article 36 of the treaty of Rome, to stop the export of calves to be reared in the crate system.

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food set out the conclusion which emerges from the legal advice, and the reasons for it, in his letter of 1 February to all right hon. and hon. Members.

Regional Operations

Mr. Byers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in the latest available year; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used.

Mr. Jack: The Department's regional administrative organisation, consisting of nine regional service centres, employed a total of 1,610 staff as at 1 January 1995 with a budget provision for 1994–95 of £35.4 million, as published in the Supply estimates.

The regional service centres handle the administration of grant and subsidy schemes, licensing and various other services provided mainly to farmers and growers. The present organisation into nine regions was adopted in 1992 and was designed to match the distribution of the farming industry rather than the standard regions used by other Departments.

Apart from the primary regional organisation, there are separate regional structures within the Department for the state veterinary service and various inspectorates, for which information in the form requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The executive agency, ADAS, also has its own regional structure.

WALES

Dental Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps are being taken by his Department to improve the situation relating to provision of dental services in Gwynedd and in particular Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and the constituency of Caernarfon.

Mr. Richards: Following the Secretary of State's announcement of an extra £2.5 million for dental services in Wales, Gwynedd health authority, along with all other Welsh health authorities, has been invited to bring forward proposals to improve the quality and availability of dental services in its area. Already in this financial year, the Welsh Office has provided an additional £50,000 for the authority to purchase extra treatment sessions from the community dental service.

Gwynedd family health services authority has permission to employ salaried dentists. The Welsh Office is funding all the costs associated with this salaried dental service including the recruitment campaign; the salaries of all staff employed; all other practice expenses; and the costs of converting and equipping dental suites at Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Llanfairfechan.

Location incentive grants are also available from the Welsh Office to attract new general dental practitioners into Gwynedd.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when was his Department's last review of the provision of community dentistry in Wales; what were its fundings; how matters have proceeded since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The subject of community dentistry may be discussed with each of the district health authorities as part of the normal annual review process by the Welsh Office, which assesses their performance jointly with family health services authorities. The district health authorities are responsible for commissioning community dental services in light of local needs and locally determined priorities. They are also responsible for monitoring services.

General Practitioner Fundholders

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to ensure that in the periods of the three final months of the financial year, the patients of non-fundholders are not disadvantaged in respect of patients of fundholders in waiting periods for operations.

Mr. Richards: Hospital treatment for patients of non-fundholding GPs is purchased by district health authorities. The additional waiting times initiative funding of £4 million which my right hon. Friend announced last November should ensure that both the district health authorities and GP fundholders in Wales are able to meet the waiting times targets which they identified in their health plans for 1994–95.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many opted-out schools there are in Wales.

Mr. Richards: Sixteen.

Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Visit)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he visited the constituency of Meirionnydd Nant Conwy; what was the duration of the visit; and what was its purpose.

Mr. Redwood: I visited Meirionnydd Nant Conwy on 19 September to see the Ffestiniog railway, the A5 through Pont Padog and the set of the "White Knights" film.

Patients Charter

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost to public funds of the production, printing, distribution and advertising of the patients charter when launched *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* in 1994; and how many copies were printed in each case.

Mr. Richards: The budget for the patients charter in 1991 was £250,000 and £45,000 for the 1994 edition. In 1991, 1,250,000 copies were printed, compared with 301,000 in 1994.

Liquidations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many businesses in Wales went into liquidation in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994.

Mr. Richards: Official estimates of liquidations are compiled for Wales and England combined and are not separately available for Wales.

Estimates of total liquidations for England and Wales for 1992–93 and 1993–94 are 27,829 and 22,058 respectively.

New Businesses

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new businesses were set up in 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Richards: Comprehensive information on the number of new business start-ups in Wales is not available. However, partial information is available from VAT data, though this excludes smaller new business start-ups. This shows that during 1993, the latest year for which data is available, there were some 7,200 registrations for VAT in Wales.

Correspondence

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy towards signing Welsh language letters from his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend's policy is not to sign letters in languages he cannot understand. he replies to correspondence written to him in Welsh by sending a Welsh translation of his reply together with the signed English version.

Conversion Grants

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the categories of grant available to convert existing shop premises to residential dwellings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: District councils may make available discretionary home renovation grants to convert empty buildings, including shop premises, into dwellings. Since 1991–92 I have made £19 million available which has created an additional 1,200 dwellings. A further £1.5 million is available next year.

Shopkeeper Grants

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the categories of grant available to shopkeepers in Wales to improve and modernise their premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Welsh Office funding of local authority regeneration projects and strategies, through the strategic development scheme, includes in some cases support for grant aid towards the renovation of shops and other properties. They are normally in designated commercial improvement or renewal areas. The Welsh Development Agency's town improvement grant may support external improvement of buildings, including shops, in urban areas. The Welsh Office-through Cadw, Welsh Historic Monuments—may also offer grants on the advice of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales towards the costs of repairs in buildings of outstanding historic or architectural interest.

Grant may also be provided towards external repairs which would make a significant contribution to the enhancement of the preservation of the character of buildings within a conservation area, or form part of a designated town scheme, administered by the local planning authority.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares of set-aside land there are in each of the Welsh counties.

Mr. Redwood: The following table shows the area of set-aside land by Welsh Counties as recorded in the agricultural census return of June 1994:

	Hectares
Clwyd	610
Dyfed	2,094
Mid Glamorgan	219
South Glamorgan	430
West Glamorgan	238
Gwent	838
Gwynedd	781
Powys	945
Wales	6,155

Opencast Coal

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the sites for which opencast coal extraction planning permission has been applied for; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally.

Council Tax Appeals

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales with reference to council tax appeals, if he will state how many appeals under council tax legislation in Ynys Môn *(a)* have been dealt with and *(b)* are outstanding; and what are the target dates for completion of those currently outstanding.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As at 31 January 1995 1,214 appeals had been settled and 636 appeals were outstanding. For Wales as a whole 41,630—77.2 per cent.—of initial council tax appeals were settled by 31 December 1994 against a target of 38,000—70 per cent. Around 90 per cent. of initial appeals will be cleared by 31 March 1995. Targets for the clearance of outstanding and subsequent appeals are under consideration.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Redwood: The local Government (Publication of Manpower Information) (Wales) (Revocation) Regulations 1994 was withdrawn. The Department is continuing to review its rules and regulations and any which are to be withdrawn in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are complete. The manpower implications are taken into account in the Department's central manpower plans which will be published in the Welsh Office departmental report in March. Most regulations are England and Wales or United Kingdom wide and do not fall to the Welsh Office to repeal. The Welsh Office has cut the number of forms sent to the health service by a third over the last year.

Civil Service Jobs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the likely effects of the centralisation of civil service jobs in Wales on unemployment statistics.

Mr. Redwood: Changes in civil service job numbers are just one of many factors which influence unemployment statistics.

A449

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Abergavenney turn-off on the northbound section of the A449 between Newport and Raglan will be reopened following reconstruction.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Raglan junction on the A449 trunk road is now open.

Health Service Forms

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *642*, how long each of the forms scrapped has been in use; and how many times per annum completion was required by his Department.

Mr. Redwood: The information available is given in the following table. In many cases, when these forms were introduced they superseded existing returns of similar information.

Forms to the NHS discontinued in 1994–95

Form	*Description*	*Information collected in present format since*	*Number of times collected each year*
Financial returns—costing:			
HFR7/TFR8	Catering, laundry and linen	1987–88	1
HFR16/TFR6	Ambulance services	1987–88	1
HFR19	Purchase of health care from non NHS bodies and grants to voluntary bodies	1991–92	1
HFR20	Joint Finance and Care in the Community	1987–88	1
HFR24	Care group analysis of health services purchased	1991–92	1
HFR26/TFR7	Analysis of stock	1991–92	1
HFR27/TFR5	Fixed assets	1991–92	1
HFR28	Artificial limb and Wheelchair Services	1987–88	1
FFRO6	FHSA revenue and capital income	1987–88	1
FFR07	FHSA administration	1987–88	1
FFRO8	FHSA administration expenditure–capital	1987–88	1
Financial returns—other:			
FIS(HA)4	Superannuation forecast	1993–94	4
FIS(FHS)5b	Cash limited GMS; practice staff costs	1989–90	12
FIS(FHS)6	Suspense items	1985–86	12
FIS(FHS)7	Superannuation/PAYE/NI	1977	12
—	Incentive Bonus Scheme for ancillary staff	1978	1
—	Memo Trading accounts standards	1992	1
Statistical returns:			
KA32	Summary of Patients Journeys	1987–88	1
KE85	Estate Finance/Budgets	1991–92	1
KH05	Summary of Ward attenders	1988–89	1
KH08	NHs Operating theatres: availability and use	1988–89	4
KH10a	Inventory and Intended availability of radiotherapy equipment	1988–89	1
KH10b	Actual availability of radiotherapy equipment	1988–89	1
KH10c	Summary of radiotherapy machine activity	1989–90	1
KH11a	Diagnostic departments: pathology—unit values	1988–89	1
KH11b	Diagnostic departments: pathology—location of departments and equipment	1988–90	1
KH13	Diagnostic departments: Physiological measurement	1988–89	1
SBH112(w)(MI)	Return of mental illness facilities	1970s	1
SBH112(w)(MH)	Return of mental handicap facilities	1970s	1
KO39	Hospital Eye Service	1988–89	1
SH9	Patients receiving treatment under contractual arrangements	Early 1980s	1
KC54	Maternity services	1990–91	1
LHS27/1	Births	Early 1970s	1
KM45	Manpower joiners summary	1987	1
KM46	Manpower leavers summary	1987	1

Recycling Collection Points

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many recycling collection points there were in Wales for (i) glass, (ii) save-a-can, (iii) aluminium cans, (iv) newspapers and magazines, (v) plastic bottles, (vi) plastic carrier bags, (vii) textiles and (viii) vending cups in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1995.

Mr. Redwood: In 1990, there were 212 glass banks and 19 save-a-can sites. Figures for the other commodities are not available.

District Councils currently provide collection points for the public as follows:

Waste type	*Collection points*
Glass	449
Cans (all types)	253
Paper and Magazines	318
Textiles	252

Information is not available in respect of plastic bottles, plastic carrier bags or vending cups.

Old Building Waste

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of, and percentage of, old building waste was used as hard core or aggregate in Wales in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1995.

Mr. Redwood: Accurate information is not available.

Broadleaf Trees

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many upland sessile oakwoods have been planted in Wales in each of the last 10 years; and what plans he has to make available funds to encourage further planting of this broadleaf.

Mr. Redwood: The areas of upland sessile oakwoods planted each year are not recorded separately and the information requested is therefore not available. The Government provide grants for the establishment of broadleaved woodlands, including sessile oakwoods, under the woodland grant scheme.

Education Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the education component of standard spending assessments per pupil, net of specific grants, in sub blocks five to 10 and 11 to 15 in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 (i) in each Welsh local education authority and (ii) on average.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend does not set an education component within Welsh local authorities' standard spending assessments. It is for each authority to determine how much of its total available resources to direct to each of its services, including education, taking account of its statutory responsibilities and its perception of local needs and priorities.

Recycling

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of all household waste is currently being recycled in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Accurate information is not available. The Government's target is to recycle 25 per cent. of the United Kingdom's household waste by the year 2000. Most district councils have now prepared recycling plans and the Welsh Office will be monitoring the progress they make toward achieving the target.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number and monetary value of supplementary credit approvals promised to Welsh local authorities to develop recycling projects since the launch of "This Common Inheritance".

Mr. Redwood: In Wales, resources, which include those for developing recycling projects, are unhypothecated and distributed on a formula basis. This allows individual authorities to determine their own priorities for capital expenditure. This arrangement has the support of the local authority associations. The most recent capital settlement for local authorities for 1995–96 show a good increase in permitted expenditure overall.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of households in each of the Welsh counties are covered by kerbside collection recycling schemes.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not available. However, I know that several district councils have been actively considering such schemes in the context of their recycling plans.

Overgrazing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites of special scientific interest in Wales have been damaged by overgrazing in each year since 1985; what was the hectarage of each site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Responsibility for the designation and monitoring of sites of special scientific interest rests with the Countryside Council for Wales. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member and will arrange for a copy of his reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

Hedgerows

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many kilometres of hedgerows have been lost in Wales in each year since 1984.

Mr. Redwood: The information is not available in the form requested. However, two sample surveys covering the periods from 1984 to 1990 and from 1990 to 1993 indicated net losses of hedgerows in Wales of 18,000 km and 5,500 km respectively at an average annual net loss of 2,570 km for the first period and 1,830 km for the second period.

Bird Populations

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the population of *(a)* corn bunting, *(b)* grey partridge, *(c)* skylark, *(d)* curlew, *(e)* redshank and *(f)* snipe have been observed in Wales in each year since 1980.

Mr. Redwood: There are no annual data of sufficient quality for Wales.

Data gathered by the British Trust for Ornithology between 1988 and 1991, however, shows the number of 10 km squares in Wales occupied by each species as follows:

Corn Bunting: 5
Grey partridge: 54
Skylark: 203
Curlew: 176
Redshank: 60
Snipe: 105

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each year since 1984 *(a)* annually and *(b)* quarterly the number of people in Great Britain surveyed by the labour force survey who, although they are without a job, have looked for a job within the four weeks prior to their labour force survey interview or are waiting to start a job within the two weeks following their labour force survey interview, and the number of

people who are neither in employment nor unemployed on the International Labour Organisation measure but who said they would like a job.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information available from the labour force survey is shown in the following table, classified to the categories economically inactive and International Labour Organisation unemployed as defined by the international guidelines set out by the ILO.

Up-to-date figures for the groups tabulated are published quarterly, in greater detail, in both the LFS "Quarterly Bulletin" and in the LFS helpline section of the *Employment Gazette*; these data show that the majority of people within the economically inactive group who say they want work but are not actively seeking it are students; looking after a family or home; or long-term sick or disabled. Although such detailed information about the economically inactive group was not collected prior to 1984, the available figures for spring 1979 show that 23 per cent. of the population of working age were economically inactive, compared with 21 per cent. in autumn 1994, the latest available figure.

ILO unemployed and economically inactive people who would like a job

Great Britain not seasonally adjusted *Thousands*

Quarter	*ILO Unemployed*[1]	*Economically Inactive*[2]	
		Wants job[3] *but not seeking work in past 4 weeks*	*Wants job*[3] *and seeking work but not available to start in next 2 weeks*
Spring 1984	3,094	2,198	216
Spring 1985	2,968	2,039	227
Spring 1986	2,969	2,106	210
Spring 1987	2,879	1,971	209
Spring 1988	2,376	1,985	199
Spring 1989	1,978	2,090	224
Spring 1990	1,869	2,011	187
Spring 1991	2,302	2,025	220
Spring 1992	2,649	1,906	313
Summer 1992	2,797	1,913	277
Autumn 1992	2,801	1,897	231
Winter 1992–93	2,920	1,945	232
Spring 1993	2,804	1,885	310
Summer 1993	2,894	2,003	245
Autumn 1993	2,792	2,036	190
Winter 1993–94	2,737	2,168	206
Spring 1994	2,615	2,059	264
Summer 1994	2,679	2,036	225
Autumn 1994	2,470	[4]—	[4]—

Source: Labour Force Survey

[1] The ILO definition counts as unemployed those people without a paid job who were available to start work within the next two weeks and had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained.

[2] People who are neither in employment nor ILO unemployed according to the international guidelines of the ILO.

[3] According to responses to the LFS question.

[4] Not yet available.

Disabled People

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many disabled persons registered with the Employment Service in the Durham district are actively seeking employment; and how many registered disabled persons in the current financial year, have (i) enrolled at job clubs in the Durham district and (ii) completed a course at a job club in the Durham district.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 6 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of disabled persons registered with the Employment Service and actively seeking work and disabled person attendance at Jobclub in the Durham District.

I am unable to tell you how many people with disabilities are registered with the Employment Service in the Durham North District and are actively seeking work because we do not gather this information. However we do record the number of clients with health/disability problems who are placed in jobs by Jobcentres. I am pleased to be able to tell you that within the Durham North Employment Service District (covering the Durham City, Consett Stanley, Chester-le-Street and Spennymoor areas), 302 clients with health/disability problems have been placed into jobs during the period April-December 1994. This represents 4% of the total job placings for the ES Durham North District.

Placing unemployed people with disabilities is a key activity of the Employment Service and is not the sole responsibility of our specialist staff such as Disability Employment Advisors (DEAs) or our Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACTs). Not all ES clients with health and disability problems actually register as disabled persons under the Disabled Persons and Employment Acts 1944 and 1958.

Some people are reluctant to disclose that they are disabled and many disabilities are not visible. Our services and help are available to any client with long term health or disability problems which affect the kind of work they can do, irrespective of whether they are actually registered as a disabled person. The ES Access to Work (ATW) scheme offers practical help and advice in a flexible way, tailored to suit individual need in individual jobs. ATW is only one of many programmes and special help provision available to clients with health problems.

There are 7 Jobclubs within the ES Durham North District. During the period April-December 1994 there has been a throughput of 1060 clients including 79 people who though not necessarily registered disabled under the Acts, indicated that they have a long term health problem or disability which affects the kind of work they are able to do. Of these 1060 clients, 468 found a job but I am unable to say how many of these clients had previously had a health problem.

I hope this is helpful.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Oppenheim: Since 1 January 1994 the Department has revoked seven sets of workplace health and safety regulations and three sets of employment regulations. These are shown in the following list.

The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced when consultations are completed.

The staffing implications are taken into account in the preparation of the annual departmental report which will be published in March.

The Construction (Notices of Operations and Works) Order 1965 No. 221. (Revoked by SI 994 No. 3140.)

The Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging) Regulations 1993 No. 1746. (Revoked by SI 1994 No. 3247.)

The Health and Safety (Dangerous Pathogens) Regulations 1981 No. 1011. (Revoked by SI 1994 No. 3246)

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 No. 1657. (Revoked by SI No. 3246)

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (Amendment) Regulations 1991 No. 2431. (Revoked by SI 1994 No. 3246)

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (Amendment) Regulations 1992 No. 2382. Revoked by SI 1994 No. 3246.)

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1984 No. 824. (Revoked by SI 1994 No. 1886.)

Section 59(1) (b) of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1973

The licensing requirements of the Employment Agencies Act 1973.

The remaining employment provisions of the Shops Act 1950.

Jobseekers

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether jobseekers allowance will be paid to an individual who is taking steps to carry out a reasonable direction for the purposes of seeking entitlement to jobseekers allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: A benefit sanction will be imposed only if it is determined that a jobseeker has refused or failed to carry out a direction without good cause and that the direction was reasonable, having regard to his circumstances.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what rights of appeal jobseekers allowance claimants will have to an adjudicating officer if they feel they are being required to agree to something they consider to be unreasonable.

Miss Widdecombe: All labour market decisions will be made by independent adjudication officers. Clause 7(8) and 7(9) of the Jobseekers Bill provide for jobseekers to be able to refer the terms and conditions by a proposed jobseeker's agreement to an independent adjudication officer if they believe they are unreasonable. They will also have the right for the adjudication officer's determination to be reviewed by a second adjudication officer, and the right of appeal to a social security appeals tribunal.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what safeguards will be taken to ensure that, where directions are applied to a person seeking entitlement to the jobseekers allowance and which require a subjective opinion of a claimant's life style, appearance, or general physical, mental or emotional make up, the opinion held by the Employment Service officer issuing the directions will not in any way discriminate against the claimant concerned;

(2) how the nature of discretion exercised by Employment Service officers will be held to be free from prejudice or ignorance in directing the claimant for purposes of entitlement to the jobseekers allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: A jobseeker's direction must be reasonable having regard to the circumstances of the jobseeker. If the jobseeker refuses or fails to carry out a direction, an independent adjudication officer will determine whether the direction was reasonable and whether the jobseeker had good cause for failing to act.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what special provision will be made available for people who have transferred to jobseekers allowance from incapacity benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Jobseekers will be able to restrict their availability to the type of hours of work they are prepared to take because of their physical or mental condition.

Significant extra resources will be provided over the next three years to fund additional back-to-work help for those leaving incapacity benefit. The Benefits Agency and the Employment Service are working closely to ensure a smooth transition from incapacity to unemployment benefits for those who will be affected.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) who will be empowered in the Employment Service to judge that a direction issued to a claimant seeking jobseekers allowance is considered to be reasonable; and who is empowered to disqualify a claimant from benefit;

(2) who will be responsible for deciding whether the amount of time provided for claimants to carry out directions issued by Employment Service officers for the purposes of seeking entitlement to jobseekers allowance is fair and reasonable;

(3) who will determine that the advice given by Employment Service staff to direct claimants seeking entitlement for purposes of jobseekers allowance will be in the best interests of the individual and that this advice has been optimally matched to improve the claimant's chances of finding work.

Miss Widdecombe: The Jobseekers Bill provides that a jobseekers's direction must be reasonable in the claimant's circumstances, and given with a view of assisting him to find or retain employment or improving his prospects of being employed. If the jobseeker refuses or fails to carry it out, an independent adjudication officer will take all the facts of the case into account in deciding whether to impose a sanction, including whether the claimant had good cause for his action.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what safeguards will be built into the jobseeker's allowance appeals process to ensure that claimants are not coerced into signing the agreement against their will.

Miss Widdecombe: If a jobseeker does not agree with the terms and conditions of a proposed jobseeker's agreement, he can refer it to an independent adjudication officer for a determination. He will also have the right to have that determination reviewed by a second adjudication officer, and the right of appeal to a social security appeals tribunal.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what instances discretion will be held to apply in directing the claimant for purposes of entitlement to the jobseeker's allowance to take steps as provided in section 6(3) (a) of the Jobseekers Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no provision under this clause to give direction to jobseekers. Jobseekers will be required to demonstrate that they are actively seeking employment. The steps which will constitute meeting this requirement will be set out in regulations.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who will judge if the assessment for the purposes of entering into the jobseeker's agreement is accurate and a genuine reflection of an individual's skills, qualification and experience.

Miss Widdecombe: The employment officer and the jobseeker will seek to draw up a jobseeker's agreement. If they cannot agree on the terms an conditions of the proposed agreement, it will be referred to an independent adjudication officer.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice and guidance will be given to Employment Service staff of the interpretation and execution of directions under section 6(3) (a) of the Jobseekers Bill; and what specific circumstances will be prescribed to fall within the jurisdiction of the definition of directions.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no provision under this clause to give directions to jobseekers. Jobseekers will be required to demonstrate that they are actively seeking employment. The steps which will constitute meeting this requirement will be set out in regulations.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the composition of the jobseekers allowance project team; how often it has met; and to whom it reports.

Miss Widdecombe: The jobseeker's allowance is jointly the responsibility of my right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Social Security. An official group, chaired by the Employment Department, is accountable to them for implementation of the allowance. A project director is accountable for the implementation project to the implementation group and is assisted in the day-to-day management of the project by a project manager. The latter is assisted by a project management board, comprising himself, key managers within the project, and representatives of the ED, the Department of Social Security and their agencies. The board has met 12 times.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the term "direction" is to be defined in relation to the jobseeker's allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: The Jobseekers Bill defines in clause 15 the term "jobseeker's direction" as "a direction given in writing by an employment officer—with a view to achieving one or more of the following:

(i) assisting the claimant to find employment;

(ii) assisting the claimant to retain employment;

(iii) improving the claimant's prospects of being employed.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether interpreters will be readily available for people seeking entitlement to jobseekers allowance whose first language is not English.

Miss Widdecombe: For those jobseekers whose first language is not English, and who need help with translation, as now, an appointment will be booked with an adviser with the appropriate language skills, where they are available. Alternatively, another member of staff with appropriate language skills will act as a interpreter. If neither of these is possible the jobseeker will be encouraged to bring a friend or relative to the interview to act as an interpreter. Jobcentres are also able to make use of local services offering interpreting facilities where there is a need.

Mr.McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which members of staff in the Employment Service will be empowered to issue directions to claimants seeking entitlement to jobseekers allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: Jobseeker's directions will be given by staff who have appropriate training to do so.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what timescale will apply to claimants seeking entitlement to jobseekers allowance for carrying out directions as issued by Employment Service staff;

(2) how long claimants seeking entitlement to jobseekers allowance will be given, in order that they may take steps to carry out a reasonable direction.

Miss Widdecombe: A jobseeker's direction will specify the action required of the claimant, and the time by which it is to be carried out. The Jobseekers Bill provides that a direction must be reasonable in the claimant's circumstances, and the independent adjudication officer will therefore take the required timescale into account in deciding whether to impose a sanction for the claimant's failure to carry out a direction.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how long in practice the assessment process will take for the purposes of entering into the jobseekers agreement.

Miss Widdecombe: The process of entering into the jobseekers agreement will be handled as part of the new claim interview. Work is currently in progress to assess the impact of all new features of the jobseekers allowance, including the jobseeker's agreement, on the structure and nature of the new claim interview.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment has been made of future premises needs for the Employment Service after the introduction of the jobseekers allowance.

Miss Widdecombe: Work is underway as part of the implementation of jobseeker's allowance to assess the implications of JSA on the network of Employment Service jobcentres. This taking place alongside other development work with which it is linked, including in particular the detailed business processes through which the allowance will be delivered.

"Connect"

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many issues there have been of the newsletter "Connect"; what is the circulation; and what has been the total cost of production.

Miss Widdecombe: At 3 February 1995 there have been three issues of the newsletter "Connect". The current circulation is 61,500 per issue, to staff in the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service, the Department of Social Security and the Employment Department. The total cost of production of the three issues has been £31,324.

Minister's Working Hours

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average number of hours worked in a week by *(a)* a Secretary of State, *(b)* a Minister of State and *(c)* a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in his Department.

Mr. Portillo: Ministers in the Employment Department work the hours necessary to complete all the ministerial and departmental tasks for which they are responsible. Ministers do not keep detailed logs of the hours per week which they work.

MSc Courses

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* those MSc courses that are currently funded with money from the European social fund, *(b)* the criteria for the distribution of ESF money for MSc courses and *(c)* those MSc courses that have ceased to receive ESF money this academic year; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: MSc courses may receive support from the European social fund towards the costs of training eligible unemployed people. All such courses must lead to a recognised higher or degree level vocational qualifications.

ESF funds are allocated on a calendar year basis, following a competitive selection process. The following list shows the courses which received approval for an element of ESF funding for 1994. Applications for 1995 funds are currently being processed.

Information on courses that have ceased to receive funding during the last year could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Higher Education—European Social Fund Unit 1994
Recommended Masters Courses

Institution Name	*Project Name*
Anglia Polytechnic University	European Business MNGMT and IT Systems
Canterbury Christ Church Collge of H.E	Transnational MSC in IT
University of Luton	SEM D and M
Nene College	MBA (Europe)
Nene College	Office Systems and Data Communications
Nene College	Office Systems and Data Communications 025
Huddersfield University	Analytical Chemistry
Huddersfield University	Analytical Chemistry
Huddersfield University	Engineering
Huddersfield University	Software Development
Huddersfield University	Textile Technology for Textile Designers
Huddersfield University	Textile Technology for Textile Designers
Manchester Metropolitan University	Clothing Design and Technology
Manchester Metropolitan University	Food Manufacture
Manchester Metropolitan University	Management in Manufacturing Industry
Manchester Metropolitan University	Quality Assured Applied Chem Analysis
Manchester Metropolitan University	Science and Engineering
Middlesex University	Applied Informatics (Trans)
Middlesex University	Computing for Manufacturing Industry
Middlesex University	ELEC Product Innovation and MNGMT
Middlesex University	Environmental Technology
Middlesex University	Microelectronic Tech and Application
Middlesex University	VT in Business Info Systems
Middlesex University	VT in Knowledge Engineering
North London University	Computing for Women
Nottingham Trent University	Integrated Environmental Control
Nottingham Trent University	Manufacturing Systems
Nottingham Trent University	PG Conversion in IT
Portsmouth University	ADV Manufacturing Technology
Portsmouth University	Advanced Manufacturing Technology
Portsmouth University	Advanced Manufacturing Technology
Portsmouth University	Design and Product Cultural Interact Dbases
Portsmouth University	Microwave Design Training
Plymouth University	Applied Marine Studies
Plymouth University	Applied Marine Studies
Plymouth University	Hydrographic Surveying
Plymouth University	Hydrographic Surveying
Plymouth University	MSC Applied Fish Technology
University of Sunderland	Applied Business Programme
University of Sunderland	Applied Computing Programme
University of Sunderland	Applied Environmental Programme
University of Sunderland	Applied Technology Programme
University of Sunderland	Combined Environmental Technologies
University of Sunderland	Combined Industrial Computing
Wolverhampton University	Applied Microbiology and Biotech
Wolverhampton University	Computing for Women Returners
Wolverhampton University	ENV. Sciences for U/E Grads
Wolverhampton University	PG MGT for Women Returners
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	Electronic Imaging
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	European Urban Conservation
Edinburgh College of Art	Urban Design
Glasgow Caledonian University	IT and Management Conservation
Napier University	Advanced Electronic Design ENG
Napier University	Business Info Management
Napier University	Control Engineering
Napier University	Electronic Engineer (Digital Systems)
Napier University	Electronic Engineer (Manufacture)
Napier University	Engineering Design Analyst
Napier University	Environmental Technology
Napier University	Info Systems Analyst
Napier University	Large Software Systems Development
Napier University	Manufacturing Systems Engineering
Napier University	Materials Analysis
Napier University	Quality Systems Management
Napier University	Software Analyst and Designer
Napier University	Software Engineer
Napier University	Systems Integration Engineering
Napier University	Water Resource Managements
North of Scotland College of Agriculture	Agricultural Biotechnology
North of Scotland College of Agriculture	Agricultural Technology

Higher Education—European Social Fund Unit 1994
Recommended Masters Courses

Institution Name	*Project Name*
North of Scotland College of Agriculture	Agro Food Technologies
North of Scotland College of Agriculture	Organic Farming Technologies
Robert Gordon University	Advanced Technologies
Robert Gordon University	Environmental Technology and ECO Design
Aberdeen University	Agro Industrial Technology
Aberdeen University	Applied Artificial Intelligence
Aberdeen University	Applied Artificial Intelligence
Aberdeen University	Applied Artificial Intelligence
Aberdeen University	Chemical Analysis
Aberdeen University	Engineering and Environmental Technology
Aberdeen University	Environmental Technology
Aberdeen University	Information Technology
Aberdeen University	Marine and Fisheries Technology
Aberdeen University	Materials Tech/Industrial CHEM Analysis
Aberdeen University	Training in Biotechnology
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	Agriculture Genetics
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	Biotechnology Training (Physiology)
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	Biotechnology TRNG (Electronmicroscopy)
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	High Level Vocational Training IT
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	High Level Vocational Training IT
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	High Level Vocational Training IT
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	High Level VT Environmental Technology
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	High Level VT in Environmental Technology
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	High Level VT TRNG Young People Biotech
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	Information and Library Studies
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	Information Technology
Aberystwyth Univ. College of Wales	VT Environmental Technology
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	Advanced Chemical Lab Techniques
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	Animal Health and Production
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	APP Forestry and Wood Technology
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	APP Physics and GEOTECH Marine Technology
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	Applied Biological Sciences
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	Applied Marine Aquacultural and ENV TECH
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	Applied Plant Biotechnology
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	Electronic Engineering Technology
Bangor Univ. College of North Wales	Rural and Water Resource Management
Birmingham University	Applied Genetics Conserv Genetic Resource
Birmingham University	Applied Meteorology and Climatology
Birmingham University	Applied Radiation Physics
Birmingham University	Biochemical Engineering
Birmingham University	Cognitive Science
Birmingham University	Computer Science
Birmingham University	Construction Management

Higher Education—European Social Fund Unit 1994
Recommended Masters Courses

Institution Name	*Project Name*
Birmingham University	Electronics and IT
Birmingham University	Hydrogeology
Birmingham University	Manufacturing and Mechanical Engineering
Birmingham University	Toxicology
Birmingham University	Water Resources Technology and MNGMT
Bradford University	ADV VT Environmental Technologists
Bradford University	VT Computer Systems Analysts and PROGRMRS
Bristol University	Crop Protection Training
Bristol University	Graduate Associate Programme (GAP)
Bristol University	PROF Updating CERT Women Returners
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Artificial Intelligence and ENG Application
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Civil Engineering
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Cognitive Science
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Computing (with Statistics)
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Data Process APPS Predictive Demography
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Electrical and Electromagnetic ENG
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Geotechnical Engineering
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Maritime Studies
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Structural Engineering
University of Wales College of Cardiff	Systems Engineering
Dundee University	Biotechnology for Young People
Dundee University	Biotechnology for Young People
Dundee University	Computer TECH for Young People
Dundee University	ENG and Material TECH for Young People
Dundee University	Environmental Monitoring 18-24 YR
Dundee University	Training in TECH for LTU
Durham University	Advanced Environmental Technology
Durham University	Advanced Geological Sciences
Durham University	Advanced Geological Sciences
Durham University	Advanced Geosciences Training
East Anglia University	Biocolloids
East Anglia University	Biotechnologists
East Anglia University	Chemical Instrument Technologists
East Anglia University	Hydrogeologists
Edinburgh University, UnivED Technologies Ltd	ADV Techniques in Animal Husbandry
Edinburgh University, UnivED Technologies Ltd	ADV Techniques of Environmental MANGMT
Edinburgh University, UnivED Technologies Ltd	Animal Breeding
Edinburgh University, UnivED Technologies Ltd	Spatial Data Handling
Essex University	Computer Applications in Business

Higher Education—European Social Fund Unit 1994
Recommended Masters Courses

Institution Name	*Project Name*
Essex University	Computer Applications in MNGMT
Essex University	Computer Science and Natural Lang Process
Essex University	Mathematics with Engineering
Essex University	Physical Sciences
Imperial College of Science Technology	ADV Mechanical ENG
Imperial College of Science Technology	Advanced Chemical Engineering
Imperial College of Science Technology	APP. ENG. and PHYS. Science to Medicine
Imperial College of Science Technology	Communications and Signal Processing
Imperial College of Science Technology	Computer Science
Imperial College of Science Technology	CONV. Training in Composite Materials
Imperial College of Science Technology	CONV. Training Young
Imperial College of Science Technology	UNEMP in TRANSP ENG
Imperial College of Science Technology	Conversion Course in Control Systems
Imperial College of Science Technology	Conversion for EMPLOY Semi-Conductor
Imperial College of Science Technology	Conversion in Petroleum Engineering
Imperial College of Science Technology	Environmental Analysis Assessment
Imperial College of Science Technology	Foundations in Advanced IT
Imperial College of Science Technology	Higher Level CONV. Training Civil ENG
Imperial College of Science Technology	Mineral Exploration
Imperial College of Science Technology	Petroleum Geology
Imperial College of Science Technology	Training Unemployed in Hydrology ETC
Imperial College of Science Technology	VT in Geological Engineering
Keele University	COMP. for GEOG and Business INFO Systems
Keele University	Computing in Earth Sciences
Keele University	Machine Perception and Neurocomputing
University of Kent at Canterbury	ADV TECH Training Skill Shortages
University of Kent at Canterbury	ADV Technology for LTU
University of Kent at Canterbury	Computer Sciences for GRADS
Lampeter (Saint David's) University College	VT in Multi-Media Management
Leicester University	Biotechnology
Leicester University	Cognitive Sciences and Manmade Machines
Leicester University	CONS and Interpret. ARCH. Sites Spain
Leicester University	CONS and Interpret. of ARCH Sites (Italy)
Leicester University	CONSV and History of Urban Environment
Leicester University	Geograph INFO Systems and COMP Cartography
Leicester University	High TECH Training for Unemployed
Leicester University	High Level Training for LTU
Leicester University	High TECH Training for Unemployed
Leicester University	High TECH Training for Unemployed

Higher Education—European Social Fund Unit 1994
Recommended Masters Courses

Institution Name	*Project Name*
Leicester University	High TECH Training for Unemployed
Leicester University	Techniques ADV Biotechnol.
Leicester University	TRANS Training CONS Cultural Heritage
Liverpool University	Advanced Scientific Computation
Liverpool University	High Level Training Engineering/Science
Liverpool University	Materials and Chemical Sciences
Liverpool University	New TECH APPLIC to Management and Admin
Liverpool University	New TECH APPLIC to Planning MGT
Liverpool University	Psychology
Liverpool University	VT Computer Sciences
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	Training in Medical Statistics
Loughborough University of Technology	Advanced Industrial Ergonomics
Loughborough University of Technology	Advanced Industrial Materials
Loughborough University of Technology	Advanced Plastics and Rubbers
Loughborough University of Technology	Computer Integrated Manufacturing
Loughborough University of Technology	Construction MGT Training
Loughborough University of Technology	CONTEMP. European Studies for Women
Loughborough University of Technology	European Construction ENG Training
Loughborough University of Technology	Industrial Mathematical Modelling
Loughborough University of Technology	INFO Technology Conversion
Manchester University	APPLIC of Physical and Computing Science
Manchester University	Biocomputing and Biomathematics
Manchester University	Engineering Conversion Course
Manchester University	VOC Train for LTU High Level QUALIF
Newcastle Upon Tyne University	Computing Science Conversion
Newcastle Upon Tyne University	European Property Development
Salford University	Advanced Engineering
Salford University	Advanced Manufacturing
Salford University	Computational Applications
Salford University	Environmental Management
Salford University	IT in Construction
Salford University	Radiation and Analytical Chemistry
Southampton University	Micropalaeontology for the Oil Industry
Southampton University	Operational Research
Southampton University	Training in Biochem Pharmocology
Southampton University	VT in Social Statistics
St. Andrews University	Information Technology
St. Andrews University	Information Technology
Swansea (University College)	European Training Development
Swansea (University College)	Management Training for Women
Swansea (University College)	VT in Design Engineering and IT
Swansea (University College)	VT in Electrical Engineering
Swansea (University College)	VT in IT
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Biotechnology and Bioreactor Systems

Higher Education—European Social Fund Unit 1994 Recommended Masters Courses

Institution Name	*Project Name*
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Chemical Technology
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Chemistry of Advanced Materials
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Computation
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Corrosion Science and ENG
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Information Systems Engineering
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Instrumentation and Analytical Science
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Machine Translation
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Manufacturing Technology
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Metallic and Ceramic Materials
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	MSC Textile Design Technology
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Paper Technology
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	Polymer Science and Technology
UMIST, Bursars Dept.	VSLI Systems Engineering
University College London	Applications of Geographic INFO Systems
University College London	Biotechnology Training Scheme
Warwick University	Analytical Methods
Warwick University	Parallel Computers and Computation
Institute of Occupational Medicine	Occupational Hygiene Education

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the weekly cost of keeping a prison inmate in prison in England and Wales as at 8 January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, Dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the weekly cost of keeping an inmate in prison in England and Wales.

The most recent published figures are for the financial year 1993–94 when the average cost per prisoner place per week was £437.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual cost at current prices of keeping a man in a high security prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter for Derek Lewis to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the annual cost of keeping a prisoner in a high security prison.

The annual average net operating cost per prisoner place in dispersal prisons in 1993–94 was £26,671.

Temporary Release (Prisoners)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward measures to ensure that prisoners will be considered for temporary release or home leave only if they have been declared as drug free.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Lady Olga Maitland, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about whether measures will be brought forward to ensure that prisoners will be considered for temporary release or home leave only if they have been declared as drug free.

Instructions to Governors on the operation of temporary release and home leave require an in-depth risk assessment to be carried out before a prisoner is granted any form of release on temporary licence. The assessment requires full account to be taken of specific areas of concern such as drug abuse where these would increase the risk of re-offending or danger to the public.

Mandatory drug testing is being introduced as part of the Service's initiative against misuse of drugs in prison. The results of the tests will be used for risk assessment purposes in the grant of temporary release and home leave. No prisoner found to be using drugs, who presents a risk to public safety or who is likely to re-offend, will be released from prison temporarily. Where a prisoner has tested positively and is not considered a risk to public safety, there will equally be a clear presumption to refuse temporary release or home leave, save in exceptional circumstances.

Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison establishments have achieved 12 hours unlocking; what activities have been provided for the prisoners; and what are the implications for staff and inmate safety.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisons which are unlocking prisoners for more than 12 hours on weekdays, the types of activities provided for inmates and the implications for staff and inmate safety.

On 31 December 1994, 60 prisoners were unlocking prisoners for at least 12 hours on weekdays. In December 1994, prisoners were spending on average 26.5 hours per week engaged in purposeful activities broken down as follows:

Activity	*Percentage time spent*
Work	
domestic	19
workshops	14
kitchens	9
farms and gardens	4
other work	4
Education and Training	20
Other	
PE	9
induction	3
chaplaincy	2
other structured activities	16

Prison Governors are required to ensure that prisoners are engaged in active and demanding regimes which are relevant to their needs and to the reasons they are in prison. Such regimes have an important part to play in maintaining a stable prison system.

Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were declassified from A to B and B to C during the last 12 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners who have been declassified from A to B and B to C during the last 12 months.

During the period from January to December 1994, 25 prisoners were recategorised from category A to B.

Recategorisations from category B to C are the responsibility of Governors of prisons and no central records are kept. I regret, therefore, that the information requested about this group of prisoners is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Statements

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he took to ensure that his statements to the House on 10 January columns *31–34* and the Home Affairs Select Committee on 25 January met the requirements of paragraph 27 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers".

Mr. Howard: I am satisfied that my recent statements to the House and to the Home Affairs Select Committee are consistent with "Questions of Procedure for Ministers".

Blakenhurst Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest available figure for the number of disturbances at Blakenhurst prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the latest available figures for the number of disturbances at Blakenhurst prison.

There has only been one significant disturbance at Blakenhurst, which took place in February 1994, involving 150 prisoners and resulting in property damage of about £30,000, which was paid for by the contractors. There were no injuries to staff or prisoners and the security of the prison was not threatened.

On 5 September 1994 there was an incident involving a small cell fire, and during which a Prison Custody Officer was assaulted.

There have been nine other incidents of passive or minor concerted indiscipline in the twenty months since the prison opened.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *512–13*, how his Department will monitor the new arrangement that a domestic worker must be provided with a separate bedroom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Inquiries will be made as to the accommodation of domestic workers when they apply for further leave to remain in the United Kingdom.

Visitors

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what basis and under what conditions Dr. Svdja Trifkovic visits or resides in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) on what basis and on what dates Jovan Zametica was allowed admission into the United Kingdom during the past eight weeks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It would be contrary to our normal practice to disclose information to third parties on a person's immigration status.

Prisons (Damage)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the cost of refurbishing prisons and relocating prisoners as a result of damage caused by prisoners acting unlawfully in prisons in Greater London in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Services, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question concerning the cost of refurbishing prisons and re-locating prisoners as a result of damage caused by prisoners acting unlawfully in prisons in Greater London in each year since 1979.

Detailed information prior to June 1988 is not available.

Greater London establishments, represented by Belmarsh prison, Wormwood Scrubs prison, Brixton prison, Wandsworth prison, Pentonville prison, Feltham Young Offenders Institution, and Holloway prison, reported 9 incidents between 7 August 1988 and 31 December 1994, in which there was damage to prison property, as follows:

Date	*Establishment*	*Reported Damage*
8th April 1990	HMP Brixton	Minor
8th April 1990	HMP Pentonville	Minor
5th November 1991	HMYOI Feltham	Minor
2nd July 1992	HMP Belmarsh	Minor
2nd July 1992	HMP Belmarsh	Minor
29th August 1992	HMP Belmarsh	Minor
27th July 1993	HMP Belmarsh	Minor
2nd October 1994	HMP Belmarsh	Minor
10th December 1994	HMP Belmarsh	Extensive

Where the damage was reported as minor, the costs were met locally within the prison. In most cases, where details are available, the damage was caused to furnishings rather than fabric. In the Belmarsh incident of 10 December 1994, where the damage was reported as extensive the cost of repair was approximately £10,000.

Details of prisoners who were re-located are not recorded centrally, unless re-location occurs in serious situations at the time of the incident. None of the reports on these incidents indicated that any prisoners were re-located to other prisons at the time, though, some may have been at a later date. Some were re-located within the establishment where the incident occurred.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of refurbishing prisons as a result of damage caused by prisoners acting unlawfully in each of the years 1979 to 1985.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the cost of damage to Prison Service establishments between the years 1979 to 1985.

I am afraid that this information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Prison Riot

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's definition of a prison riot.

Mr. Michael Forstyh: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for a definition of a prison riot.

A riot is defined in section 1 of the Public Order Act 1986, a copy of which will be found in the Library of the House. Riot can take place in a public or private place, including a prison.

There is also an offence of prison mutiny which is defined in section 1(2) of the Prison Security Act 1992, a copy of which can also be found in the Library.

In addition, the Prison Service maintain statistics on the number of acts of concerted indiscipline which take place. Concerted indiscipline takes place when two or more prisoners refuse to conform to the rules and regulations of a prison. Such incidents include both passive disobedience and active indiscipline.

Director General of the Prison Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *230*, if he will list candidates assessed as of an acceptable standard for the post of Director General of the Prison Service; and in what order of suitability those candidates were placed.

Mr. Howard: No. Candidates put themselves forward for posts in the civil service on the understanding that their applications are treated in confidence. It is not the practice to make public details of candidates who are not appointed.

Prison Escapes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *534*, which prison the prisoners at large had escaped from; what their offence was; and for how long they have been on the run.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about prisoners unlawfully at large.

The total number of prisoners who have escaped since 20 June 1988 and are still unlawfully at large at 13 January 1995 is 123.

The attached table lists the prison or escorting contractor from whose custody each prisoner escaped, their offence and the length of time unlawfully at large. A copy of this table has been placed in the Library of the House.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits were made by inspectors under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to *(a)* the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Salisbury, *(b)* the Defence Research Agency, Alverstoke and *(c)* The Centre for Human Sciences in each of the last five years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The number of visits made by inspectors was:

(a) Chemical and Biological Defence Establishments

1990: 5
1991: 9
1992: 8
1993: 7
1994: 6

(b) Defence Research Agency, Alverstoke

1990: 4
1991: 4
1992: 2
1993: 3
1994: 2

(c) Centre for Human Sciences (Previously the RAF Institute of Aviation Medicine)

1990: 4
1991: 4
1992: 6
1993: 4
1994: 9

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list and give details of project licences involving animal experiments granted to Ministry of Defence establishments for each of the last two years for which information is available;

(2) how many project and personal licenses issued to Ministry of Defence establishments under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 have been withdrawn; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information held in connection with the issue of licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 will have been given in confidence: the disclosure of such information is prohibited by virtue of section 24 (1) of the Act.

Twelve project licences were granted to Ministry of Defence establishments in 1993, and 20 in 1994. In 1993, 10 project licences expired at the end of the five years permitted by the 1986 Act, and three were surrendered when the relevant project work was completed; in 1994 three expired and seven were surrendered.

In 1993, nine personal licences were revoked on completion of the work on which the licence holders were engaged; in 1994 the figure was 24.

Information on the numbers of project and personal licences issued to particular establishments prior to 1993 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bosnian Refugees

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the reception centre for Bosnian refugees at Cheylesmore lodge, North Berwick, and other reception centres; and if he will give an estimate of the numbers of refugees from Bosnia who will come to Britain during the next 12 months.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Due to the declining number of evacuees from the former Yugoslavia in recent months, it has been decided, following discussions between the Home Office, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the voluntary agencies running the centres, that two of the present nine centres should close at the end of March 1995, and a further five, including Cheylesmore lodge, by the end of April. Of the two remaining centres, one will close at the end of June, and we will review in April the timing of the closure of the last centre against the background of developments in Bosnia.

There are approximately 370 people who have been accepted under the temporary protection programme but who have yet to arrive. The majority are still in Bosnia. UNHCR is reassessing these cases but, because of the uncertain situation within Bosnia, cannot say when, or if, they will be able to travel.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to require victims who have received payment from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority under the tariff scheme to repay sums received if their payment is reassessed following the tariff scheme being withdrawn or altered as a result of court proceedings.

Mr. Maclean: If the tariff scheme had to be withdrawn all payments made under its terms would have to be reassessed. Where the tariff award exceeded the reassessed award the beneficiary would, in principle, be liable to refund the difference. We have decided that it would not be right to seek to recover that difference.

Illegal Immigrant Suspect Index

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Home Office first embarked on the computerisation of the illegal immigrant suspect index; how much has been spent on the project to date; and when he expects the system to be fully operational.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A project team was resourced in late 1989 to develop the suspect index system, and commenced work in January 1990. Following approval of the business case, and a competitive procurement including technical design studies, a supply contract was let to ICL Ltd in December 1992. Development of the system began in January 1993. Capital costs in the order of £13.7 million will have been spent by the end of phase 1 of the project. The system commenced live running at Stansted airport and the Immigration Service intelligence and investigation unit near Heathrow airport on 23 January 1995. The first phase, which includes major ports of entry and enforcement offices, is planned to be completed in April 1995.

Further phases of the project are proposed to encompass remaining ports of entry, enforcement offices and other IND locations where system access is required by 1998.

False Identities

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken to prevent individuals illegally acquiring false identities for passport, DSS and other purposes by using official documentation obtained by posing as a deceased person.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The United Kingdom Passport Agency takes great care to prevent the issue of passports in false identities. The passport issuing system incorporates a variety of safeguards to prevent fraud. Special fraud detection teams in each office liaise closely with the police, immigration service and other agencies such as the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys to counter the submission of applications in false identities.

The Department of Social Security's Benefits Agency has developed a security strategy to combat benefit fraud of all kinds. The strategy involves investment in a variety of measures, including improvements to information technology and increased verification of information presented in claims to benefit. It is anticipated that the substantial investment envisaged will achieve a dramatic reduction in benefit fraud, shifting the emphasis away from detection and investigation towards prevention and deterrence.

Charity Commission

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the efficiency of the Charity Commission.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I do not think that a further review is necessary. The efficiency of the Charity Commission is regularly reviewed by Home Office Ministers, notably as part of the public expenditure process. The Charity Commission is making significant improvements in efficiency, particularly through the introduction of new computerised methods of working, and is carrying through a development programme to enable it to carry out its new responsibilities under the Charities Act 1993. An independent review of the Commission's senior structure and staffing has just been completed which will bring further gains. The Commission has also achieved gains through a recent market test of its managerial and paper-keeping services.

Charities

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered charities are working in *(a)* animal welfare, *(b)* child welfare, *(c)* youth services, *(d)* adult health, *(e)* child health, *(f)* education, *(g)* the Church of England and *(h)* other religions.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The classification on the Charity Commission's present computerised register does not match the categories in my hon. Friend's question precisely. The information available is as follows:

Field	Number of registered charities
(a) animal welfare	886
(b) child welfare and (c) youth services	[1]12,866
(d) adult health and (e) child health	[2]18,834
(f) education	35,347
(g) the Church of England	5,791
(h) other religions	4,514

[1] *Note:* The Charity Commission's classification system is not as broad as the areas listed in the question. It is difficult to distinguish between child welfare and youth services as many charities operate for the benefit of both children and young people.

[2] *Note:* The Charity Commission's classification systems does not distinguish between adult and child health: most of the charities in this field make no distinction as to the age of their beneficiaries.

An improved computerised register which will give a more detailed analysis is planned for next year.

Prison Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost of public funds of running the Prison Service in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the costs to public funds of running the Prison Service in each year since 1979.

The costs for the Prison Service in England and Wales are set out below. They are expressed in cash terms, but include notional depreciation and superannuation.

	£000s
1979–80	344,326
1980–81	437,884
1981–82	498,424
1982–83	572,597
1983–84	637,118
1984–85	656,445
1985–86	743,229
1986–87	786,450
1987–88	882,341
1988–89	1,013,898
1989–90	1,205,763
1990–91	1,464,227
1991–92	1,630,956
1992–93	1,660,200
1993–94	1,638,200

Note:

Information on prisons in Scotland is a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Prison Service.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress the Prison Service has made in devising a key performance indicator on recidivism.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 December 1994]:* I have asked the Prison Service to give this matter further consideration, and expect their advice shortly.

Prisons (Running Costs)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost to public funds of running each prison in Britain in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the cost to public funds of running each prison in Britain.

The attached table shows the costs expressed in cash terms but including notional depreciation and superannuation of each prison in England and Wales in the last 10 years. The figures for earlier years are published in the relevant annual reports on the work of the Prison Service, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.

Information on prisons in Scotland is a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Prison Service.

Prisons (Suicides)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of suicides in prisons in each year since 1979; and if he will give in each case the prison in which the suicide occurred and the age of the prisoner.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 6 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking what has been the number of suicides in prisons in each year since 1979 giving in each case the prison and the age of the prisoner.

Table A gives the number of self-inflicted deaths in prison establishments in England and Wales from 1988 in each case showing the name of the establishment and age of the prisoner. The Coroner's verdict is also shown as not all self-inflicted deaths result in a "suicide" verdict.

Table B gives the number of self-inflicted deaths in prison establishments in England and Wales for 1979 to 1987 and the total number of suicide verdicts.

A copy of these tables have been placed in the Library of the House.

Detailed records were not stored centrally before 1988 and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their client's interests.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* None.

Prison Locks

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons have had their locks changed because of key compromises in the last three years; and what was the average cost for each such prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Margaret Hodge, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisons where locks have been changed because of key compromises in the last three years.

Since January 1992 there have been 28 key compromises resulting in a change of locks. This includes the recent compromise at Parkhurst prison.

The cost of replacing the locks varies according to the size of the prison and the class of locks. Typical costs are in the range of between £40,000 and £64,000.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 7 February 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many new justices of the peace were appointed in Wales during 1994; and what is the political affiliation of the new appointees.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor appointed 116 new justices of the peace in Wales during 1994. The political affiliation of these appointees was as follows:

Party	*Number*
Conservative	24
Labour	50
Liberal Democrat	19
Plaid Cymru	8
Independent/not known	15

DEFENCE

Service Children's Education Authority

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reassessment has been made of the list of admissible schools by the Service Children's Education Authority in the light of *(a)* the Her Majesty's inspectorate and Office for Standards in Education reports and *(b)* the league table of examination results.

Mr. Soames: No reassessment of the admissible schools list has been made in the light of the Her Majesty's inspectorate and Office for Standards in Education reports and the league table of examination results. The Service Children's Education Authority makes Ofsted reports available to service parents, and examination league tables are provided on request.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made by the Service Children's Education Authority of the provision for the education and welfare of service children at *(a)* Rodney school, Nottinghamshire, and *(b)* Finborough school, Suffolk.

Mr. Soames: The Service Children's Education Authority does not assess the provision of education and welfare at schools. Such assessments are the responsibility of the Department for Education, Her Majesty's inspectorate and the Office for Standards in Education. SCEA offers an advisory service to parents whose children already attend boarding schools and to those who are considering a boarding education for their children.

Aircraft Orders

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many orders have been placed with aircraft companies to replace Royal Air Force Wessex helicopters; when those orders were made; and when the aircraft will be delivered;

(2) how many orders have been placed to replace the Wessex helicopters on the Queen's Flight; when those orders were made; and when they will be delivered;

(3) what plans he has to replace Wessex helicopters in the Queen's Flight;

(4) what plans he has to replace Wessex helicopters in the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Freeman: Current plans assume that all UK-based RAF Wessex helicopters, including those in the Queen's Flight, will be replaced by the turn of the century. The Wessex unit in Cyprus is planned to be replaced early next century. An order was placed in October 1992 for six Sea King helicopters which, with the RAF's existing Sea King fleet, will replace Wessex in the search and rescue role. The Sea Kings are due to be delivered this year. Options for the replacement of Wessex in other roles remain under consideration. No orders have been placed.

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account is taken of the policy on corporal punishment in assessing the suitability of schools for children receiving the service schools boarding allowance.

Mr. Soames: Corporal punishment is a matter between individual schools and service parents; it does not affect the eligibility criteria for boarding school allowance. The Service Children's Education Authority is happy to advise service parents on schools' policies relating to corporal punishment.

Joint Services Command

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report,* column *291*, what appraisal was made by his Department of the merits of local schools and medical services in *(a)* Camberley, *(b)* Greenwich and *(c)* Bracknell.

Mr. Soames: As I explained in my previous answer, the key assessment that we have made in respect of schools and medical services is the extent to which students at the proposed joint services command and staff college, and their families, could benefit from ready access to common facilities.

The married quarters serving Bracknell and Camberley are close to the college, so students' children form a significant proportion of the local school population. As a result, some schools have been able to make special provision to cater for this group, such as adjusting the teaching year to coincide with that of the college's, and providing special language and cultural training for the children of foreign students. In Greenwich, however, the married quarters supporting the college are dispersed and situated outside the borough, so no appraisal of the merits of Greenwich schools was appropriate.

Medical care is available on a simillar basis to officers, and their families, at all three sites, but, again, the relative proximity of the associated married quarters to the

colleges at Bracknell and Camberley makes access to common medical services much easier

Secondment

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which individuals have been seconded from the private sector to the Defence Export Services Organisation; and, since January 1992, what were the dates of such secondments and the company or organisation from which each individual was seconded.

Mr. Freeman: Further to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *778*, both the head of the organisation and the offset adviser have been seconded from British Aerospace since September 1994 and October 1993 respectively. The international financial adviser joined the DESO on a short-term contract in April 1992.

Awards

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is able to give details of the new award to recognise conspicuous gallantry and heroism by members of the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: Her Majesty the Queen has graciously approved the institution of the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross to recognise conspicuous gallantry and great heroism by members of the armed forces. This award will replace the Distinguished Service Order, when awarded to officers for specific acts of gallantry, the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal, the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal (Flying). It will apply to all three services, and will be open to service men and women of any rank.

The Distinguished Service Order is to be retained across all three services as an award in recognition of exceptional service in positions of substantial responsibility for command and leadership during active operations.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Political Asylum

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received in the last six months from the Governments of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain about the United Kingdom's political asylum laws, procedures and decisions on individuals.

Mr. Goodlad: The Saudi and Bahrain Governments have raised with us the presence in the United Kingdom of some of their nationals. We have explained United Kingdom asylum procedures to them. Decisions on individual cases are a matter for the Home Office.

Drugs

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to ensure that United Kingdom security assistance provided for drug control purposes does not contribute to human rights violations in developing countries.

Mr. Baldry: Requests from overseas Governments for United Kingdom drugs-related assistance are carefully considered against a number of criteria. These include the human rights record of the country concerned.

Gibraltar

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what amount of resources has been denied to the Government of Gibraltar by the loss of the dockyard and other reductions in the forces over the last 10 years.

Mr. Goodlad: It is generally estimated that, at its peak, the Ministry of Defence contribution to the Gibraltar economy was about 50 per cent. It is currently estimated at about 10 per cent. More detailed figures are not available.

Dr. Hulak Gerger

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey about the imprisonment without trial of Dr. Haluk Gerger, General Secretary of the United Nations Association of Turkey; and what response he received from the Turkish Government.

Mr. Goodlad: We have not raised this specific case, but we take every opportunity to make our concerns on human rights known to the Turkish Government. The Foreign Secretary last did so when he met the Turkish Foreign Minister in London on 2 February. We are following closely the Turkish Government's programme of democratisation measures.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the reasons for the current decline in Rockhopper penguin numbers in the Falkland Islands; and which other penguin species are similarly affected.

Mr. Baldry: Assessments carried out on the reasons for the current decline in Rockhopper penguins are inconclusive. Two major reasons for the decline, which is not confined to the Falklands, have been put forward: first, changes in ocean temperatures, possibly related to the El Nino phenomenon; and, secondly, a natural cycle of decline similar to those previously recorded, which have been followed by an upturn.

No major penguin species on the Falkland Islands have suffered significant decline. Detailed surveys of penguin colonies are being conducted by the organisation Falkland Conservation.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are being taken to avoid over fishing in Falkland Islands waters; and which countries are currently licensed to fish in those waters.

Mr. Baldry: Fishing in Falkland Islands waters is closely controlled by the Falkland Islands Government through a strict licensing regime that limits fishing effort to safe levels. Scientific evaluation of the sustainable development of the fishery is carried out, under contract

to the Falkland Islands Government, by Imperial College and the British Antarctic Survey. The Falkland Islands Government operate two fishery protection aircraft and, depending on the season, either one or two fishery protection vessels.

Vessels from the following are licensed to fish in Falkland waters during 1995:

Belize
Chile
Falkland Islands
France
Honduras
Italy
Japan
Korea
Panama
Poland
Portugal
Spain
Taiwan

Fur Seals, South Georgia

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration is being given to a cull of fur seals on South Georgia.

Mr. Baldry: There are no plans for a cull. The British Antarctic Survey is studying the population dynamics of fur seals and their impact on terrestrial and marine eco-systems.

Liberia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries in the ECOWAS monitoring group initiative in Liberia have indicated that they will withdraw their troops unless there is progress in the peace process or financial assistance is given.

Mr. Baldry: Many ECOMOG troop contributing countries have voiced their frustration with the lack of progress in the peace process and have indicated that they are not prepared to enter into an open-ended commitment in Liberia.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further financial contribution is being made by *(a)* the United Nations or *(b)* other bodies to alleviate the financial hardships being suffered by those countries contributing forces to the ECOWAS monitoring group initiative in Liberia.

Mr. Baldry: The UN trust fund for Liberia was set up to help offset ECOMOG's costs. So far, only five countries, including the United Kingdom, have contributed. The UN Secretary-General has appealed for further donations. I am not aware of any other bodies outside the Economic Community of West African States that have given financial help for ECOMOG.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Faraday Station

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide additional resources to enable the Faraday station to stockpile sufficient quantities of baked beans to last until the closure of the station.

Mr. David Hunt: The provisioning of the United Kingdom's Antarctic stations is the responsibility of the Natural Environment Research Council and its institute, the British Antarctic Survey.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) when the House was informed of the proposal to transfer Faraday station to the Ukraine;

(2) who took the decision to hand over Faraday station to the Ukraine; when it was taken; and what are the terms of the transfer.

Mr. David Hunt: The House was informed of the decision to close Faraday from March 1996, as a manned station, by the then Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science, on 19 May 1993, *Official Report,* columns *157-58.*

Subsequently, the possibility of transfer of the station as a working unit to another operator was explored by the Foreign Office. Negotiations with the Ukrainians were opened following authorisation by the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in June 1994. These have yet to be concluded.

The terms of the transfer are still subject to negotiation.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what guarantees he is able to give that the scientific work currently being carried out by the Faraday station will continue after 1995–96;

(2) what scientific work on the ozone layer is carried out by staff at the Faraday station; and who will carry out this work after the station closes.

Mr. David Hunt: If the Faraday station is closed as a manned station, the British Antarctic Survey will complete the development of automated data collection systems, which will enable key long-term meteorological and magnetic observations to be completed at Faraday.

Should negotiations for the transfer of the station to the Ukrainians prove successful, their scientists will, after training, carry out the existing scientific measurements at Faraday and transfer the resulting data to the United Kingdom.

Ozone measurements have been carried out for many years at Faraday. The monitoring programme will either continue in that location or be transferred to Rothera island.

Sick Leave

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each Department and agency the average days of sick leave and the index figure taking the civil service average as 100.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Data on sickness absence is submitted to the civil service Occupational Health and Safety Agency by Departments and agencies on a voluntary basis. The tables show, for 1993, the average days of sick leave and the index figure taking the civil service average as 100 for participating Departments and agencies.

Ranked working days absence for departments by departmental size

Figure		*Average Days sick leave*	*Staff years*	*Index CS average = 100*
Departments of 10,000 + staff				
190	Inland Revenue	7.71	66,392	76
058	MOD	8.71	84,726	86
180	Customs and Excise	8.75	26,222	86
185	Department of Trade and Industry	8.90	12,112	88
076	Home Office	10.60	47,141	105
093	Department of Transport	10.70	13,588	106
048	Lord Chancellor's Department	11.80	13,048	116
528	Employment Service (DE)	12.27	48,516	121
537	SS Benefits Agency (DSS)	12.81	69,371	126
Departments of 5,000–10,000 staff				
165	Department of Environment	8.14	6,307	80
422	Crown Prosecution Service	8.21	6,572	81
140	MAFF	8.45	7,889	83
427	Department of Health	9.74	5,194	96
091	Scottish Office	10.33	6,298	102
125	Employment Department	10.58	7,620	104
538	SS Contributions Agency (DSS)	11.03	9,851	109
532	Land Registry	12.38	9,228	122
379	National Savings Department	14.81	6,110	146
Departments of 1,000–5,000 staff				
551	ADAS (MAFF)	7.08	2,135	70
040	HM Treasury	7.14	1,683	70
570	Building Management (PSA)	8.37	3,452	83
521	Met Office (MOD)	8.74	2,516	86
119	Health and Safety Executive	8.76	4,632	86
116	Crown Office and Proc Fiso (SO)	8.84	1,044	87
430	Central Statistical Office	8.91	1,317	88
531	Ordinance Survey	9.04	2,275	89
061	ODA	9.14	1,285	90
523	IT Services Agency (DSS)	9.35	4,186	92
426	DSS	9.51	3,075	94
567	SS Child Support Agency (DSS)	9.79	3,628	97
102	Department for Education	9.82	2,135	97
392	Welsh Office	10.13	2,326	100
123	OPCS	10.67	2,128	105
139	Intervention Board	11.93	1,023	118
432	Scottish Prison Service	15.29	4,533	151
516	Registers of Scotland (SO)	15.90	1,268	157
Departments of 500–1,000 staff				
512	Natural Resources Institute (ODA)	4.82	548	48
447	OFSTED	5.50	543	54
443	OPSS (Cabinet Office)	5.54	618	55
166	PSA	6.28	854	62
515	Central Office of Information (HMT)	7.23	570	71
564	Planning Inspectorate (DOE)	7.71	582	76
124	ACAS	8.98	681	89
526	Central Vet Lab (MAFF)	9.48	619	94
002	Charity Commission	10.03	693	99
011	Paymaster General Office	10.41	877	103
146	Export Credits Guarantee	10.94	598	108
050	Scottish Courts Service	12.53	812	124
Departments of 200–500 staff				
507	CS College (OPSS)	4.85	257	48
530	Royal Mint	5.69	370	56
195	National Heritage	5.77	311	57
055	North Ireland Office	6.22	204	61
001	Cabinet Office	7.02	406	69
445	Government Centre for Information Systems	8.19	391	81
077	Treasury Solicitor Department	8.22	377	81
434	Office of Electrical Reg.	8.55	229	84
144	Crown Estate Office	8.58	204	85
577	Chessington CC (OPSS)	8.63	441	85
054	Fair Trading Office	9.40	420	93
508	Hist Royal Palaces (DNH)	10.28	411	101
056	Scottish Courts Administration	10.54	216	104
131	Gen. Register Office (SO)	10.86	274	107

Ranked working days absence for departments by departmental size

Figure		*Average Days sick leave*	*Staff years*	*Index CS average = 100*
013	Public Record Office	11.23	470	111
506	Resettlement Agency (DSS)	14.64	319	145
Departments of 1–200 staff				
075	Legal Secretariat	1.95	29	19
509	QE II Conf. Centre (DOE)	2.45	8	24
005	Government Actuary Department	3.31	78	33
423	OFGAS	3.75	43	37
085	Lord Advocates Department (SO)	6.35	19	63
503	HMSO	6.52	7	64
012	Privy Council Office	6.61	36	65
583	Government Property Lawyers (TSOL)	6.98	124	69
510	OHS (OPSS)	7.17	104	71
429	OFWAT	7.46	145	74
424	Serious Fraud Office	9.47	170	93
205	Telecoms Office	10.04	140	99
205	Scottish Record Office	10.14	129	100
120	Friendly Societies Reg.	10.98	165	108
028	Investment and Loans Office	12.55	38	124
539	RASA (Cabinet Office)	12.94	167	128

Government Contracts

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the bodies with contractor or agency roles for Government that *(a)* can be put into receivership or *(b)* can fail to pay sums due under contract for services meeting Government commitments.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Large numbers of private companies and other independent organisations provide goods or services for the Government. Listing them would involve disproportionate cost.

Abandoned Bases (Antarctica)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how much has been allocated in the last two years to clean up abandoned former British bases in Antarctica;

(2) if he will list all British Antarctic stations now abandoned; and if all the necessary clean up work has been completed.

Mr. David Hunt: No specific funds have been earmarked for this purpose from within annual recurrent expenditure. The list of British abandoned bases is provided in the table. Some clean-up work has been undertaken, although not a full programme.

Base	*Date established*
Port Lockroy	1944
Deception Island	1944
Hope Bay	1945
Sandefjord Bay	1945
Cape Geddes	1946
Stonington Island	1946
Argentine Island, Winter Island	1947
Admiralty Bay	1947
View Point	1953
Horseshoe Island	1955
Danco Island	1956
Portal Point	1956
Detaille Island	1956
Prospect Point	1957
Orford Cliff Hut (Refuge)	1957
Blaicklock Hut (Refuge)	1957
Halley Station IV (inaccessible)	1984

British Antarctic Survey

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what grant was made to the British Antarctic Survey in 1994–95; and what is the proposed grant for 1995–96.

Mr. David Hunt: The science budget allocation for the British Antarctic Survey in 1994–95 was £24.379 million. The planning figure for the science budget allocation for 1995–96 is £25.87 million.

Duchy of Lancaster "Forward Look"

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the next "Forward Look" will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has recently written to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Science and Technology to confirm that the next "Forward Look" of Government-funded science, engineering and technology, will be published in May 1995.

This is to be a permanent change from the arrangements proposed in the White Paper "Realising our Potential" which envisaged a publication date in April each year. This slight adjustment in timing will enable the "Forward Look" to link more effectively with annual public expenditure surveys.

National Science Week

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *4*, what proportion of the £195,000 allocated in support of the national week of science, engineering and technology was given in grants;

what number of applications were unsuccessful; and what would their total costs have amounted to.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Of the £195,000 the Office of Science and Technology has allocated in support of the 1995 national week of science, engineering and technology—SET 95—£50,000 was made available to the Committee on the Public Understanding of Science as additional funding for grants in direct support of SET 95. Some 102 applications were unsuccessful, whose total costs would have amounted to nearly £167,000.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Nitrates

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the justification for the setting of limits to nitrate levels in vegetables.

Mrs. Browning: I see no justification for setting limits while the EC scientific committee for food is still considering the issue. We have made it very clear to the Commission that we oppose the proposal both because no scientific case has been established for it and because of the serious effects that it would cause to our glasshouse lettuce industry. The Commission is accordingly reconsidering the matter.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement about the objective of the trials currently taking place on bovine somatotropin in the United Kingdom; how my trials are taking place; in which counties they are taking place; what companies are sponsoring the trials; and what measures he is taking to ensure that milk from cows being treated with BST in the trials is not entering the food chain;

(2) whether the trials for bovine somatotropin in the United Kingdom will continue following the EU Agriculture Council's decision to continue the moratorium until 1999; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: No trials are currently being undertaken on bovine somatotropin in cows in the UK. The decision of the Council of Agriculture Ministers to extend the moratorium on BST until 31 December 1999 also allowed limited practical tests to be carried out under certain conditions. Details of any such tests and how they might be conducted have yet to be worked out.

Coventry Airport

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many flights had taken place from Coventry airport carrying live animals to Europe in the year to 21 December 1994.

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is not available. It could be provided only by the air operators concerned.

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies

Mr. Booth: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent information about research into transmissible spongiform encephalopathies he has received from the spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: As part of its continuing work to maintain an overview of research into transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, the independent spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee has produced a report which summarises what is now known about TSEs. The report provides an insight into research both completed and under way.

I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library of the House. The report has been published by HMSO.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing, West Midlands

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated number of dwellings for rent in the public sector and scheduled to be built in the next year in each of the West Midlands district council areas; and what are the current housing waiting lists for each of those councils.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest available figures for local authority and other public sector housing stock and on the numbers waiting for housing in districts in the west midlands relate to 1 April 1994 and can be found in the "1994 HIP1 All Items Prints", a copy of which is in the Library. Estimates of local authority and other public sector bodies' proposals to build new dwellings are not held centrally.

In addition, there were a total of 71,000 housing association dwellings in the west midlands region—46,000 in the west midlands county—at 31 March 1994. The forecast for housing association new build starts in the west midlands in 1995–96 is 1,800, and 1,100 in the west midlands county.

Housing Waiting Lists

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current numbers on local authority housing waiting lists, broken down by local authority, as registered on the 1994 housing investment programme returns from local authorities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested on the numbers of households on local authority housing waiting lists at 1 April 1994 can be found in section B of the "1994 HIP1 All Items Prints", a copy of which is in the Library.

Oxygenated Petrol

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has carried out into oxygenated petrol; what plans for research into the environmental suitability of oxygenated petrol he has; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The environmental case for oxygenated fuel is not yet clear. The Government will keep it under review. We are participating fully in the setting of standards for fuel formulation at a European level, in particular in the light of the forthcoming report from the European tripartite initiative on future engine and fuel technologies.

Redundancy Compensation

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the reasons for the differences between the proposed compensation package offered for staff made redundant in the current local government reorganisation and that offered in the 1986 package, with special reference to *(a)* maximum payments and *(b)* discretionary payments for those over 50 years.

Mr. Curry: Any compensation scheme must be tailored to the specific circumstances to which it applies, and should be viewed as a whole. We have provided a compensation package for the current reorganisation which in all the circumstances is fair to employees and affordable for the local authorities and taxpayers.

Construction Contracting

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Heating and Ventilating Contractors Association about the need for legislation on construction contracting in the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is not available in the form requested. However, more than 60 letters have been received since September 1994 on this subject from members of the constructors liaison group of which the HVCA is a component part. Later today my right hon. Friend is meeting representatives of all sectors of the construction industry to discuss this and other issues arising from the Latham report.

Disabled People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions he has had with the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People regarding the effect of payments by councils in lieu of community care on local authorities' budgets;

(2) what discussions he has had with the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People regarding increases in standard spending assessments to offset the costs on local authorities for disabled people not in care.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced in November her intention to allow local authorities to make direct payments to disabled people in lieu of services. My Department has discussed with the Department of Health the effects of this proposal on local authorities' budgets. As any powers to make direct payments will be permissive and will involve the same assessment procedures as now, I am satisfied that there will be no additional need for resources.

Test Valley

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his inspector will report on the Test valley local plan.

Sir Paul Beresford: The provision of information on inspectors reports on objections to development plans is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the inspectorate's chief executive, Mr. Christopher Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Michael Colvin, dated 3 February 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO. 1036: 2 FEBRUARY 1995

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the Test Valley Borough Local Plan.

The long inquiry into objections to the Test Valley Borough Local Plan opened on 11 May 1993, and closed on 22 December 1993 after 100 inquiry sitting days and site visit days. Some 1,600 written objections were lodged in addition to those heard at the inquiry, which have to be examined by Inspectors and reported on with recommendations to the Council.

The report is expected to be issued to the Council in mid-February 1995. By using a second Inspector, this is several months in advance of the date by which the report would normally be expected given the scale of the inquiry and the large number of written objections to be considered.

In view of your interest I will arrange for you to be advised of the date of despatch of the report to the Council.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the saving to public funds if the Ordnance Survey were privatised.

Mr. Atkins: The first review of Ordnance Survey's performance as an executive agency was carried out in 1994. It concluded that agency status had been a spur to significant improvements in performance. Consultants employed to look at options for the future status of Ordnance Survey assessed that it would continue to progress well with its current status and recommended that it should remain an executive agency for the time being. The consultants believed that privatisation offered potential benefits as well as disadvantages but found that various obstacles precluded any change of status in the immediate future. They were unable, at that time, to quantify the full costs of privatisation or subsequent savings to public funds. Government accepted these recommendations and OS will remain an agency for the next four years at least. In the meantime, I have tasked the chief executive of Ordnance Survey with investigating the obstacles to privatisation so that these costs and benefits can be established.

Housing Stock Transfers

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *210*, if he will list the local authorities which have conducted a ballot on proposed large-scale voluntary transfer of their housing stock and, in each case, the number of tenants eligible to vote, the number of those participating and the number of those voting for and against the proposed transfer.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Since 1988, 64 local authorities have conducted tenant ballots on proposed large-scale voluntary transfers. These authorities are listed, with details of the number of properties involved, the rate of tenant participation in the ballot and the proportion of tenants voting for and against the proposal.

The Department does not keep a central record of the number of tenants eligible to vote in each transfer, the actual number of votes cast or the actual numbers of tenants voting for and against each proposal.

Large scale voluntary transfers—successful ballot results

Authority	*Number of dwellings*	*Participation rate (per cent.)*	*Votes in favour (per cent.)*	*Votes against (per cent.)*
Chiltern	4,650	71	85	15
Newbury	7,053	87	82	18
Sevenoaks	6,526	80	85	15
Broadland	3,721	84	53	47
East Dorset	2,245	85	84	16
Medina	2,825	84	69	31
Mid Sussex	4,426	80	77	22
North Bedfordshire	7,472	73	72	28
Rochester	8,029	76	60	40
South Wight	2,119	89	91	9
Swale	7,352	80	82	18
Christchurch	1,621	76	54	46
Ryedale	3,353	83	82	18
South Buckinghamshire	3,319	82	75	25
Suffolk Coastal	5,272	78	57	43
Tonbridge and Malling	6,382	76	71	29
Bromley	12,393	76	55	45
Tunbridge Wells[1]	5,519	80	60	40
	5,519	81	52	48
Breckland	6,781	81	62	38
East Cambridgeshire	4,266	82	70	30
Surrey Heath	2,885	78	55	45
West Dorset	5,279	84	65	35
Epsom and Ewell	1,740	75	53	47
Hambleton	4,268	84	66	34
Hart	2,408	81	76	24
Havant	3,561	81	51	49
Hertsmere[2]	4,370	81	78	12
	1,700	89	76	24
Leominster	1,832	84	87	13
Penwith	3,354	89	65	35
South Ribble	3,445	76	77	23
South Shropshire	1,500	82	69	31
Mid Bedfordshire[2]	3,976	80	73	27
North Dorset	2,881	84	55	45
Thanet[2]	1,760	91	51	49
Wychavon[2]	4,020	76	81	19
	2,543	75	54	46
Basingstoke and Deane[2]	4,850	72	52	48
	4,850	77	60	40
Windsor and Maidenhead[2]	3,250	81	60	40
	3,250	80	54	46
Vale of White Horse	5,028	82	67	33
Maldon	2,050	80	83	17
Malvern Hills	4,867	80	83	17
Kennet	4,996	83	87	13
Rushmoor	5,300	75	69	31

[1] Held two consecutive ballots
[2] Proposed split transfer to two housing associations. Two ballots held.

Unsuccessful Ballot Results

Authority	*Number of dwellings*	*Participation rate (per cent.)*	*Votes in favour (per cent.)*	*Votes against (per cent.)*
Rochford	2,343	87	7	93
Salisbury	7,795	77	25	75
Torbay	3,425	59	27	73
Arun	3,569	81	25	75
Brentwood	3,269	88	20	80
Canterbury	6,228	79	25	75
Redbridge	8,165	73	30	70
Three Rivers	5,534	86	25	75
Bournemouth	6,300	84	32	68

Unsuccessful Ballot Results

Authority	Number of dwellings	Participation rate (per cent.)	Votes in favour (per cent.)	Votes against (per cent.)
North Kestevan	4,800	85	44	56
South Holland	4,819	80	37	63
Wokingham	3,431	75	30	70
Hillingdon	14,500	79	20	80
Kingston	6,432	44	39	61
Woodspring	7,922	75	29	71
Maidstone[1]	4,000	81	41	59
	4,000	84	41	59
Mendip	5,100	79	49	51
Rother	3,733	79	45	55
Westminster	674	68	31	69
Poole[1]	1,400	92	73	27
	4,000	86	39	61
Mid Bedfordshire[1]	4,907	78	48	52
Thanet[1]	4,850	80	37	63
Cherwell[1]	3,274	83	37	63
	3,692	77	43	57
Castle Point	1,877	81	17	83

[1] Proposed split transfer to two housing associations. Two ballots held.

River Quality

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to maintain recent improvements in river quality in England and Wales.

Mr. Gummer: We have in hand a major programme for water quality improvement. Between 1989 and 2005 the water companies are spending an average of some £3 billion a year, much of it of benefit to water quality. The National Rivers Authority has since 1989 been able to bring a co-ordinated approach to discharge consenting and the other means it has of bringing about improvement. Other dischargers and farmers are taking steps that benefit water quality, much of it voluntary in response to codes of practice rather than regulation. The results are shown in the more than 15 per cent. net improvement in river quality that the NRA estimates took place between 1990 and 1993. These efforts will be continuing and we are going further than required by legislation, as is shown by the more than £500 million that water companies will be spending up to 2000 to bring about additional river quality improvement.

At the time of privatisation of the water industry in 1989, we provided a further mechanism for co-ordinating and prioritising improvement, in the form of statutory water quality objectives—SWQOs. Last May, the Government put in place the new classification system inter alia as the framework for SWQOs. We now intend to consult formally on proposals for a small set of SWQOs which will allow us to test the operation of the system on a pilot basis. The final details are being agreed with the NRA.

The proposals will specify the improvements to be achieved in each case and the timetable for achieving them. With the help of the NRA, I shall also identify the specific actions that will be needed, with a preliminary assessment of the likely costs and benefits. There will then be a three-month period within which any interested person or body may comment, including by offering further information on costs and benefits. I shall than decide whether and in what form to make the SWQO. In controversial cases, I may arrange for a local inquiry before reaching my decision.

The implementation procedures, and practical operation of the statutory objectives in the initial limited pilot group of catchments will be assessed before any decision is made on whether SWQOs should be introduced on a wider basis. The Government are also considering the development of proposals for economic instruments for water pollution and abstraction. Our intention on both national water regulation, including SWQOs, and economic instruments will need to take into account the way in which water legislation is developing in the European Community.

Construction Industry

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to publish another state of the construction industry report.

Mr. Gummer: The latest state of the construction industry report, produced jointly by my Department and representatives of the construction industry, has just been completed. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Crown Estate Meeting

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, column *174*, what was the purpose of the meeting held on 26 May 1994 at the Crown Estate between English Nature, the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and the Crown Estate; and what conservation groups were invited to this meeting.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* The informal discussions were to identify the key issues regarding the current process for leasing the foreshore for wildfowling. Conservation groups were subsequently consulted.

Tidal Land (Conservation)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conservation groups have been invited to participate in the Crown Estate's joint group on wildfowling and conservation on tidal land lease application procedures.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* English Nature is a member of the joint group. Voluntary bodies are being consulted on the new draft procedures, which it is hoped will be extended to all foreshore leases granted by the Crown Estate.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State, Treasury on Monday 6 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *69*.

Environmental Claims

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environmental when he initiated a report by the National Consumer Council on the issue of environmental claims and related issues; when the findings will be made public; and what actions the Government will take to address the report findings.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* My Department and the Department of Trade and Industry are discussing with the National Consumer Council the detailed specification for a study into the effectiveness of controls over the making of environmental claims. The study should be concluded in the summer. We will decide nearer the time how best to make the findings known and what action might be needed to follow them up.

Planning Funds

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *763*, what plans he has to restrict the use to which local authorities may put planning gain money to the geographical area of the consent in question; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: We have no plans to introduce such restrictions.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 February.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 7 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Constitutional Change

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what constitutional change he proposes should take place in the United Kingdom before the end of the century.

The Prime Minister: Any proposals for constitutional change will be put before Parliament when it is appropriate to do so.

Staff Inquiry

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister between what dates Ms Baxendale served on the Scott inquiry team; and if he will list the members and grades and originating departments of the current team.

The Prime Minister: Miss Presiley Baxendale QC has worked on Sir Richard Scott's inquiry from 18 January 1993 to 31 March 1994 inclusive, and from 2 May 1994 to 13 May 1994 inclusive and thereafter from time to time as the need arises.

The current members of the inquiry team are:

	Department
Christopher Muttukumaru (Grade 5)	Treasury Solicitor's Department
David Price (Grade 5)	Department of Trade and Industry
Peter Edwards (Legal Officer)	Inland Revenue Solicitor's Office
Karen Wiseman (Grade 7 (Legal))	Crown Prosecution Service
Catherine Southern (Grade 7 (Legal))	Crown Prosecution Service
Christopher Stone (HEO)	Department of Trade and Industry
Mufassir Mohammed (EO)	Department of the Environment
Sonia Octave (AO)	Home Office
Joanne Bishop (AA)	Home Office
Velma Bernard (Personal Secretary)	Department of Trade and Industry
Wendy Moore (Personal Secretary)	Department of Trade and Industry

Downing Street Policy Unit

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Prime Minister from what sources the head of the Downing street policy unit is paid; and if he will make a statement on the division of his role in relation to official and party matters.

The Prime Minister: The head of the Downing street policy unit is paid from the Cabinet Office other services vote as a special adviser. Like other special advisers, and like his predecessors under this and previous Administrations, he assists me with work which is partly governmental and partly political.

Coastal Protection

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Prime Minister what funds are available other than funds available through the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the current financial year for coastal protection and repair.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, *Official Report*, column *85*, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of the Environment, *Official Report*, column *12*.

Deception Island

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what plans exist to clean up the site of the former British whaling station on Deception island.

Mr. David Hunt: I have been asked to reply.

Further work on the clean up of the former British station on Deception island is planned for 1996–97, subject to the allocation of funds and the co-operation of the other Antarctic treaty partners involved.

Pay Rises (Utilities)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to establish a committee to examine utility directors' and chairmen's pay rises, pension contributions and share options.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* No. As I have previously made clear, private sector salaries and other remuneration are a matter for companies and their shareholders to decide, not the Government. We welcome the establishment of Sir Richard Greenbury's group, which will prepare a code of good practice on directors' pay and conditions, and the recent contribution made by the Institute of Directors.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury, *Official Report*, column 69.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Radioactive Waste Shipments

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what extent the United Kingdom will be liable in the event of an accident resulting in radioactive contamination from the imminent shipment of vitrified high-level radioactive waste from France to Japan on a BNFL/PNTL ship.

Mr. Charles Wardle: If nuclear injury or damage occurs in the course of carriage of cargoes by PNTL in a country which is not a party to the Paris convention on nuclear liability, there is a possibility of claims against BNFL/PNTL, as the carrier.

Civil Servants

Mr. McAllion: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Ian Taylor: The figures for the Department, excluding the following executive agencies—Companies House, the Insolvency Service, the National Engineering Laboratory, the National Physical Laboratory, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, the Patent Office and the Radiocommunications Agency—but including the Accounts Services Agency and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist are set out in the table. The figures include only those staff who have chosen to declare that they have a disability or long-term health condition.

	Registered disabled staff	*Non-registered disabled staff*	*Total number of disabled staff*	*Total number of staff*
Number	52	146	198	6,449
Per cent. of total staff	0.8	2.3	3.1	—

I have asked the chief executives of Companies House, the Insolvency Service, the National Engineering Laboratory, the National Physical Laboratory, the National Weights and Measures laboratory, the Patent Office and the Radiocommunications Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. John McAllion, dated 7 February 1995:

You recently tabled the following Parliamentary Question:

"To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibiliy are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, Focus on Ability."

I am replying as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency.

The figures are set out below, and include only those staff who have chosen to declare that they have a disability or long-term health condition.

	Registered disabled staff	*Non-registered disabled staff*	*Total number of disabled staff*	*Total number of staff*
Number	14	13	27	1,143
Per cent. of total staff	1.23	1.13	2.36	—

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. John McAllion, dated 31 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of proportion of non-industrial civil servants in The Insolvency Service who have a disability.

The figures for the Insolvency Service are as set out below. These only include those staff who have chosen to declare that they have a disability or long term health condition.

	Registered disabled	*Non registered disabled*	*Total number disabled staff*	*Total number of staff*
Number	19	28	47	1,615
Percent of total staff	1.18	1.73	2.91	—

Notes:[1] Figures are provided on a head count basis and exclude casual and industrial staff.

[2] Figures show the position on 25 January 1995.

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. John McAllion, dated 31 January 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS No. 129

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question relating to the proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, Focus on Ability. The following numbers apply to NEL

Registered disabled—2

Unregistered disabled—1

Total manpower at January 1995—252

Therefore disabled as a proportion—1.2 per cent.

I trust you will find the above information to be satisfactory for your purposes.

Letter from Dr. Peter Clapham to Mr. John McAllion, dated 31 January 1995:

I am writing in response to your question to the President of the Board of Trade regarding the proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibility who are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, Focus on Ability.

Details of staff currently employed by the National Physical Laboratory, who have chosen to declare their disability, are as follows:-

	Registered disabled	*Non-registered disabled*	*Total disabled*	*Total staff*
Number	6	26	32	651
Per cent. of total staff	0.9	4.0	4.9	—

The above figures are provided on a head count basis as at 25 January, and exclude industrial and casual staff.

I hope this provides the information you require.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. John McAllion, dated 31 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about staff with disabilities.

This Agency has no registered disabled among its 48 staff, although four members of staff (8.3 per cent.) have declared a level of disability.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. John McAllion, dated 7 February 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION 129

The President of the Board has asked me to respond to your Question about non-industrial disabled staff.

The information requested is set out below. The figures include only those staff who have chosen to declare that they have a disability or long-term health condition.

	Registered disabled staff	*Non-registered disabled staff*	*Total number of disabled staff*	*Total number of staff*
Numbers	16	12	28	891
Per cent. of Total Staff	1.8	1.35	3.15	—

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. John McAllion, dated 7 February 1995:

Employment of Disabled People

I am replying on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your written question to the President of the Board of Trade about the employment of disabled people.

To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and Agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, Focus on Ability.

Of the 542 staff employed in the Agency on 1 January, there are two registered disabled staff and 14 other staff who have chosen to declare their disability. In total this represents 3 per cent. of Agency staff (0.4 per cent. registered disabled, 2.6 per cent. unregistered disabled staff who have chosen to declare their disability).

Non-commercial Disputes

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new provision he is planning for the handling of non-commercial disputes.

Mr. Heseltine: The provision of the draft Arbitration Bill would, like those of the existing Arbitration Acts 1950 to 1979, apply to commercial and non-commercial arbitrations alike.

Bills (Private Utilities)

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will takes steps to ensure that partial payment of bills from private utilities may be made at post offices in cash.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Post Office Counters already has such arrangements on a commercial basis with British Gas, British Telecom and the great majority of regional water and electricity companies.

Uranium Exports

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 26 January to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), *Official Report*, columns *335–36*, if he will give the reasons why the British percentage share of EU exports of low enriched, high enriched and natural uranium is confidential for the years 1988 to 1992 but not confidential for 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on exports of these commodities is available in aggregate only, due to commercial confidentiality. With the introduction of Intrastat from January 1993, separate figures for EU and non-EU exports are the available aggregates.

Konver

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which areas have been selected for assistance under the Konver initiative; what types of projects will be supported; how many jobs are expected to result; what funds are involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A list of priority areas eligible for Konver II will be published by European Commission in the *Official Journal* shortly. I expect the London borough of Ealing to be included in this list. The

Government are currently considering additional areas to be included in the British programme to be sent to the Commission by 1 March. Once the programme has been agreed, probably in the summer, applications for grant can be considered.

Konver targets small and medium enterprises needing advice and support for diversification, such as the promotion of innovation, know-how and technology transfer and feasibility studies. The rehabilitation of military sites and environmental improvement is also covered. There is also a provision for training.

The number of jobs likely to be created through Konver II will not be known until applications are received and considered.

Konver I grants worth £17.9 million were awarded in 1993 to projects across the country. The UK's allocation from Konver II will be £79 million.

Coal Privatisation

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arrangements he has made to ensure that agreements existing for the sale and purchase of land by British Coal will be carried out by the appropriate successor privatised companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In general, the acquisition and disposal of land are commercial matters for the mining companies concerned. Where British Coal's interests in land have been transferred to successor companies, any binding agreements relating to the sale and purchase of that land have also been transferred.

Consultants

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department permits consultants to tender for contracts resulting from work they have carried out in *(a)* drawing up the specification for the tender documents or *(b)* recommending the contracting out of a Government service.

Mr. Heseltine: *(a)* No. *(b)* Consultants are generally excluded from tendering for services where they have been employed to advise on the feasibility of contracting out. Where a general exclusion has not applied, appropriate safeguards have been required to prevent potential conflicts of interest arising between the interests of the project and any other commercial interest the consultant may have.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if Shreeveport Consultants submitted its accounts for 1993–94 to Companies House by the legal deadline.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: As this is an operational matter for Companies House executive agency, I have asked David Durham, the chief executive, to respond directly.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Nigel Griffiths, dated 7 February 1995:

You have recently tabled a Parliamentary Question which asked for details about the filing of the 1993–94 accounts for Shreeveport Consultants. The Minister has informed you that I have been asked to reply as Chief Executive of the Agency as this is an operational matter for Companies House.

There is no company with the name Shreeveport Consultants on the UK Register. There is a company called Shreeveport Ltd, but we have no way of knowing whether this is the company that you are interested in.

Information on document filings by UK companies is a matter of public record, and available to any member of the public either through our search rooms or through our on-line information service Companies House Direct. There is a statutory fee of £1 charged for the screen of information which shows the document filing history of any company. You may find that use of these services provides the quickest and easiest way of checking whether you have correctly identified the company in which you are interested, and of finding out any relevant information on it.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he intends to publish the responses of official receivers to the consultation on the affirmative order to enable the work of the Insolvency Service to be contracted out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I would propose to publish a digest of official receivers' responses to the current consultation by laying copies in the Library of the House before seeking parliamentary approval to any draft enabling order.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the amount spent annually on mechanical processing work in the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In its report, Stoy Hayward estimated that, based on costs and the average staff in post for 1993–94, the contracting-out of administrative work would open up some £24 million of official receivers' work to competition.

This figure will vary with changing case loads and changes in the level of the Insolvency Service's staffing.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to recover the working papers of Stoy Hayward Consultants on the Insolvency Service and to ensure that Stoy Hayward Insolvency Co. has not been passed copies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No steps have been taken to recover Stoy Hayward's working papers.

All information obtained by Stoy Hayward Consulting as part of its work for the Insolvency Service is subject to its undertaking as to its confidentiality.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what fee is being paid to Shreeveport Consultants for drawing up the specification for contracting out the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The total contract price for drawing up a specification, bid documentation and evaluation criteria was agreed with Shreeveport Ltd. at £126,900, including VAT.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish details of the grades of the staff identified as surplus to the Insolvency Service by Stoy Hayward as option 1 of its recommendations.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Stoy Hayward identified £24 million of administrative case work which could be exposed to competition if a decision were made to contract out. It did not identify the staff undertaking such work as surplus as it recognised that there would be a need for contract management and supervision and that contracting out would offer the possibility of increased concentration on the official receivers' investigative role.

Regional Operations

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff his Department employs on a regional basis in each standard English region; what is the cost of running these regional operations; what was the total budget for each region in the latest available year; and what are the main purposes for which the budget is used.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Disaggregated information on the basis of standard English regions is not available. However, information on the resources employed by my Department in each of the English regions covered by the Government offices for the regions is set out in the table.

	[1]*Staff in post as at 1 January 1995*	*Running costs for 1993–94*	*Running cost budget for 1994–95*
North East	112.0	3,618,000	3,566,000
North West	123.0	4,720,000	3,739,000
Merseyside	44.5	[2]n/a	1,279,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	103.0	3,394,000	3,376,000
East Midlands	85.0	2,356,000	2,848,000
West Midlands	148.5	4,659,000	4,686,000
South West	78.5	2,320,000	2,407,000
South East	72.5	1,693,000	2,769,000
East	55.0	1,799,000	2,209,000
London	60.0	[2]n/a	1,971,000
Total	882.0	24,559,000	28,850,000

Notes:
[1] Staff figures are based on full time equivalents (part-time staff count as 0.5)
[2] The Government Office Merseyside and Government Office London did not exist in 1993–94.

A breakdown of these running costs and budgets as well as details of the activities associated with them were published in MINIS 1994, available in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION

Nursery Education

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list those organisations which have made written submissions to the official task force consultation on nursery education for all four-year-olds.

Mr. Forth: A list of organisations from which the official task force on under-fives have received written submissions is given. The list does not include individual schools or members of the public who have written to the task force:

Association of County Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Avon Nursery Head Teachers
Avon Nursery Link Group
Barnardo's
British Association for Early Childhood Education
Business and Technology Education Council
Campaign for State Education
Catholic Education Service
Children in Wales
College of Care and Early Education
Commission for Racial Equality
Cornwall Campaign for Nursery Education
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education
Council for Disabled Children
Daycare Trust
Devon County Council
Devon Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations
Early Childhood Education Forum (in addition to many organisations who made separate submissions, this encompasses:
- Association of Advisors for Under Eights and their Families
- Childcare Association
- National Association of Nursery and Family Care
- National Portage Association
- Tutors of Advanced Courses for Teachers of Young Children)

Early Years Curriculum Group
Early Years Trainers Anti-Racist Network
Equal Opportunities Commission
Free Church Federal Council
Funding Agency for Schools
The GM Initiative
Grant-Maintained Schools Advisory Committee
Gwent Under Eights Network
Hampshire County Council
High/Scope UK
Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools
Independent Schools Joint Council
Kids' Club Network
London Borough of Brent Early Years Conference
London Boroughs Association
Mencap
Metropolitan Council of Kirklees
Middlesborough Borough Council
Montessori Education (UK) Ltd.
National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants
National Association of Grant-Maintained Primary Schools
National Association of Head Teachers
National Association of Nursery Centres
National Campaign for Nursery Education
National Childminding Association
National Children's Bureau
National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations
National Council of Women
National Governors' Council
National Private Day Nurseries Association
National Union of Teachers
OMEP (World Organisation for Early Childhood Education)
Oxfordshire Education Department
Penistone and Area Nursery Development Group
Playgroup Network
Portsmouth City Council
Pre-school Playgroups Association
Ripon Diocesan Board of Education
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

Save the Children
Shropshire County Council
Smart's Agency and Childcare Training Centre
Society of Education Officers
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Sound Start Network
Special Educational Needs National Advisory Council
Voluntary Organisations Liaison Council for Under Fives
Whitehorse Childcare Ltd.
Women's Royal Voluntary Service
Working for Childcare

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list those organisations or their representatives she has met as part of her consultation on nursery education for all four-year-olds; and when she will make an announcement on the implementation of her policy.

Mr. Forth: A list of the organisations and institutions that my right hon. Friend, members of the DFE task force and I have met or visited is given. My right hon. Friend will make an announcement in due course:

Andersen Consulting
Asquith Court
Association of County Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of Teachers and Lecturers
Bordon County Infant School, Hampshire
Belgian Ministry of Education (Flemish speaking)
Belgian Ministry of Education (French speaking)
Bradshaw Community Nursery Centre, Salford
British Association for Early Childhood Education
Busy Bees
Catholic Education Service
Centre for Policy Studies
Chase Children's Centre, Hampshire
Childcare Association
Childcare North Shields
Childcare Vouchers
Childcare Wallsend
Church of England General Synod Board of Education
Clydebank Family Centre, Strathclyde
Cranstonhill Nursery School, Glasgow
Danish Ministry of Education
Danish Ministry of Social Services
Deighton Nursery, Kirklees
Dorning Street Nursery School, Salford
Dorothy Gardner Centre, Westminster
Early Childhood Education Forum (in addition to those organisations who appear separately on the list, this encompasses: Association of Advisors for Under Eights and their Families
Campaign for State Education
Children in Wales
Commission for Racial Equality
Council for Disabled Children
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education
Daycare Trust
Early Years Curriculum Group
Early Years Trainers Anti-Racist Network
High/Scope UK
Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools
National Association of Education Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants
National Association of Nursery Centres
National Association of Nursery and Family Care
National Childminding Association
National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations
National Private Day Nurseries Association
National Portage Association
OMEP (World Organisation for Early Childhood Education)
Tutors of Advanced Courses for Teachers of Young Children)
Voluntary Organisations Liaison Council for Under Fives
Working for Childcare
Early Years Co-ordinators Network
Faifley Community Nursery, Stathclyde
French Ministry of Education
Funding Agency for Schools
Goldsmiths college
Gloucestershire LEA
Hampshire LEA
Highgate Newton Playgroup
Hillend Children's Centre, Strathclyde
Intercity Kitty Nursery
Irlam Endowed Primary School, Salford
Jigsaw Day Nursery, Welwyn Garden City
Kindercare Learning Centres
Kirklees LEA
Lepton (CE) Junior and Infants School, Kirklees
London Montessori Centre
Margaret McMillan Nursery Centre, Islington
Milton Keynes Preparatory School
Montessori UK Ltd.
National Association of Head Teachers
National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers
National Campaign for Nursery Education
National Children's Bureau
National Union of Teachers
North Tyneside LEA
Park Infant Family Centre, Gloucestershire
Peat Marwick/KPMG Consultants
Pen Green Family Centre, Corby
Perrin's Community School Day Nursery, Hampshire
Pre-school Playgroups Association
Professional Association of Teachers

Ready Steady Go Nursery, Camden
Royal Society of Arts
Salford LEA
Sheffield LEA
SIMS Education Services Ltd.
Sound Start
Spanish Ministry of Education
Startright Educare
Strathclyde Regional Council
Susan Hay Associates, Broadgate Nursery
Sythwood School Playgroup
Tower Hamlets LEA
Thomas Coram Research Unit, University of London
Thornton Lodge Nursery, Kirklees
Wandsworth LEA
Widden Family Centre, Gloucestershire
Worcester College of HE

Teachers

Mr. Steinbery: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many full–time equivalent teachers there were in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows the full–time equivalent number of teachers employed in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sectors, including self–governing—GM—schools, in England as at January of each year.

Full–time equivalent number of teachers employed in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sectors, including self–governing (GM) schools, in England as at January of each year

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	[1]*1993*	[1]*1994*
Nursery, primary and secondary	410,547	405,252	402,932	402,280	401,506	397,410	398,542	394,945	394,874	396,332	389,091	390,430
Special	17,448	17,470	17,302	17,167	17,644	16,929	17,328	17,014	16,801	16,647	16,647	16,292
Education other than at school	2,180	2,285	2,214	2,083	2,578	2,737	3,058	2,664	2,636	2,578	2,578	2,578
Total	430,175	425,007	422,448	421,530	421,728	417,076	418,928	414,623	414,311	415,557	408,316	409,300

Source: Annual 618G return.
Note:
[1] As from 1/4/93 sixth form colleges became part of the Further Education sector, and the 1994 figures therefore exclude teachers in these colleges. The second 1993 figure also excludes these teachers to allow comparison with 1994.

Schools (Wheelchairs)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which local education authorities have provided her with information on access to schools for pupils in wheelchairs under the Education (Information as to Provision of Education) Regulations 1994.

Mr. Forth: The regulations require local education authorities to provide information on the accessibility of schools to pupils in wheelchairs to the Secretary of State after 1 May and by 1 June 1995, and every second year thereafter. Information on school's access required under these regulations has, accordingly, not yet been received.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each institution of further education funded by the Further Education Funding Council the salary range of the principal in the last two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Boswell: This information is not collected centrally. FEFC guidelines on accounting policies recommend that colleges should disclose the emoluments of the principal and other senior postholders in their accounts, which are publicly available.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she expects to respond to the recommendations of the Further Education Funding Council regarding the governing bodies of *(a)* Wilmorton college, Derby and *(b)* St. Phillip's college, Birmingham.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend is aware of the need to bring these matters to an early conclusion. She will announce her decisions shortly.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Cloakroom

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee when he expects the new machines in the Members' Cloakroom to be repaired.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms.

WALES

Agri-Environmental Regulations

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to meet the EEC agri-environmental regulations; and what funds have been made available for their implementation.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In the past year, we have launched in Wales two new environmentally sensitive areas, a countryside access scheme, a habitat scheme and an organic aid scheme. We plan to launch new payments to promote public access in ESAs and a moorland scheme shortly. These are additional to the existing five ESAs and Tir Cymen. Expenditure on these schemes is planned to rise to £15,000,000 by 1996–97.

Crickhowell House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date his Department's approval was *(a)* sought

and *(b)* given for the construction of the Crickhowell house headquarters of the Welsh Common Health Services Authority at Roath basin, Cardiff docks, Cardiff; what independent evaluation of the alternative sites available was made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Crickhowell house was constructed by Grosvenor Waterside, the property arm of Associated British Ports and therefore not subject to approval by the Welsh Office.

In addition to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority's appraisal of alternative sites and options, the authority's occupation of the building was independently assessed by Gooch and Wagstaff, property consultants, which confirmed that it offered the best value for money in terms of the options considered. The National Audit Office also examined the papers.

Cardiff Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report,* column *538,* on what date the agreement by Associated British Ports to make a contribution to Cardiff Bay development corporation infrastructure costs announced on 11 May 1989 lapsed; if the chairman of the corporation sought his Department's consent to the lapsing; and if his Department's consent was sought for the development agreement between the company and the corporation signed in March 1991.

Mr. Redwood: The Department's consent was not required to the development agreement with Associated British Ports. The hon. Gentleman's questions about the development agreement are operational matters for the corporation, and the chief executive will write to the hon. Gentleman in response.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he secured the approval of the Cardiff Bay development corporation for the National Audit Office to have secondary access to its accounts for regularity and propriety purposes; and if he will place a copy of the memorandum of agreement in the Library.

Mr. Redwood: The financial memorandum of Cardiff Bay development corporation was amended on 2 December 1992 to provide the Comptroller and Auditor General access to the records and books of the corporation. A copy of the letter of the same date which made that amendment has been placed in the Library of the House.

Health Authorities

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions the local advisory committees in each health authority area in Wales have made representations to that health authority in each of the last three years.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally, but could be obtained from health authorities.

Medical Committees

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions *(a)* the Welsh medical committee, *(b)* the Welsh dental committee, *(c)* the Welsh nursing committee, *(d)* the Welsh midwifery committee, *(e)* the Welsh pharmaceutical committee and *(f)* the Welsh optical committee, have made representations to him in each of the last three years.

Mr. Redwood: I receive advice from the following five statutory committees.

(a) the Welsh Medical Committee;
(b) the Welsh Dental Committee;
(c) the Welsh Nursing and Midwifery Committee;
(d) the Welsh Pharmaceutical Committee; and
(e) the Welsh Optical Committee;

Representation is made both directly to me and indirectly through my representative who attends the committee.

Of those representations made directly to the Department over the last three years, (a) the Welsh medical committee has presented one report, with a further three currently subject to external consultation; (b) the Welsh dental committee has submitted three reports and offered advice on a further three consultation documents; (c) the Welsh nursing and midwifery committee has submitted five reports and; (d) and one each has been submitted by the Welsh pharmaceutical and Welsh optical committees.

Each statutory committee also produces an annual report.

Waste-to-energy Schemes

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what waste-to-energy schemes there are in Wales in accordance with the non-fossil fuel organisation; and what plans there are to establish such schemes in the near future.

Mr. Redwood: No waste-to-energy projects were supported in Wales under the first two orders of the non-fossil fuel obligation. Four projects have been awarded contracts under the recently announced third order.

Recycling

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been paid, and to which organisations, in respect of recycling in Wales, under the *(a)* recycling credits, *(b)* environmental technology innovation scheme, *(c)* the Department of Trade and Industry's environmental management options scheme and *(d)* Euroenviron.

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows:

(a) Details are not held centrally.
(b), (c) and (d): No payments have been made to organisations based in Wales.

Hazardous Substance Consents

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hazardous substance consents were made by local councils in Wales in the last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In the period between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994, 12 hazardous substance consents were issued in Wales. The consents were issued under the Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990, which came into force on 1 June 1992. The Act requires that the storage or use of certain substances on particular sites are consented to by the local council. Substances can be used or stored in significant amounts only after the local council has assessed the risk to people in the neighbourhood.

Only five councils received applications, compared to 26 in the previous year. Of the 12 consents issued, 10 were new applications and two were carried forward from the previous year. These were both consents for sites where substances were already being stored or used before the Act came into force.

TREASURY

Standard of Living Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he measures an increase in the standard of living; and how many years it would take to double the standard of living at the rate of increase since (i) 1979 and (ii) October 1989.

Mr. Nelson: The standard of living can be measured in a number of ways. Taking real personal disposable income per head, a per capita growth rate of 2.8 per cent. per annum would be required to achieve a doubling of living standards over the next 25 years. This compares with average annual per capita growth rates of 2.1 per cent. since 1979 and 0.8 per cent. since October 1989. However, as these are both dates from the peak of an economic cycle, such selective periods cannot be reliable indicators of future growth.

Growth Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what annual rate of growth in GDP is implied in his objective of doubling the standard of living in 25 years; how that compares with the increase in the years since the first year of membership of the EEC; and what role interest rates play in achieving that objective.

Mr. Nelson: The standard of living can be measured in many ways. In order that real personal disposal income per head should double in 25 years, each year it would need to grow by 2.8 per cent. The growth rate of real personal disposable income per head between 1973, the year we joined the EEC, and 1994 was around 2 per cent. per annum.

Monetary policy is set to keep underlying inflation within the 1 to 4 per cent. target. A low inflation environment provides the best chance of delivering higher living standards through a period of sustained growth.

Rathlin

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if vehicles on Rathlin maintain exemption from vehicle excise duty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am not aware of any vehicle currently registered on Rathlin which will pay more vehicle excise duty, or pay duty for the first time, as a result of the changes in schedule 4 to the Finance Bill.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the proceeds under inheritance tax from estates valued at *(a)* under £1 million, *(b)* £1 million to £10 million, *(c)* £10 million to £50 million and *(d)* over £50 million in the latest available year.

Sir George Young: Estimated liabilities for inheritance tax for estates passing on death in 1991–92, the latest year available, are given in the table:

Value of net estate, including lifetime transfers within seven years of death	*Liability*[1] *£ million*
Under £1 million	790
£1 million to £2 million	150
Over £2 million	140
All estates	1,080

[1] Provisional

A further breakdown of estates over £2 million cannot be reliably estimated and, in any case, the numbers involved may be too small to give adequate protection to the confidentiality of individual estates.

Heavy Fuel Oil Duty

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total value of revenue raised from heavy fuel oil duty in each of the last three years from *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Great Britain.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total revenue raised from heavy fuel oil duty in Northern Ireland and Great Britain over the last available three years is as follows:

Year	*Northern Ireland £ million*	*Great Britain £ million*
1990–91	71.13	2,740.27
1991–92	86.84	3,070.96
1992–93	95.32	3,296.78

HEALTH

Mental Nurses

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered mental nurses were employed in the Northumberland health authority in each year since 1989; and what was the percentage change in each year.

Mr. Sackville: The information available centrally is shown in the table:

Qualified mental health nursing staff within Northumberland DHA as at 30 September 1989–1993

Year	Wte	Per cent. change
1989	280	1989–90 – 6.2
1990	270	1990–91 + 1.7
		1991–92 –
1991	270	18.8
1992	220	—

Source: PD(STATS)B Non-Medical Workforce Census.
Notes:
[1]All figures rounded to nearest 10.
[2]All percentages calculated on unrounded figures.

NHS Management

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to develop alternative systems of management of the national health service.

Mr. Malone: The system of management that we continue to develop for the national health service, which began with the NHS reforms introduced in 1991, is one of decentralisation of responsibilities to purchasers and providers, while maintaining clear lines of accountability. This improves services to patients and ensures better value for money by devolving decision making about the delivery of services to local level.

Mental Illness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are at present legally detained under Mental Health Act powers.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Private Finance Partnership Initiative

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the projects which at any time have been under consideration as part of the private finance partnership initiative, giving in each case the date of the submission of the project to the Department, and the present status of the application.

Mr. Sackville: Since the launch of the private finance initiative in November 1992, the national health service has been encouraged to exploit the benefits of partnership with the private sector. The NHS Executive issued the capital investment manual under the health service guidelines—HSG(94)31—on 28 June 1994, copies of which are available in the Library, which required consideration of options of partnership with the private sector for all capital projects. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1269*, for the latest available information on the status of schemes approved. Other information on date of first submission to the NHS Executive and current status is not collected centrally.

Speech Therapists

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to provide bursaries for post-graduates pursuing two-year courses to qualify as speech therapists.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to do so.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has conducted into the length of London ambulance service emergency response times in the one-hour period before shift changes.

Mr. Sackville: This is a management issue being addressed by the London ambulance service.

Social Service Authorities

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the annual payments to each social service authority in lieu of community care.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities were given indicative figures for the 1995–96 special transitional grant in letter LASSL (94) 11, copies of which are available in the Library. Final figures will be issued in due course. It is up to local authorities how much of their general funding they make available for community care services in addition to this.

Malpractice

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors have been disciplined for *(a)* negligence and *(b)* incompetence for each year since 1984; and how many were struck off.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Complaints

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been received by each family health services authority categories of complaint and the outcome of the complaints in each category.

Mr. Malone: The available information is published annually in "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics" copies of which are available in the Library.

Fluoridated Water Supplies

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase the availability of fluoridated water supplies throughout the country.

Mr. Malone: The Government remain convinced that fluoridation of drinking water is a safe and effective public health measure and will continue to support the introduction of such schemes, particularly where the dental health of the population is known to be poor. In 1994, the Government agreed to help with the capital funding of seven schemes in the north of England which would bring fluoridation to 1.7 million more people.

Decisions about fluoridation should, however, continue to be taken at a local level.

GP Fundholders

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has given the health commissions in respect of returning to general practitioner fundholders savings they have made.

Mr. Malone: Paragraph 24 of the National Health Service (Fund-holding Practices) Regulations 1993 sets

out how general practitioner fundholders may use audited savings for the benefit of patients.

Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health districts in England have permission to employ salaried dentists; and how many have now *(a)* recruited and *(b)* failed to recruit the approved number.

Mr. Malone: The number of salaried dentists employed by English family health services authorities is shown in the table. In addition to those family health services authorities listed, Berkshire, Dorset, Hampshire, Hereford and Worcester, Kingston and Richmond, Northamptonshire and Solihull have been granted permission to employ salaried dentists. Information about vacancies is not available centrally.

Table 1: General Dental Service: Number of salaried dentists[1] by family health services authority as at 30 September 1994

FHSA	30 September 1994
All FHSAs	115
Cumbria	1
Derbyshire	3
Cambridgeshire	3
Norfolk	3
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	9
Essex	2
City and East London	9
Kent	5
Greenwich and Bexley	7
Bromley	1
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	31
Surrey	5
West Sussex	1
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	2
Wiltshire	2
Isle of Wight	2
Buckinghamshire	4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	3
Gloucestershire	3
Somerset	4
Staffordshire	1
Cheshire	8
Liverpool	2
Lancashire	2
Manchester	1
Salford	1

Source:
Dental Practice Board.
[1] This is the number of salaried dentists with contracts registered at the DPB. It is not the number of salaried dentists in employment at the actual specified date.

Restricted Growth

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she or her Department have had in regard to the incidence of restricted growth; what reply she has sent; what action she is taking; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Mr Paul Zetter, CBE, honorary president of the Restricted Growth Association, has written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently expressing concern that the association has no communication with the majority of people of restricted growth in this country, and mentioning its wish to create a database of those affected.

I have today written to Mr. Zetter to say that I fully support the excellent work that the association is doing to help people of restricted growth. However, personal health information is subject to the general principle of the law of confidence. As such, health records can be disclosed only within the national health service on a strictly need-to-know basis and, generally speaking, it cannot be disclosed to an outsider or third party without the patient's prior consent. I have invited Mr. Zetter to meet officials of my Department to discuss this issue further.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury gave him on 6 February, *Official Report*, column 69.

Anabolic Agents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to restrict the promotion and sale of anabolic agents designed to improve sporting prowess.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Anabolic steroids are prescription-only medicines, and their promotion and sale is regulated by the Medicines Act 1968. A failure to comply with the regulations can be a criminal offence. Products which purport to be anabolic steroids but which in fact are not may also be subject to the requirements of the regulations if medicinal claims are made on behalf of such products.

Enforcement of the Medicines Act is the responsibility of the Medicines Control Agency. Enforcement action against persons who illegally manufacture, sell or promote anabolic steroids is a high priority for the agency.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department announced on 2 November that he intended to bring anabolic steroids within the controls of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The necessary amending regulations will be brought before Parliament in due course.

Child Care

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the total social services budget was spent on child care provision in England in the last five years.

Mr. Bowis *[pursuant to his reply, 19 December 1994, c. 987–88]:* I regret that there were clerical errors in the 1992–93 data given in my previous reply.

A corrected table of figures is as follows.

Gross expenditure on personal social services in England

	Total £ million	Children's services £ million	Children's services per cent.
1988–89	3776.1	1164.3	30.8
1989–90	4204.4	1277.3	30.4
1990–91	4697.7	1449.4	30.9
1991–92	5127.4	1551.4	30.3
1992–93	5469.9	1653.8	30.2

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Pools Companies

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to lift the ban to allow the pools companies to advertise on radio and television; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced on 25 January that the Government had decided that it was not necessary in the public interest for the ban on broadcast advertising by the football pools to be maintained. I have invited the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority to consider amending their advertising codes accordingly.

Tourism

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will publish the initial findings of the McKinsey Inc. management consultants' report into the future of tourism in Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall be making a statement about tourism policy in the near future. The final report on the work McKinsey and Co. has done for the Department and the tourist boards will be placed in the House of Commons Library when it is available.

Pornography (Internet)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what powers he and his hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade have to regulate the use of pornography on the Internet.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science to a question by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 18 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *488*.

Television

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of current Independent Television Commission codes in regulating the licensing of channels, with particular reference to Babylon Blue;

(2) what representations he has received from the Independent Television Commission to strengthen the regulatory powers over adult channels.

Mr. Dorrell: I am aware of public concern about the portrayal of sexual conduct in television programmes and keep this matter under careful review, in consultation with the chairman of the regulatory bodies. Babylon Blue, which has been licensed by the Independent Television Commission, has yet to begin broadcasting. If and when it does, it will be expected fully to comply with ITC's programme code and the conditions of its licence. The ITC has powers to ensure that it does. I have received no request from the ITC for any strengthening of its regulatory powers over adult channels.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the maximum penalties available *(a)* to the Independent Television Commission and *(b)* to his Department where (i) satellite and (ii) terrestrial television have broken the terms of their licence or ITC codes.

Mr. Dorrell: Under the terms of the Broadcasting Act 1990, the Independent Television Commission has sole responsibility for regulating the licence conditions of terrestrial and satellite commercial television services, which include a requirement to observe the ITC's codes. The commission has a range of sanctions it can impose for non-compliance with the terms of its licences. The maximum penalty that the ITC can impose on Channels 3 and 5 licensees and on satellite services is revocation of the licence. On Channel 4, the maximum penalty the commission can impose is a fine not exceeding 3 per cent. of the channel's annual qualifying revenue for the first occasion and 5 per cent. thereafter.

Jazz

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps his Department will take to increase funding for jazz.

Mr. Dorrell: Central Government support for the arts is channelled through the arts councils and, in England, the 10 regional arts boards. It is for these bodies to determine the balance of funding as between the various art forms and individual arts organisations. I understand, however, that the Arts Council is close to completing a major review of support for jazz in this country.

National Lottery

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the first grants to the arts will be available from the national lottery funds.

Mr. Dorrell: The arts councils in the United Kingdom are considering applications for lottery funds and the first grants are expected to be announced in spring 1995.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how Her Majesty's Treasury is investing the funds raised for good causes by the national lottery in the period prior to the first allocation of grants by the lottery distribution bodies.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* Under the terms of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 responsibility for investing the proceeds of the national lottery falls to the national debt office, which is a non-ministerial department separate from the Treasury. The investment powers issued by the Treasury allow the national lottery distribution fund to be invested in a range of secure financial instruments described in paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5, 5A, 5B, 9 and 9A of part II of schedule 1 to the Trustee Investments Act 1961.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury on 6 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *69*.

Unusual Industries

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what will be *(a)* the fee and *(b)* the expected expenses paid to the firm Unusual Industries in respect of its organisation of events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it is not our practice to divulge the level of payments made to contractors.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what will be the expected level of costs borne by his Department's administration vote, class XI, vote 7, in respect of officials' support of the firm, Unusual Industries, in its organisation of events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* No costs will be borne on the Department's administration vote, class XI, vote 7, in respect of officials' support of Messrs. Unusual Industries in the provision of the programme of commemorative events. The costs to vote of officials' engaged on monitoring the performance of the contract and approving payments to Messrs. Unusual Industries is likely to be some £60,000. There are also likely to be additional small costs relating to the work of other personnel involved on an occasional basis.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage by what process the firm Unusual Industries was chosen to organise the programme of events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* Messrs. Unusual Industries was selected to provide the services in question by a process of competitive tendering.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the annual actual administrative expenditure for his Department for each year of its operation, in 1994 prices; and if he will provide a breakdown for each year to show the annual expenditure on the Royal Commission on historic monuments of England.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The Department of National Heritage was created in April 1992 when certain areas of responsibility from six other Departments were transferred. The central administration costs for each year of its operation are as follows with figures in 1994 prices shown in brackets:

£ thousand

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Total DNH administrative expenditure	9,898 (10,404)	22,710 (23,164)	20,161 —

Annual expenditure by the Royal Commission on the historical monuments of England, which is accounted for on a separate vote, is as follows:

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
RCHME gross expenditure	12,251 (12,878)	14,967 (15,266)	13,877 —

Notes:
1 Figures for DNH administrative expenditure exclude the Royal Fine Art Commission and the Millennium Commission.

The figures for 1992–93 do not reflect full DNH expenditure cost since some part-year central service costs from former Departments were met by those Departments.

Figures for 1992–93 and 1993–94 include some one-off cost that relate to the setting up of the Department.

Figures for 1994–95 represent the current level of provision before adjustments for the spring supplementary. Figures for actual outturn will not be available until the end of the financial year.

Arts Grants, Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *619*, if he will give the level of the grants from the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts in Wales given to each of the organsations listed and the dates on which the applications were *(a)* made and *(b)* approved.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The information requested is in the table:

Organisation	*Award £*	*Date received by ABSA*	*Date approved*
Theatre Bara	4,000	9 November 1990	4 December 1990
Caws	7,200	20 January 1992	31 January 1992
Y Faner	5,000	23 November 1990	4 December 1990
	10,000	21 October 1991	18 December 1991
Dalier Sylw	4,000	21 December 1990	10 January 1991
	5,000	16 August 1991	3 September 1991
Ewrosgol	2,500	7 February 1991	21 February 1991
Creu Cof	2,500	16 February 1991	7 March 1991
Cwmni Dawns Camre Cain	4,000	7 July 1991	24 July 1991

Organisation	Award £	Date received by ABSA	Date approved
Welsh International Film Festival	3,000	16 August 1991	3 September 1991
	3,000	16 September 1991	9 October 1991
	4,000	18 September 1992	7 October 1992
	5,000	24 September 1993	30 September 1993
Wales Actors Company	4,750	8 May 1992	4 June 1992
Arad Goch	4,000	29 November 1990	19 December 1990
	2,000	16 July 1993	28 September 1993
Hwyl a Fflag	7,500	23 November 1990	4 December 1990
	8,000	27 September 1991	9 October 1991
National Film and Video Archive of Wales	6,500	7 December 1990	19 December 1990
Clwyd Arts and Exhibition Service	3,000	22 January 1991	31 January 1991
Taliesin Trust	2,500	7 February 1991	7 March 1991
Theatr Gorllewin Morgannwg	7,500	8 July 1991	24 July 1991
Barddas: Y Gymdeithas Gerdd Dafod	2,000	22 July 1991	9 October 1991
Theatr Had	2,000	6 July 1992	22 July 1992
Model House Llantrisant	1,500	17 August 1992	3 September 1992
Rhiniog	1,500	27 September 1993	19 October 1993

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* My Department has not withdrawn any rules and regulations in the last 12 months.

The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed.

The manpower implications are taken into account in the Department's central manpower plans, which will be published in the Department's annual report.

Second World War (Anniversary)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the level of consultancy payments expected to be made to the programme project manager for the organisation of events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it is not our practice to divulge the level of payments made to consultants.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Sir John Wheeler: The administration of the next steps agencies is a matter for the chief executive of each agency. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Pat Devlin to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

SETTING UP OF NEXT STEPS AGENCIES

I have been asked to reply, in respect of the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency, to your Parliamentary Question.

The Agency has leased its Headquarters building at an annual rent of £196,000.

We do not publish periodical journals and we do not have executive cars or corporate clothing.

The Agency has a specially designed logo which cost £4,750 and specially designed printed stationery which cost £2,280.03.

This is a new Agency and posts did not exist prior to it being set up. At 3 January 1995 there were 1,025 Whole Time Equivalent Staff-in-Post for the entire Northern Ireland Agency, of whom 785 are engaged in delivering child support services to the GB Child Support Agency under a Provision of Service Agreement

Letter from D. A. Stanley to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply, on behalf of the Compensation Agency, to your recent Question about Next Steps agencies.

The Compensation Agency remains in the accommodation occupied by the predecessor division. No additional support staff have been required. The Agency does not publish periodical journals nor does it have any executive cars. Approximately £5,000 was spent on developing a logo and on average an additional £4,000 per year is spent on specially designed corporate stationery. The Agency does not have corporate clothing.

Letter from Brendan Magee to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the costs associated with the setting up of this Agency, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland.

We have not acquired our own Headquarters building, have not required any additional support staff, have no executive cars and have no corporate clothing.

We publish an Annual Report and a Business/Corporate plan at an annual cost of approximately £2,500. An Agency logo was designed through an in-house competition at a cost of £150 and we use our own headed stationery which costs no more than the Branch stationery which it replaced.

I hope you will find this information helpful.

Letter from L. H. Ferguson to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

In the absence of Mr. Watson, who is on leave, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the costs associated with the set up of the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency.

The Agency has not acquired its own Headquarters building, has required two additional support staff and has no executive cars.

We publish an Annual Report and Business Plan at a total annual cost of £39,000. We have a specially designed logo at a cost of £1,000 with annual corporate clothing at £1,900 more, and specially designed stationery at £2,000 more, than the pre-Agency costs.

I hope you will find this information helpful

Letter from M. J. D. Brand to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the costs associated with the set up of the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland as a Next Steps Agency.

Ordnance Survey has not acquired its own Headquarters building, does not have any executive cars and has no corporate clothing for its staff.

Three additional support staff have been required for accounts work since we became an Agency and an Annual Report and Business Plan are published each year at a cost of £7,600.

We continue to use a logo which was introduced long before we became an Agency and which appears on our stationery.

I hope you will find this information helpful.

Letter from D. W. Gallagher to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 6 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the costs associated with the set up of the Rate Collection Agency.

The Rate Collection Agency has not acquired its own Headquarters building, has not required additional support staff and has no executive cars.

An Annual Report and internal magazine are published each year at a cost of £4,700. Corporate clothing (ties and scarves) were ordered for the Agency launch in April 1991 at a cost of £2,705.

Finally an Agency logo was designed through an in-house competition at a cost of £100. However corporate stationery costs remain broadly similar to pre-Agency levels.

I hope you will find this information helpful.

Letter from Alex Wylie to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 23 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the costs associated with the set up of the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency.

The Social Security Agency did not acquire a Headquarters building when it was established, but made use of existing accommodation at Castle Buildings, Stormont. We do not publish periodical journals, we do not have any executive cars, nor do Agency staff have corporate clothing.

We do have an Agency logo and were advised by consultants on the design of Agency stationery. I regret that we are unable to give the separate costs of these. However, the total cost of the development of the logo, letterheads for Agency stationery, signage for the Agency's offices and a corporate identity manual cost a total of £13,397.17 including VAT.

Finally, 30 additional staff were needed in the Agency for work arising mainly in the areas of Finance, Planning, Personnel and Parliamentary Business which had been transferred from the Department.

I hope you will find this information helpful.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

You have asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland a number of questions about Next Steps Agencies. The Secretary of State has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply on behalf of that Agency.

The Agency has established its headquarters in Clarendon House, Belfast. This building was already a wholly owned part of the Government estate.

The Agency brought together in a single organisation the training and employment functions of the Department of Economic Development and a number of responsibilities previously held by the Northern Ireland Training Authority along with some of those of a number of Industrial Training Boards. Overall staffing in the Agency has reduced from 1,660 at the time of its launch in April 1990 (which was the number of staff fulfilling those functions of the Department for which the Agency was given responsibility) to 1,300 at present.

Two Periodical Journals are published by the Agency at an annual cost of £28,000.

A single executive car was purchased in 1992 at a cost of £13,500. Repairs and running costs, including petrol for the current financial year are around £1,800.

The Agency does not provide corporate clothing for its staff.

When the Agency was established the design of a corporate identity including a logo was commissioned. The overall costs of this work was £11,000. Costs of Corporate Stationery incorporating the Agency's logo are no more than was the cost of producing the Department's stationery which incorporated its own house style. The annual cost of printing stationery is just over £11,000.

I trust that you will find this information helpful.

Letter from D. J. Bell to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 13 January 1995:

VALUATION AND LANDS AGENCY

Sir John Wheeler has asked that I write to you in my capacity as Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Valuation and Lands Agency to give the information requested by you from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 19 January 1995.

The period since Agentisation has been a most challenging one as the organisation sought to accommodate the necessary cultural change brought about by Agency status and strove to achieve the demanding targets set for it in a climate of considerable financial constraint across the public sector as a whole.

I am confident that the Agency will continue to demonstrate improved performance flowing from the tighter targeting and resource control put in place under Next Steps.

The following is the specific information which you requested:-

(i) The Agency does not own its headquarters building—this was occupied by the Valuation and Lands Office *before* its agentisation—but shows an assessed notional annual rental value in its Accounts (£275,000 1993–94);

(ii) no additional support staff have been acquired since agentisation;

(iii) the approximate annual cost of publishing periodic journals is £13,700;

(iv) the Agency does not have any executive cars;

(v) the one-off cost of the Agency logo was £6,243;

(vi) the Agency does not have corporate clothing; and

(vii) the cost of specifically designed and printed corporate stationery since agentisation is £5,870.

I trust this information is sufficient for your purposes, however if I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Constituency Boundaries

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the occasions on which Northern Ireland constituency boundaries were discussed *(a)* in the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference and *(b)* in the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental secretariat.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The provisional recommendations on electoral boundaries published by the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Boundary Commission in January 1994 were raised by the Irish side at the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference held on 28 January 1994. As the joint communiqué issued after that conference recorded, the British side said that the commission is a body responsible to Parliament, not to Government, and described the statutory procedures for interested parties to make representations with respect to the commission's proposed recommendations.

Northern Ireland Boundary Commission

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the dates on which officials met or telephone members or officials of the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission;

(2) when the officials of the political affairs division first became aware of what became the revised recommendations of the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission.

Mr. Ancram: Having regard to the independence of the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Boundary Commission, contact has been confined to Northern Ireland Office officials with specific responsibility for the commission's financial accountability and resources, and has been minimal.

The deputy chairman of the boundary commission wrote to the Secretary of State on 16 January to advise him of the revised recommendations. That letter was copied to appropriate officials within the Department and included senior members of the political affairs division.

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the persons and firms engaged as consultants by the Fair Employment Commission.

Mr. Ancram: The firms and persons engaged as consultants by the Fair Employment Commission from 1 January 1990 to date were:

BIS Beecom (now Parity Solutions Ltd.)
F. Cassidy
R. J. Cormac
A. M. Gallagher
Gilpin Black
J. M. D. Kremer
Market Research N I
A. Murphy
Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre
R. D. Osborne
Psychometric Research and Development
Research and Evaluation Services
M. Rubenstein
Septembers McConnell
Ulster Marketing Services

In addition, the commission administered, on behalf of the Department of Economic Development, the small firms fair employment scheme, under which companies obtained free consultancy advice on fair employment procedures. This scheme ceased to operate on 31 March 1993. During the life of the scheme, 58 consultants undertook assignments for small companies.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is the practice of the Fair Employment Commission to notify any consultants of forthcoming investigations.

Mr. Ancram: The Fair Employment Commission does not notify consultants of forthcoming investigations.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means notice is given by the Fair Employment Commission *(a)* to the firms concerned, *(b)* to other bodies and *(c)* to the public of forthcoming investigations.

Mr. Ancram: The conduct of investigations under section 11 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 is governed by paragraph 2 of schedule 9 of the legislation.

Before holding an investigation, the commission serves notice of its intention to hold the investigation and furnishes particulars of the scope and purpose of the investigation in a formal letter to the party concerned.

It is not the policy of the commission to provide notice of forthcoming investigations to any other body.

The public is provided with general information on the commission's investigation activities in its annual report. The names of concerns under investigation are not released until the investigation is complete and the report published.

Abortion

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights on abortion law in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The Government are giving careful consideration to the recommendations on abortion law which have been made by the commission. Decisions on those recommendations have yet to be taken.

Roads Service

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many personnel are retiring or being offered redundancy in the current phase of roads service staff reductions; what are the grades of those leaving the roads service; and how reductions are distributed within each division.

Mr. Moss: In response to the 1994–95 early retirement programmes available to Northern Ireland civil service industrial and non-industrial staff, a total of 133 personnel in the Department of the Environment roads service have applied successfully for voluntary redundancy and will be leaving during the period 1 January to 20 March 1995.

Some of the vacancies created within the administrative and professional and technical grades will not necessarily be carried within the division in which the retiring officer served.

This overall figure is divided among the roads service's divisions as follows:

Division	Non-Industrial Administrative	Non-Industrial Professional and Technical	Industrial	Total
HQ (Belfast)	1	6	3	10
Ballymena	1	3	14	18
Belfast	—	2	11	13
Coleraine	1	3	14	18
Craigavon	1	11	15	27
Downpatrick	2	4	15	21
Omagh	—	8	18	26

All the industrial staff leaving are non-craft road workers, with the grades and distribution of the non-industrial staff concerned being as follows:

	Grades
HQ	1 x Principal, 2 x SPTO, 2 x HPTO, 1 x PTO, 1 x TG I
Ballymena	1 x Staff Officer, 1 x SPTO, 1 x HPTO, 1 x PTO Supervisor
Belfast	1 x HPTO, 1 x TG I
Coleraine	1 x Staff Officer, 1 x SPTO, 1 x HPTO, 1 x PTO Supervisor
Craigavon	1 x EO I, 2 x PPTO, 2 x SPTO, 2 x HPTO, 1 x PTO, 2 x PTO Supervisor, 2 x TG I
Downpatrick	1 x Deputy Principal, 1 x Staff Officer, 1 x SPTO, 1 x PTO, 1 x PTO Supervisor, 1 x TG I
Omagh	5 x SPTO, 1 x PTO Supervisor, 2 x PTO

Notes:
1. PPTO—Principal Professional and Technology Officer.
2. SPTO—Senior Professional and Technology Officer.
3. HPTO—Higher Professional and Technology Officer.
4. PTO—Professional and Technology Officer.
5. TG I—Technical Grade I.
6. EO I—Executive Officer Grade I.

Rates Collection Agency

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultation took place with elected Northern Ireland Members before *(a)* the setting up of the Rates Collection Agency and *(b)* the decision to reduce from 13 to five the number of rates collection offices.

Mr. Moss: The decision to establish the Rates Collection Agency as an executive agency of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland with effect from 1 April 1991 was announced in answer to a question from the then Member for North Devon on 27 March 1991, *Official Report*, columns *426–27*. The chief executive's recommendations last year for streamlining the work of the agency became public knowledge before any external consultations could be arranged.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the proposed reduction in the amount of rate support grant payable in each of the 26 local government councils for the year 1995–96 in *(a)* overall cash terms, *(b)* p/£ rate and *(c)* as a percentage of each council's district rate 1994–95.

Mr. Moss: There is no proposed reduction in the amount of general grant payable for the year 1995–96. Overall, there will be a 7.1 per cent. increase as set out below. However, since district councils are still in the process of finalising accounts, it is not possible to provide the information requested at (b) and (c).

District councils	Cash provision 1994–95 £k	Cash provision 1995–96 £k
Antrim	189	394
Ards	1,773	2,007
Armagh	1,966	1,953
Ballymena	643	781
Ballymoney	834	877
Banbridge	872	1,180
Belfast	5,314	6,061
Carrickfergus	743	835
Castlereagh	1,015	882
Coleraine	392	412
Cookstown	904	964
Craigavon	1,899	2,140
Derry	3,065	3,206
Down	2,023	2,457
Dungannon	1,748	1,704
Fermanagh	1,782	1,774
Larne	703	806
Limavady	921	1,035
Lisburn	1,860	1,531
Magherafelt	1,116	1,452
Moyle	540	554
Newry and Mourne	3,375	3,503
Newtownabbey	1,335	1,447
North Down	1,038	558
Omagh	1,666	1,951
Strabane	1,700	1,741
Totals	39.4 million	42.2 million

Notes:
[1] Staff figures are based on full time equivalents (part-time staff count as 0.5)
[2] The Government office Merseyside and Government office London did not exist in 1993–94.

The figures for 1994–95 cannot be finalised until accounts are certified towards the end of the 1995–96 financial year. The figures for 1995–96 are based on provisional estimates provided by district councils in September 1994.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he intends to reduce the regional rate required by an amount comparable to the increase which will be required in the district rate in order to compensate for the proposed reduction in the 1995–96 rate support grant.

Sir John Wheeler: No decision has yet been taken on the level of the 1995–96 regional rate. An order fixing the regional rate poundage will be laid before the House. However, the legislation governing the striking of the regional rate provides for the amounts to be raised by the district rate to be taken into account before the order is made.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the discretionary power being given to councils in Northern Ireland to increase from 2p to 5p in the pound the amount to be spent on local economic development will be met by extra taxation or by way of transfer of moneys from the Department of Economic Development budget to individual councils.

Mr. Moss: There is a discretionary power. It is a matter for district councils to decide how much they wish to raise within the 5p limit to provide economic development activities within their districts. There is no specific funding from central Government. Any additional expenditure by councils as a result of the increase from 2p to 5p will have to be met from within their overall resources.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed reductions in the 1995–96 rate support grant on the work of local government councils in fulfilling their obligations to community relations and other cross-community projects; and what areas of councils' responsibilities are likely to be affected.

Mr. Moss: No such assessment has been made because the general grant for 1995–96 has not been reduced. The allocation of £42.2 million represents an increase of £2.8 million—7.1 per cent.—on the 1994–95 provision.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Mine Clearance

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research is being conducted by the British Government into improved methods of humanitarian mine clearance.

Mr. Baldry: We are currently evaluating proposals from the Defence Research Agency, whose technological expertise may be able to improve the means of mine detection. If successful, these proposals could be a major step forward in dealing with the various land mine problems around the world.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* mechanised or *(b)* other methods of humanitarian mine clearance are available.

Mr. Baldry: There a number of methods of mechanical mine clearance, including flails, ploughs, rollers and hard-wheeled vehicles. Other methods of mine clearance include detection by trained mine clearance teams using hand-held locators, or dog teams.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the condition of the Neretva hydro-electricity generation complex and its associated transmission system in central Bosnia; how many people could be served by this electricity supply; if he will estimates the cost of reinstating the system; and if he is involved in any plans to reinstate it.

Mr. Baldry: Of the Neretva hydro-power stations, only the Rama power station is currently operating, at a much reduced capacity. If the Neretva system were connected to the national grid it would help provide 709 MW of power to the whole of Bosina Herzegovina compared with 1,160 MW for the thermal system. Following an ODA review in January 1994, it was decided to continue to support thermal, rather than hydro, power stations due to the prohibitive cost of the large-scale civil engineering repairs that would be required. For the past one and a half years, the ODA has undertaken a £9.8 million programme to restore basic electricity supplies to central Bosnia by assisting in vital repairs to thermal power stations and transmission lines and helping to maintain coal output.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects funded by his Department during the last three years, and planned for the future, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, giving the cost of each project and the contributions made by other agencies or Governments.

Mr. Baldry: During the three years of the conflict, the ODA has provided over £173.5 million in emergency aid to the former Yugoslavia—£94 million bilaterally and over £79.5 million through the European Union.

Copies of an information sheet which gives financial and factual information, details of contributions to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the 1994 summary of overall donor assistance to the former Yugoslavia and a list of all the projects undertaken by the EEU, will be placed in the Library of the House at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the condition of the principal supply routes to and within Bosnia-Herzegovina; and what plans he has to support the repair and maintenance of those routes to facilitate the supply of humanitarian aid.

Mr. Baldry: Although local authorities are still responsible for the original roads, the maintenance and repair of principal supply routes in the former Yugoslavia are dealt with primarily by the engineering units of UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and UNPROFOR, the United Nations protection force. The ODA has seconded two road engineers to the UNHCR for the last two years to assist with the upkeep of the supply routes. All aid routes are accessible, subject to weather conditions.

EU Development and Co-operation Activities

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the new division of responsibility for development and co-operation activities within the European Commission.

Mr. Baldry: Five Commissioners will share responsibility for development and co-operation activities in the new European Commission. Mr. Pinheiro will be responsible for DG VIII—African, Caribbean and Pacific countries; Mr. Marin will be responsible for DG I North/South—the Mediterranean, Asia and Latin America; Mr. van den Broek will be responsible for DG I—the PHARE and TACIS programmes for eastern and central Europe and the former Soviet Union; Ms Bonino will be responsible for emergency aid—the European Community Humanitarian Office; Mme Cresson will be responsible for research and development including that for developing countries—DG XII.

Liberia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British aid organisations are currently involved in providing humanitarian assistance in Liberia.

Mr. Baldry: The Save the Children Fund is currently providing health care to displaced persons in Greater Monrovia and Bomi county. We are unaware of any other British aid organisations currently operating in Liberia.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if humanitarian assistance in Liberia outside Monrovia has now been resumed.

Mr. Baldry: There has been some resumption of humanitarian aid outside Monrovia, but this is essentially exploratory and small scale. The British Government have provided over £3 million of emergency aid bilaterally to Liberia since April 1993.

Child Health

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of overseas aid is used for low-cost strategies with particular reference to *(a)* oral rehydration therapy and *(b)* immunisation.

Mr. Baldry: Improving child health is an important objective for Britain's health and population aid. The promotion of oral rehydration for diarrhoea and immunisation against preventable infectious diseases are essential, cost-effective interventions in all primary health care programmes which now form the major part of ODA's strategy for reaching this objective. Data are not available for our aid to health classified by the specific nature of the intervention; such data could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of overseas aid is devoted to the health, nutrition, education and well-being of children.

Mr. Baldry: One of the main aims of the aid programme is to enhance access to education, basic health services and improved livelihoods. Where appropriate, projects are funded to address the needs of children, including their health, nutritional and educational requirements. Information about the amounts spent in each area could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list dates on which aid offers in principle were made to the Government of Indonesia in each year since 1980;

(2) if he will list the dates on which aid and trade provision offers in principle were made to the Government of Indonesia in each year since 1980.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answers 3 February 1995]:* Aid offers in principle are not made in respect of projects financed from the bilateral aid programme.

For projects financed under the aid and trade provision, we have entered into the following framework agreements with the Government of Indonesia since 1980:

Date	*Agreement*	*Amount £ million*
16 July 1986	Concessional loan arrangement 1986	140
1 December 1988	Concessional loan arrangement 1988	100
5 April 1993	Concessional loan arrangement 1993	65
7 April 1994	Concessional loan arrangement 1994	80

The amounts indicated relate to support available in principle for projects to be mutually agreed between the United Kingdom and Indonesian Governments. They comprise a mix of grants from the aid and trade provision and export credits through the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates since 1980 bilateral aid to Indonesia, including aid and trade provision support, has been withheld or suspended for good government reasons with particular reference to persistent or severe abuse of human rights.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* None.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, columns *118–20*, concerning projects in Indonesia financed from the aid and trade provision, if he will give an assurance that none of the equipment provided is being used by Indonesian military or security personnel; and what is the purpose of the provision of radio communications and shortwave radio transmitters for the Ministry of Forestry.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* None of the equipment provided for the projects referred to in my answer of 6 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *118–20*, is being used by Indonesian military or security personnel.

The radio communication systems project was for the installation of an integrated radio network at the Ministry of Forestry's headquarters and selected provincial offices to improve the sustainable management and control of the country's forestry resources.

The shortwave radio transmitters project involves the installation of high-frequency transmitters to enable shortwave broadcasting to be heard throughout Indonesia. The principle objective of the project is to give the population access to information, and to educate and unite disparate communities.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Creation

11. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs will be created if the Jobseekers Bill becomes law.

Miss Widdecombe: The national insurance contribution holiday, the back-to-work bonus and other measures in the Jobseekers Bill will assist unemployed people into the jobs which business, not Government, create.

Equal Opportunities Commission

12. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met representatives of the Equal Opportunities Commission to discuss fair employment practices.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the chairwoman and chief executive of the Equal Opportunities Commission on 7 November 1994, when a range of issues was discussed, including fair employment practices.

Training Places

13. **Mr. Scott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what calculation he has made of the number of extra training places which will be required as a result of the provisions in the Jobseekers Bill; and what is the total cost of the places to be provided.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government already provide 1.5 million opportunities, including substantial training provision for unemployed people. The jobseeker's allowance will help unemployed people take best advantage of those opportunities.

Disabled People

14. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent discussions he has had with the CBI on the policy of its members employing disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets the CBI regularly to discuss issues of mutual interest. The CBI responded to the Government's recent consultation document on discrimination against disabled people.

Industrial Relations

15. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the long-term improvement of industrial relations.

Mr. Portillo: Industrial relations in Britain are so much improved and so good by international comparisons that, like most good news, they are nowadays scarcely discussed.

Employment Service

16. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people the Employment Service has helped into employment in the last year.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1994 the Employment Service placed 1,924,400 people in jobs. This is 16 per cent. more than in 1993.

European Work Directive

17. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the impact on United Kingdom unemployment of the EU's 48-hour working week directive.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government negotiated the working time directive so that people could continue to be free to work more or less than 48 hours a week. It is not possible to make numerical estimates of the effect on unemployment, but any statutory limit on working hours would be damaging to competitiveness, jobs and the economy.

Health and Safety

18. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussion he has had with his EU counterparts about health and safety measures within Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets his European counterparts on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues, including health and safety.

Labour Statistics

19. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what, at the latest date, were the figures for unemployment; and what were the comparable figures in June 1979.

Mr. Paice: There were 2,415,500 claimant unemployed in December 1994 compared with 1,067,400 in June 1979.

26. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to change the method of calculating the numbers of unemployed.

Mr. Oppenheim: There no plans at present to change the method of calculating unemployment figures derived from either the claimant count or the labour force survey. Each method complements the other and each has its own distinct advantages.

Minimum Wage

20. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effects of a minimum wage in the tourism industry.

Mr. Oppenheim: Statutory minimum wages destroy jobs. This is as true of the tourism industry as it is of any other sector of the economy.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library the notes of his meeting in Davos with Mr. Alphandéry with particular reference to the subject of a minimum wage.

Mr. Portillo: I took part in a round-table discussion on unemployment and under-employment at the world economic forum in Davos at which Mr. Alphandéry and others were present. A full note of the meeting has not been produced to the best of my knowledge. A one-page summary of the meeting has been published by the world economic forum and I shall arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

25. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effects of a statutory minimum wage on the employment prospects of unemployed people.

Mr. Oppenheim: A statutory minimum wage would destroy jobs and job prospects. Its effects on the employment prospects of unemployed people would undoubtedly be disastrous.

Inward Investment

21. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of jobs that have arisen from inward investment over the last five years.

Mr. Portillo: According to figures notified to the Invest in Britain Bureau, as a result of inward investment more than 126,000 new jobs were created, and nearly 200,000 more were safeguarded, in the United Kingdom in the five financial years to 1993–94.

Full Employment

22. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his policy in respect of full employment.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government pursue policies designed to achieve high employment and low inflation.

Youth Unemployment

23. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the rate of youth unemployment in the United Kingdom and in other EU countries.

Mr. Oppenheim: The United Kingdom youth unemployment rate is below the European average and is lower than in every EU country except Denmark, Luxembourg and Portugal. The information is contained in the table.

Seasonally adjusted youth unemployment rates in EU countries

	Latest month
Belguim	19.4 (November)
Denmark	10.0 (October)
Germany[2]	—
Greece[1]	—
Spain	36.3 (November)
France	23.0 (November)
Ireland	27.1 (November)
Italy	31.2 (November)
Luxembourg	7.1 (November)
Netherland	15.4 (October)
Portugal	11.4 (November)
United Kingdom	13.5 (November)
EC Average	19.5 (November)

Source:
Statistical Office of the European Community Unemployment Bulletin. Latest available data—subject to revision.
[1]Only 1991 annual average figures available for Greece
[2]No ILO rate available for unified Germany

Youth Training

24. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of the number of 16 to 17-year-olds who are not in receipt of a youth training scheme place.

Mr. Paice: On 30 December 1994, in England, 179 young people covered by the youth training guarantee had been waiting for the offer of a YT place for eight weeks or longer.

Skill Shortages

27. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage change in the number of hard-to-fill vacancies over the last year; and in which sectors these skill shortages are most concentrated.

Mr. Paice: The number of hard-to-fill vacancies reported by medium and large employers increased by 76 per cent. between spring 1993 and spring 1994. These hard-to-fill vacancies are most concentrated in manufacturing, wholesale and retail, hotel and restaurants and the health and social work sectors.

Job Creation (East Sussex)

28. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessments he has made of the prospects for job creation in East Sussex.

Miss Widdecombe: We believe that the Government have created the right framework for employers to create jobs and reduce unemployment in East Sussex, as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The latest figures show that in the year to December 1994 claimant unemployment in East Sussex fell by 12 per cent., while the labour force survey indicates that in the year to summer 1994 employment in the area increased by 14,000 to 316,000.

Jobcentres

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently employed in jobcentres; what are the main tasks they undertake; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Currently, around 30,000 staff are employed on front-line duties in jobcentres. They provide a range of services designed to help unemployed people back to work, and to pay benefit to those who are entitled to it. The main tasks staff undertake are job-broking—obtaining vacancies from employers and sending jobseekers to them, advising jobseekers on the range of help available and paying unemployment benefit to those entitled to it. Actual duties are interchangeable, as staff are encouraged to be able to perform a variety of work.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances, for what reason and when South Thames TEC ran out of money.

Mr. Paice: The extent of the problems at South Thames training and enterprise council was revealed by a team of accountants led by staff from this Department with the support of the accountancy firm, Grant Thornton. Grant Thornton reported to this Department on 16 December 1994. Its report was conveyed to the TEC on the same day. The report showed that the TEC was trading at a loss and forecasted that this would continue, that its balance at best was negative or would shortly become so,

that it faced major cash flow problems and that weaknesses in its management accounting and financial control systems persisted. In the light of the report, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State concluded that it would be unsafe to commit further public money to the TEC. In view of the report and that conclusion the board of South Thames TEC concluded on 21 December 1994 that the company was insolvent and invited my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to appoint a receiver.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will update each quarter a list of training providers to South Thames TEC that became business failures because of money unpaid by South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: To date, I have not been told of any training providers who have failed for this reason.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to what purpose South Thames TEC put the money received from central Government for the purpose of paying training providers.

Mr. Paice: The training and enterprise council's financial affairs are currently a matter for the receiver appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I shall reply to the hon. Member's question when the receiver has done the necessary work in connection with the TEC's affairs.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that training guarantees for young people and unemployed adults in the area formerly covered by South Thames TEC are fulfilled.

Mr. Paice: The Government guarantee that any young person aged 16 to 17 who is not in employment, training or education and seeks youth training will be offered a suitable opportunity. There is no equivalent guarantee for unemployed adults. The Department's main aim is to ensure the continued provision of training in the South Thames training and enterprise council area. A number of steps have been taken to assure training providers that they will be paid for training undertaken since 7 November 1994. The Department has issued letters of comfort to providers contracted to South Thames TEC for training for work and youth training credits, child care, work-related further education, careers and guidance year 9 and 10 and careers libraries. The Department of the Environment has extended comfort to the business start-up programme. The Government office for London is making payments direct to providers of these programmes under the terms of its contract with South Thames TEC from 7 November 1994 until 1 January 1995. For the period of three months from the appointment of the receiver on 21 December 1994, the Departments will make available to the receiver sufficient funds to ensure providers receive payments for training and outputs delivered by them under the terms of their contract with South Thames TEC for the same programmes.

I made an announcement on 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *598–600*, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), about the future arrangements for the South Thames TEC area. Two neighbouring TECs, Central London TEC and South London TEC have been invited to submit proposals to me on how they would provide the full range of TEC responsibilities for the area fro the beginning of the new financial year.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the names and addresses of training providers who did not have a formal contract with South Thames TEC but who had provided training by agreement with South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: I understand that the South Thames training and enterprise council did not have formal contracts but paid under letters of intent to providers of the following programmes: compacts, teacher placement service, work-related further education and years 9 and 10 careers-guidance. In addition, some providers of traineeships to Routeways—a wholly owned subsidiary of South Thames TEC—were also paid through letters of intent. The providers covered by letters of intent are shown in the following table:

Archbishop Michael Ramsey
Aylwin
Charles Edward Brooke
Dick Sheppard
Dunraven
Geoffrey Chaucer
Lilian Bayliss
Norwood
Sacred Heart
St. Martin's in the Field
St. Saviours and St. Olaves
Stockwell Park
Walworth
Warwick Park
Waverly
William Penn
Aspen House
Elm Court
Highshore
Landsdowne
Mortimer
Orchard Centre
Spa
Thurlow Park
Turney
Willowfiled
Clapham Park
George Rainey
Kingsdale
Abbey Wood School
Addey and Stanhope School
Anerley School
Blackheath Bluecoat C of E
Brent Knoll School
Catford County Girls School
Churchfields School
Crofton School
Crown Woods School
Deptford Green School
Eaglesfield Boys School
Eltham Green School
Forest Hill School
Hatcham Wood School
John Evelyn ESC
John Roan School
Kidbrooke School
Malory School
Moatbridge School
Northbrook C of E School
Pendragon School
Plumstead Manor School
Prendergas Girls School
Sedgehill School

St. Joseph's Academy Boys
St. Pauls RC School
Sydenham School
The Schoolhouse Alternative Education Project
Waterfied School
Woolwich Polytechnic Boys

Others
Southwark College
Lambeth College
Lewisham College
Greenwich College
Southwark Careers Service
Lambeth Careers Service
Lewisham Careers Service
Greenwich Careers Service
British School of Motoring
Direct Team
Goodnews Training Ltd.
Greenwich Clipper
Jobreach (Greenwich)
New Directions
Pepys Radio Project
Rendberry Ltd.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when South Thames TEC was entered on to the high-risk register.

Mr. Paice: The Department does not maintain formal risk registers. The training and enterprise council's internal financial management is a matter for the TEC board. The high-risk assessment made by the Department related to the effectiveness of financial control systems in the TEC and was made in December 1993.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what responsibilities his Department has to those firms which are put into bankruptcy as a result of the financial failure of TECs which renege on their debts.

Mr. Paice: Because training and enterprise councils are private companies, the Department has no legal responsibilities towards firms contracted with them.

Contracts between TECs and other parties are commercial, subject to company law and the law of contract, including that relating to insolvency.

The Department is concerned, where problems arise between TECs and suppliers of services under Government programmes, that steps are taken to minimise disruption to individuals.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what percentage of works on adult rates divided between manual and non-manual, male and female, and full and part-time have earnings less than £2.60, £3, £3.20, £3.40, £3.60, £3.80, £4, £4.40, £4.80, £5.20, £5.60, £6 and £8 per hour, including and excluding overtime, in West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, Humberside, Yorkshire/Humberside and the north region;

(2) what were the average gross weekly earnings, weekly hours and hourly earnings for part-time workers, manual and non-manual, in *(a)* West Yorkshire, *(b)* South Yorkshire, *(c)* North Yorkshire, *(d)* Humberside, *(e)* Yorkshire/Humberside and *(f)* the north region; and what were the lowest and highest decile and median hourly earnings of these workers;

(3) what percentage of full-time workers on adult rates, male/female, manual/non-manual, are earning less than £160, £180, £200, £220, £300 and £340 per week, including and excluding overtime, in West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, Humberside, Yorkshire/Humberside and the north region.

Mr. Oppenheim: As the information is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

European Social Conference

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who will represent Britain at the European social conference held in Paris on 30 March.

Miss Widdecombe: A decision on Government representation at this conference will be taken nearer the date.

Women

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which Ministers have what responsibility in respect of matters of specific relevance to women; how they are co-ordinated; what have been the results of their work to date; what they are currently working on to improve women's lives; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Every Minister takes account of sex equality issues within his or her area of policy responsibility. The Cabinet Sub-Committee on Women's Issues reviews and develops overall Government policy on issues of special concern to women; the Employment Department has lead responsibility within Whitehall for co-ordinating this policy. The United Kingdom's report for the United Nations fourth world conference on women, produced in October 1994, gives a recent overview of key achievements and priorities for action, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the responsibilities of the Health and Safety Executive in relation to the Forth rail bridge; and what is the conclusion of Mr. John Rimington's inquiry into the Forth rail bridge.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is responsible for the oversight of safety on all parts of the railway, including the safety of workers, the protection of passengers and the integrity of structures such as the Forth rail bridge.

I understand that Mr. Rimington wrote to the hon. Member about this matter on 25 January 1995. There is no present threat to the structural integrity of the bridge.

Structural Funding

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he is in a position to announce that the Auchmountain Glen restoration and training project, Greenock, will receive in 1995 financial support by way of the European Union's objective 3 structural funds; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: No application for European social fund support under objective 3 has yet been approved. All applications are currently being considered by sector managers who represent the main organisations which receive ESF money. In accordance with European Commission requirements, all the selected projects will be presented to regional co-ordinating groups for their approval during March. The Department will then be able to issue formal approval letters to successful projects.

Training Providers

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his written answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *539*, if he will list the names and addresses of those training providers who have yet to receive a letter of comfort but whose case is still under investigation by the receiver.

Mr. Paice: I apologise to the hon. Member for the confusion caused by my answer of 30 January. This resulted from an administrative error made by the Department. A list of training providers who have yet to receive a letter of comfort but whose case is still under investigation by the receiver is now shown in the table:

List of South Thames TEC Employer Investment in People Contractors which did not receive comfort letters

QTAB
Business Development Consultancy
ETC Ltd.
Terry Smith
Training For Change
Trevor Holt Associates
Hambledon Group
My Fathers Business
Strand International
John Horwood Consultants Ltd.
Nick Zienau Consultancy and Training
ECO International Ltd.
Sandra Burrows Associates
Peter Austin
John Beecher
John Lawrence
FOTEC
Performance 2000
Genesis Development
Mountwood Consultants
Roger Ayscough
Roy Price Healthcare Consultant
PPC Ltd.
Central Management Services Ltd.
Latimer Chandler
Bridge Penines Ltd.
Statius Management Services
Scher Associates
LCD Associates
Partners in Innovation
L M Quality
Havenguard Financial Management Ltd.
Martyn Dawes Association
Chalk n Cheese
Chromacolour
Colebrook Bosson Saunders
Executive Cleaning Group
Executive Cleaning (Security)
Heymount Ltd.
London Research Centre
Scotts of Stockwell
Skill National
South London Press
St. John's Angell Town CE
Surrey Cricket Club
TEC National Council
Telferscot Primary School
World Society for Protection of Animals
Cromwell Cleaning
EPS
Executive Cleaning Ltd.
Freemans
Leiths Good Food
Office Cleaning Services
Railtrack South West
SAS Services
Swirl Service
Alma Primary School
Anthony Gold Solicitors
(Ayscough Travel)
Battley Brothers
Book Aid International
Bredinghurst School
Chapter Group plc
Design Research Unit
DSL Software Ltd.
Fisher Meredith
Further Education Unit
(Hatcham Wood School)
Highshore School
Institute of Optometry
London Limousines
Martyn Dawes
Raymond Bushell
Robin Johnson
Sacred Heart School
Sitra
Southwark Counsell Corporate Policy
(St. Michaels Press)
St. Saviour's and St. Olave's School
Training for Change
Understanding Industry
Walter Coles
Walworth School
W. J. Boyle
ASRA Housing
Clapham Park School
Graham and Rose Colley
Major Hire
Melrose Film Productions Ltd.
Peries Solicitors
SM Distribution
St. Martin-in-the-Field School
St. Saviour's Primary School
St. Stephens Primary School
Vassel House
Medicines Control Agency
Railtrack South
Beormund Primary School
Bishop Thomas Grant
Charles Dickens Primary School
Cherry Garden School
Cleaning and Support Services
Eltham Green
Joseph Lancaster
Middle Park Junior
Nell Gwyn Nursery
Peckham Park Infants School
Plumstead Manor School

Southwark CEOs
Southwark EMs
St. Stephens School
Steer Davies Gleave
Unilever (CMEG)
Waterfield School
Waverley School
Central Office of Information
Davy Wine Bar
Hunter Plastics
(Lambeth College)
(Lewisham College)
London Borough of Southwark
Southbank University
(Southwark College)
(Southwark Development Directorate)
(Southwark Direct)
(Woolwich College)
AEEU
Financial Times
Goldsmiths College
Greenwich: Direct
Greenwich: Director of Environmental and Consumer Services
Greenwich: Education Directorte
Hyde Housing
Lewisham: Assessment and Care Management
Lewisham: Care First
Lewisham: LEED
Lewisham: Direct
Lewisham: Education
Lewisham: Revenue and Benefits
Bryen and Langley
Clarkes
Computer Literacy
Deptford Enterprise Agency
Forest Hill Cars
Greenwich: Borough Secretary and Solicitors
Greenwich: Planning
Lewisham: Care and Corporate Services
Lewisham: Chief Executives Office
Lewisham: Computing
Lewisham: Legal
Lewisham: Member Services
Lewisham: Personnel and Administration
Lewisham: Womens Training Centre
Lings Ltd.
Mastercourt Ltd.
Regent Graphics Ltd.
Action for Blind People
Age Concern Southwark
Convoys Ltd.
Lewisham: Central Service
Peabody Trust
Southwark Direct
Southwark Education
Southwark Housing
Southwark Law and Administration
Southwark Leisure
Greenwich: Borough Treasures
Optimum Health
Bromcom Computers
Convoys
Elfrida Primary School
Furnitures
Greenwich Careers
Harveys
Lewisham Nexus
Mercury Newspapers
Music City
Perrymount Primary School
Speedicars
URBED
Watergate School
Archduke Partnership
Centrereed
Emergency Exit Arts
George E. Neville and Co.
Guarantee Security Cover
Hays Corporate Service Ltd (P)
House of Questa
Superprint
Tower Bridge
(Citi Data Ltd—Hays Group)
(Colourama)
Columbia International
Greenwich Leisure
Hays Record Management
HM Prison Belmarsh
Imperial War Museum
(IPC Magazines)
London Quadrant and Housing Ltd.
Abbey Wood School
Blackheath Leisure
Charlton Garage Services Ltd.
Cyril Henry Nursery
Eglinton Infant School
George English Electronics
Hawksmoor Grant Maintained School
Henwick School
Jackson Lifts
Kennedy and Partners
Kidbrooke Primary School
Kidbrooke School
Linton Mead Primary School
Maze Hill Special Needs School
Meagher Credit Management Service
M. Epps
Middle Park Infants School
Morden Mount Primary School
Protegumus Security Services
Sherryton School
Thomas Tallis School
Project Coin
Shelley School
Walton Lodge Linen Service
Windmill School

North West Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *716*, if he will name the members on the board of the north west training and enterprise council together with the interests they represent.

Mr. Paice: The names of all training and enterprise council board members are available from the Library. TEC board members join and remain on the board of directors as individuals and not as representatives of another company or organisation. There is no such single organisation as the north west TEC.

Redundancies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the firms in the Dundee travel-to-work area which have notified his Department

of redundancies involving more than 10 people since 1 August 1993, giving in each case the actual number.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information given to the Department under the statutory redundancy handling provisions is provided in confidence.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury on 6 February 1995, *Official Report,* column *69.*

TRANSPORT

East Coast Main Line

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effect of the subsidence of old mine workings under the east coast main line between Prestonpans and Wallyford; what assessment he has made of the completeness of the record of such workings under railway lines; and what will be the liability of Railtrack for the consequences and costs of similar incidents following privatisation.

Mr. Watts: A temporary speed restriction was imposed in November 1994 between Prestonpans and Wallyford station following discovery of subsidence of old mine workings during routine maintenance. To prevent further subsidence, Railtrack is injecting concrete slurry into the former mine workings. It is anticipated that the work will be completed in the next few weeks and the line speed will be back to 60 mph by March 1995 and restored to 125 mph later in the year.

Railtrack is carrying out a search of mining records compiled by the British Railways Board, the Coal Authority and other sources for a report identifying the locations of mine shafts, drifts and shallow mine workings in the vicinity of Railtrack property.

Liability for costs and consequences of remedial work to a collapsed mineshaft or shallow mine working will depend on the circumstances of each case. Privatisation will make no difference to Railtrack's liabilities.

Driving Test Centre, Rhyl

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from individuals and organisations with regard to the proposed relocation of the driving test centre at 96 Cefndy road, Rhyl; if he will review the objections for himself; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Driving Standards Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from L. M. Manley to Mr. David Hanson, dated 7 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about the Rhyl driving test centre. I wrote to you on 20 January about the need to relocate the Rhyl and Llandudno driving test centres and the public consultation exercise we are carrying out.

The public consultation exercise concluded on 30 November 1994. Some 25 individuals and organisations responded, mostly expressing concern at our proposals. In the meantime the Rhuddlan Borough Council and the Vale of Clwyd Traders Council have offered to assist us in finding alternative accommodation in Rhyl. We will delay consideration of the representations made during the public consultation exercise until our discussions with Rhuddlan Borough Council and Vale of Clwyd Traders Council have been completed.

Sickness Absence

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *881,* if he will list the areas of work in his Department which have been reorganised following the Vehicle Inspectorate's total quality initiative; and what assessment he has made of the relationship between these reorganisations and the stress level and sick absences among employees of his Department.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 6 February 1995:

TOTAL QUALITY INITIATIVE IN THE VEHICLE INSPECTORATE

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding reorganisation within the Vehicle Inspectorate following its Total Quality Initiative.

To meet its commitments, the Inspectorate has to keep pace with developments and be able to respond to change. We are currently in the second stage of the Total Quality Initiative (TQI) and we expect it to deliver improvements in efficiency, as well as effectiveness and service. During the course of this financial year, Corrective Action Teams and Continuous Improvement Teams have been working across the Inspectorate. We believe that staff participation and understanding can help in minimising the stress of change and their recommendations as part of the "Teams" have contributed to the reorganisations under way in the Inspectorate's 3 divisions.

The Inspectorate surveyed staff attitude at the start of the TQ process in Autumn 1993. We plan to survey staff attitude again during the 1995/96 financial year and continue to look at staff absence rates to provide us with as full a picture as possible.

If you have any further questions about the Inspectorate's initiatives, please contact me at the above address.

Policies and Programmes

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether each of the transport policies and programmes of highway authorities for the past two years are in his Department's library; whether the library is open to researchers; where the library is; when it was last moved; and what the cost consequences have been.

Mr. Norris: Current transport policies and programmes are held by local transport policy division. They are available to the DOT library in 2 Marsham street, if required. Old TPPs are stored off site. Researchers may use the library by prior arrangement. The library moved in April 1994, saving £1 million a year.

Publicity

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last three financial years, the amount spent by his Department on publicity for the work of the traffic area offices, excluding that spent on the traffic area network, the traffic commissioners and the licensing authorities' annual reports.

Mr. Norris: Excluding the annual reports, the amount spent directly on publicity for the work of the traffic area offices is as follows:

1992–93: £4,756.74
1993–94: £2,520.28
1994–95: £5,801.00

Driving Standards Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *881*, if he will (1) list the occasions in 1994 on which risk assessments by the Driving Standards Agency have led to reorganisations in his Department;

(2) list the dates of risk assessments by the Driving Standards Agency in 1994; and if he will make a statement on the nature of these assessments.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for the Driving Standards Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from L. M. Manley to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 7 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about risk assessments in the Agency which have led to reorganisation.

To date it has not been found necessary to make any reorganisation as a result of risk assessments. Where risks have been identified, they have been controlled or eliminated without the need for reorganisation.

Letter from L. M. Manley to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 7 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about risk assessments in the Driving Standards Agency.

The attached table provides the dates and numbers of risk assessments carried out in 1994. The assessments covered display screen equipment, manual handling procedures and general risks.

Year	Month/Date	Number
1994	*January*	
	6	1
	19	1
	25	1
	29	1
		4
	February	
	8	7
	9	3
	10	1
	11	7
	14	6
	15	3
	18	1
	22	2
	28	2
		32
	March	
	1	1
	4	1
	8	1
	17	6
	28	1
	29	3
	30	1
	31	4
		32
	April	
	5	1
	6	2
	8	6
	11	8
	12	12
	13	1
	14	6
	22	5
	25	1
		42
1994 (cont.)	*May*	
	4	1
	9	2
	10	2
	11	2
	13	31
	16	1
	17	6
	18	2
	20	2
	21	18
		67
	June	
	2	1
	3	4
	6	7
	10	2
	20	1
	22	6
	24	12
	28	2
	29	5
	30	1
		41
	July	
	1	1
	4	1
	8	1
	17	1
	18	1
	19	4
	22	1
		10
	August	
	9	1
	10	1

Year	Month/Date	Number
	12	2
	16	3
	17	6
	22	2
	23	9
	24	4
	25	3
	26	5
	30	7
	31	7
		50
	September	
	1	4
	2	8
	5	3
	6	12
	7	10
	8	2
	9	3
	10	1
	12	4
	13	6
	14	8
	15	2
	16	1
	17	1
	19	4
	20	4
	21	3
	22	2
	23	4
	24	1
	25	2
	26	3
	27	6
	28	4
	29	2
	30	6
		106
	October	
	1	2
	3	9
	4	5
	5	7
	6	13
	7	7
	10	15
	11	15
	12	9
	13	9
	14	7
	17	5
	18	10
	19	13
	20	5
	21	2
	24	7
	25	5
	26	1
	27	10
	28	5
	29	2
	30	1
	31	3
		167

Year	Month/Date	Number
	November	
	1	3
	2	1
	3	1
	4	3
	7	2
	8	2
	9	4
	10	2
	11	26
	12	1
	14	2
	15	2
	16	4
	17	4
	18	7
	20	1
	21	30
	22	12
	23	9
	24	2
	25	6
	26	9
	29	8
	30	7
		148
	December	
	1	19
	2	7
	4	3
	5	10
	6	12
	7	4
	8	3
	12	10
	13	1
	15	3
	16	3
	21	3
	22	3
	28	1
	30	1
		83
		Total 1994 768
1995	*January*	
	3	2
	5	2
	6	1
	9	4
	12	4
	16	1
	17	4
	18	3
	19	1
	20	1
	23	7
	24	5
	25	13
	26	3
	27	1
		Total 1995 52
		Grand Total 820

Casual Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the status of employees of his Department which make up the panels which recruit casual staff at AA or AO level.

Mr. Norris: Casual staff within the Department of Transport at AA or AO level are recruited by the division where the vacancy arises. Usually two members of staff, at EO level or above, would conduct the recruitment interview.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about his employment of the former head of personnel for the Vehicle Inspectorate to undertake a report on the Register of Shipping and Seamen office in Cardiff; and if he will list *(a)* the status of this employee, *(b)* the status of any severance pay granted following redundancy from the Vehicle Inspectorate and *(c)* the process by which he was chosen to fill this post.

Mr. Norris: The former head of personnel for the Vehicle Inspectorate is employed as a consultant by the Marine Safety Agency and was selected from a shortlist of retired departmental employees with the appropriate skills and experience.

There is no direct employer-employee relationship between MSA and Mr. Walton, and the status of his severance pay is not affected.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made on the improvement of the west coast main line; if it is up to schedule; when the works will commence; what is the total likely cost; and what is the expected completion date.

Mr. Watts: The feasibility study was completed on schedule at the end of December. Railtrack will be publishing a summary of its findings shortly.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions since the channel tunnel rail link has been established, his inspectors have inspected the operation of the security services on the route; and what were their findings.

Mr. Watts: The channel tunnel security inspectors have inspected the security measures in place on a number of occasions. It would not be appropriate on security grounds to detail their findings.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *859*, about the channel tunnel link route on what date the delegation was led by the hon. Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), at which Miss Maureen Tomison made a presentation to his predecessor on behalf of the Ebbsfleet Promoter Group.

Mr. Watts: The presentation referred to in my reply of 2 February took place on 11 May 1994. Miss Tomison made no presentation at this or any other departmental delegation.

Highland Railways

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the adequacy of safety measures in place at accommodation crossings on rail lines in the highlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: Accommodation level crossings are private crossings, and it is the responsibility of the authorised user to ensure that the railway is clear before attempting to cross. Instructions on the safe use of crossings are displayed at each crossing.

Rail Stations (Wheelchairs)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the railway stations in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland which are inaccessible to wheelchair users; and what proposals he has to make such stations barrier free.

Mr. Watts: The facilities available for disabled passengers vary from place to place. The leaflet "British Rail and Disabled Travellers" is designed to help disabled passengers plan their rail journeys and gives contact details for British Rail managers who will provide passengers with information about their nearest suitably designed and equipped station. A copy of this leaflet is available in the House Library.

Government proposals to improve accessibility at stations for disabled passengers are included in the Disability Discrimination Bill, published last month.

Bull Bars

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 31 January to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), *Official Report*, column *586*, what steps he proposes to take to discourage vehicle manufacturers from fitting bull bars.

Mr. Norris: My predecessor wrote to vehicle manufacturers in 1993 expressing concern about the fitting of aggressive bull bars. We have since put in hand the accident analysis referred to in my answer of 31 January. We shall consider whether further steps should be taken to discourage vehicle manufacturers from fitting bull bars, and owners of existing vehicles from using them on the road with bull bars attached, in the light of that analysis.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Most of the rules and regulations which

were identified for withdrawal in last year's reviews have yet to be implemented. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when the consultations are completed.

The manpower implications are taken into account in the Department's central manpower plans, which will be published in the Department's annual report in March.

Train Timetables

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains between London and Plymouth in the last 28 days have arrived at the time advertised in the timetable, on weekdays and at the weekend; and if he will make a statement on the level of delays.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Statistics are compiled according to service groups, not individual routes, and on a four-weekly basis. The most recent figures covering the 28 days up to 7 January 1995 show that 88 per cent. of all trains in the Great Western service group arrived within 10 minutes of their advertised time. The figure for the 12 months up to this date is 91.2 per cent.

Channel Tunnel (Safety)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made as to the existing integrity of the safety regime operating in the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* Under the terms of the treaty of Canterbury the channel tunnel intergovernmental commission takes decisions in the name of the two Governments for the implementation of the concession.

The channel tunnel safety authority is established under the treaty to advise and assist the commission on all matters concerning safety in the construction and operation of the tunnel. It ensures that safety measures and practices applicable to the tunnel comply with national and international laws.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects that agreement will be reached clarifying the respective responsibilities for the enforcement of channel tunnel safety measures between the French authorities, the channel tunnel safety authority and Britain's Health and Safety Executive; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will place in the Library the proposals of the Health and Safety Executive for the future division of responsibility for safety in the channel tunnel between the French authorities, the channel tunnel safety authority and Britain's Health and Safety Executive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts *[holding answers 2 February 1995]:* The channel tunnel safety authority is preparing advice for the intergovernmental commission. Formal agreement between the United Kingdom and French authorities will be reached in due course. The Health and Safety Executive works in close co-operation with the United Kingdom delegation to the safety authority.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what considerations have so far led the channel tunnel safety authority not to exercise its power to make regulations and appoint inspectors; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when inspectors will be appointed by the channel tunnel safety authority.

Mr. Watts *[holding answers 2 February and 3 February 1995]:* The channel tunnel safety authority does not have power to make regulations. It has powers to authorise experts to observe and inspect Eurotunnel's activities and exercises those powers as it considers appropriate.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken with the French authorities and Eurotunnel to meet the concerns about the responsibility and jurisdiction for safety in the channel tunnel as expressed by the Health and Safety Executive to the Employment Committee in November 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* These matters are under continuing discussion within the channel tunnel intergovernmental commission.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners' Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown on the number of *(a)* single pensioners, *(b)* pensioner couples and *(c)* all pensioners (i) aged under 75 years, (ii) aged 75 years and over and (iii) in total given in the analysis of pensioner incomes by quintile published on 15 April 1994, *Official Report,* column *304.*

Mr. Arbuthnot: The latest information relating to 1992 pensioners' incomes details is in the tables.

The numbers of pensioner units in each quintile of the net equivalised income distribution of pensioners—Table 1: Single pensioners

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Under 75	300,000	350,000	350,000	400,000	400,000
75 and over	*250,000	*150,000	*150,000	*150,000	*100,000
Total	550,000	500,000	500,000	550,000	550,000

Table 2: Pensioner couples

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Under 75	350,000	450,000	400,000	450,000	550,000
75 and over	550,000	450,000	450,000	450,000	350,000
Total	900,000	900,000	900,000	900,000	900,000

Table 3: All pensioner units

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Under 75	650,000	750,000	750,000	850,000	1,000,000
75 and Over	750,000	650,000	650,000	550,000	450,000
Total	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,400,000

Notes:

1. These estimates are taken from the 1992 family expenditure survey and are for private households in the UK.
2. The estimates denoted by an asterisk are based on unreliably small sample sizes and therefore should be treated with caution.
3. The estimates have been rounded to the nearest hundred thousand. Total population figures may therefore be misleading.

1992 Version of Table 1 of the answer made on 15 April 1994—Table 1 the Average Incomes of Pensioners 1979–1992 (by quintile—quintile 1 = lowest—(£per week July 1992 prices).

Income Source	Quintile 1		Quintile 2		Quintile 3		Quintile 4		Quintile 5		Total	
	1979	1992	1979	1992	1979	1992	1979	1992	1979	1992	1979	1992
(a) Single Pensioners												
Earnings*	0.40	0.00	0.10	0.20	0.40	0.50	3.80	1.60	25.00	23.20	5.90	5.10
Benefit Income	51.00	57.20	59.20	68.10	62.10	78.50	61.60	78.40	55.90	72.00	58.00	70.80
Investment Income	2.00	10.50	2.20	5.00	2.40	4.60	6.90	12.80	33.00	93.20	9.30	25.20
Occupational Pension	0.60	2.10	1.90	5.40	3.30	8.00	7.90	24.30	37.10	82.90	10.10	24.50
Other*	0.50	0.10	0.20	0.40	0.30	0.20	1.00	0.30	1.00	2.80	0.60	0.70
Gross Income	54.50	69.80	63.50	79.00	68.50	91.90	81.20	117.40	152.00	274.10	83.90	126.40
Deductions	5.60	12.90	4.70	5.60	4.40	6.20	7.30	10.70	29.50	49.50	10.30	17.00
Net Income BHC (mean)	48.90	56.90	58.90	73.40	64.10	85.70	74.00	106.70	122.50	224.60	73.60	109.40
Net Income AHC (mean)	38.10	42.30	47.40	55.80	51.30	64.30	59.60	90.40	107.10	212.80	60.70	93.00
Net Income (BHC (median)	50.50	58.90	60.20	75.50	66.80	86.30	74.40	105.60	106.10	184.30	66.80	86.30
Net Income AHC (median)	40.20	46.60	47.40	55.70	52.10	62.80	60.00	88.60	92.80	175.50	52.10	62.80
(b) Pensioner Couples												
Earnings*	0.30	0.10	1.30	2.70	5.90	6.60	28.00	15.60	95.50	65.20	26.10	18.00
Benefit Income	85.50	100.80	93.10	110.00	93.00	111.80	88.10	110.60	78.80	102.10	87.70	107.10
Investment Income	2.70	4.60	3.70	8.40	5.80	26.20	10.70	42.80	64.70	145.60	17.50	45.40
Occupational Pension	2.60	7.00	7.30	19.10	19.20	35.30	38.30	79.10	96.30	189.70	32.60	65.90
Other*	0.30	0.40	0.40	0.30	1.60	1.30	0.90	1.40	1.10	3.70	0.90	1.40
Gross Income	91.40	112.90	105.80	140.40	125.50	181.20	166.00	249.50	336.40	506.30	164.80	237.80
Deductions	6.10	10.60	5.70	11.10	8.40	17.00	18.40	26.90	80.80	92.70	23.80	31.60
Net Income BHC (mean)	85.20	102.30	100.20	129.30	117.10	164.20	147.60	222.70	255.60	413.60	141.00	206.20
Net Income AHC (mean)	70.60	83.80	83.20	112.00	100.10	148.10	128.90	209.80	228.70	400.80	122.20	190.70
Net Income BHC (median)	85.80	105.10	99.20	128.10	115.10	162.90	145.50	220.80	221.00	364.60	115.10	162.90
Net Income AHC (median)	70.90	84.90	82.30	112.50	97.90	145.80	128.00	208.50	197.90	352.70	97.90	145.80
(c) Pensioner Units												
Earnings*	0.30	0.00	0.50	0.80	0.90	1.90	10.50	7.40	52.20	39.50	12.90	9.90
Benefit Income	62.70	70.80	71.30	83.10	69.40	89.00	70.30	92.30	67.40	86.70	68.20	84.40
Investment Income	2.20	8.40	2.80	5.20	3.00	9.90	8.50	24.50	44.10	116.00	12.10	32.80
Occupational Pension	1.30	3.60	3.90	8.70	6.40	15.40	17.20	41.20	60.80	131.10	17.90	40.00
Other*	0.40	0.20	0.20	0.30	0.50	0.60	1.40	0.50	0.80	3.40	0.70	1.00
Gross Income	67.00	83.00	78.70	98.20	80.20	116.70	107.90	165.80	225.40	376.70	111.80	168.10
Deductions	5.80	11.80	5.00	7.30	5.20	8.90	10.20	16.90	48.50	67.40	14.90	22.40
Net Income BHC (mean)	61.20	71.20	73.70	90.90	75.00	107.90	97.70	148.90	176.90	309.30	96.90	145.60
Net Income AHC (mean)	52.80	57.70	57.90	65.80	61.90	93.00	83.10	137.50	154.00	293.90	81.90	129.50
Net Income BHC (median)	53.70	63.60	62.50	80.40	68.40	93.50	85.10	134.20	163.00	266.60	68.40	93.50
Net Income AHC (median)	43.40	50.50	48.00	57.70	53.00	76.40	67.40	120.80	141.20	254.70	53.00	76.40

Average income change (per cent.)—Single Pensioners (S), Pensioner Couples (C) and Pensioner Units (U)

Income Source	Quintile 1			Quintile 2			Quintile 3		
	S	C	U	S	C	U	S	C	U
(d) Growth in Pensioner Income 1979–92									
Earnings*	-96	-59	-89	50	107	59	50	12	121
Benefit Income	12	18	13	15	18	17	26	20	28
Investment Income	413	70	274	132	128	87	94	350	226
Occupational Pension	227	165	178	187	162	126	139	84	140
Other*	-87	56	-45	125	-22	34	-30	-22	16
Gross Income	28	24	24	24	33	25	34	44	45
Deductions	129	73	104	21	96	45	41	103	71
Net Income BHC (median)	17	23	18	25	29	29	29	42	37
Net Income AHC (median)	16	20	16	17	37	20	20	49	44

Average income change (per cent)—Single Pensioners(S), Pensioner Couples(C) and Pensioner Units(U)

Income Source	Quintile 4			Quintile 5			Total		
	S	C	U	S	C	U	S	C	U
(d) Growth in Pensioner Income 1979–1992									
Earnings*	-57	-44	-30	-7	-32	-24	-14	-31	-23
Benefit Income	27	26	31	29	30	29	22	22	24
Investment Income	85	300	189	182	125	163	172	160	171
Occupational Pension	207	106	139	124	97	116	142	102	123
Other*	-72	61	-68	190	235	307	29	65	48

Average income change (per cent)—Single Pensioners(S), Pensioner Couples(C) and Pensioner Units(U)

Income Source	*Quintile 4*			*Quintile 5*			*Total*		
	S	*C*	*U*	*S*	*C*	*U*	*S*	*C*	*U*
Gross Income	45	50	54	80	50	67	51	44	50
Deductions	47	46	66	68	15	39	65	33	50
Net Income BHC (median)	42	*	58	74	65	63	49 (mean)	46 (mean)	50 (mean)
Net Income AHC (median)	48	63	79	89	78	80	53 (mean)	56 (mean)	58 (mean)

Notes: N.B. means given for total income growth.

* Indicates that sample sizes are too small to provide reliable estimates. Figures are shown only to demonstrate how totals are arrived at.

1. All figures before housing costs (BHC) unless otherwise stated. After housing costs= AHC.
2. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated.
3. Components may not sum to totals owing to rounding.
4. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age and couples in which the husband is over state pension age.
5. Estimates of percentage growth are based on unrounded income figures and may not therefore be the same as those calculated from the rounded amounts shown in the table.
6. Estimates of growth in total net incomes by quintile are based on medians. Estimates of growth of components of income and total incomes of all pensioners are based on means.

Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each of the past 30 years *(a)* the number and percentage of people claiming the state retirement pension, *(b)* the number and percentage receiving income support, *(c)* the number of people over retirement age who draw only income support and *(d)* the number receiving the relevant pension plus housing benefit.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The available information is in the tables.

Claimants over state retirement age with and without Retirement Pension (RP), Supplementary Benefit (SB), Income Support (IS) and Housing Benefit (HB). Table 1A: Number of claimants—(Thousands)

	People with RP				People without RP			
Year	All (a)	With IS/SB only (b)	With IS/SB and HB	With HB only (c)	All	With IS/SB only (b)	With IS/SB and HB	With HB only (c)
1964	6,158(d)	—	—	—	1,747	—	—	—
1965	6,357(d)	—	—	—	1,710	—	—	—
1966	6,540(d)	—	—	—	1,622	—	—	—
1967	6,769(d)	—	—	—	1,560	—	—	—
1968	6,973(d)	—	—	—	1,497	—	—	—
1969	7,170(d)(e)	1,662	—	—	1,457	208	—	—
1970	7,363(d)(e)	1,700	—	—	1,396	200	—	—
1971	7,515(d)	1,735	—	—	1,404	185	—	—
1972	7,668(d)	1,733	—	—	1,367	177	—	—
1973	7,688	—	—	—	1,467	—	—	—
1974	7,822	1,654	—	—	1,454	156	—	—
1975	7,985	1,538	—	—	1,399	142	—	—
1976	8,155	1,547	—	—	1,295	143	—	—
1977	8,266	1,590	—	—	1,242	150	—	—
1978	8,397	1,593	—	—	1,138	147	—	—
1979	8,528	1,599	—	—	1,032	121	—	—
1980	8,681	1,576	—	—	1,032	114	—	—
1981	8,780	1,624	—	—	1,030	116	—	—
1982	8,877	1,683	—	—	990	97	—	—
1983	8,936	1,549	—	—	946	101	—	—
1984	9,003	1,565	—	—	907	115	—	—
1985	9,085	—	—	—	936	—	—	—
1986	9,210	1,592	—	—	892	128	—	—
1987	9,310	1,613	—	—	863	117	—	—
1988	9,298	1,431	—	—	923	109	—	—
1989	9,305	1,314	—	1,057	974	116	—	108
1990	9,391	595	789	1,033	919	59	60	109
1991	9,380	595	677	1,026	976	68	65	124
1992	9,425	692	626	1,031	955	76	64	123
1993	9,448	674	712	952	943	80	75	120
1994	9,442	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 1B: As a percentage of all people over state retirement age.

	People with RP				People without RP			
	All (a)	With IS/SB only (b)	With IS/SB and HB	With HB only (c)	All	With IS/SB only (b)	With IS/SB and HB	With HB only (c)
1964	77.9	—	—	—	22.1	—	—	—
1965	78.8	—	—	—	21.2	—	—	—
1966	80.1	—	—	—	19.9	—	—	—
1967	81.3	—	—	—	18.7	—	—	—
1968	82.3	—	—	—	17.7	—	—	—
1969	83.1	19.3	—	—	16.9	2.4	—	—
1970	84.1	19.4	—	—	15.9	2.3	—	—
1971	84.3	19.5	—	—	15.7	2.1	—	—
1972	84.9	19.2	—	—	15.1	2.0	—	—
1973	84.0	—	—	—	16.0	—	—	—
1974	84.3	17.8	—	—	15.7	1.7	—	—
1975	85.1	16.4	—	—	14.9	1.5	—	—
1976	86.3	16.4	—	—	13.7	1.5	—	—
1977	86.9	16.7	—	—	13.1	1.6	—	—
1978	88.1	16.7	—	—	11.9	1.5	—	—
1979	89.2	16.7	—	—	10.8	1.3	—	—
1980	89.4	16.2	—	—	10.6	1.2	—	—
1981	89.5	16.6	—	—	10.5	1.2	—	—

Table 1B: As a percentage of all people over state retirement age.

	People with RP				People without RP			
	All (a)	*With IS/SB only (b)*	*With IS/SB and HB*	*With HB only (c)*	*All*	*With IS/SB only (b)*	*With IS/SB and HB*	*With HB only (c)*
1982	90.0	17.1	—	—	10.0	1.0	—	—
1983	90.4	15.7	—	—	9.6	1.0	—	—
1984	90.8	15.8	—	—	9.2	1.2	—	—
1985	90.7	—	—	—	9.3	—	—	—
1986	91.2	15.8	—	—	8.8	1.3	—	—
1987	91.5	15.9	—	—	8.5	1.2	—	—
1988	91.0	14.0	—	—	9.0	1.1	—	—
1989	90.5	12.8	—	10.3	9.5	1.1	—	1.0
1990	91.1	5.8	7.7	10.0	8.9	0.6	0.6	1.1
1991	90.6	5.8	6.6	10.0	9.5	0.7	0.6	1.2
1992	90.8	6.7	6.1	10.0	9.3	0.7	0.6	1.2
1993	90.9	6.5	6.9	9.2	9.1	0.8	0.7	1.2
1994	90.8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:
— not available.
(a) Including AP only from 1979.
(b) All SB/IS claimants prior to 1990.
(c) All claimants aged 60 or over.
(d) Figures include a small number of pensions paid to persons overseas.
(e) Estimated figures.
1. Males aged 65 or over and females aged 60 or over.
2. Supplementary benefit, income support and housing benefit figures are for claimants only, ie partners are not counted.
3. Housing benefit data are not available prior to 1989.
4. Income support replaced supplementary benefit in 1988.
5. "People without RP" includes those who have elected to receive invalidity benefit or widows benefit, rather than any retirement pension to which they may be entitled.
6. To arrive at the total number and proportion of people over pension age receiving IS/SB, it is necessary to add the figures in columns 3, 4, 7 and 8.
Sources:
Supplementary benefit/income support statistics annual inquiries.
Retirement pension annual inquiries.
Housing benefit management information statistics.

Invalidity Benefit and Sick Pay

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list for each of the last 30 years for which figures are available *(a)* the number and percentage of claimants drawing invalidity benefit, *(b)* the number and percentage drawing invalidity benefit and income support, *(c)* the number and percentage drawing invalidity benefit and housing benefit and *(d)* the number and percentage of long-term sick drawing income support and or housing benefit;

(2) if he will list for each of the past 30 years *(a)* the number and percentage of people claiming sick pay or statutory pay only, *(b)* the number and percentage of this group drawing sick pay and income support, *(c)* the number and percentage claiming sick pay and housing benefit and *(d)* the number and percentage without sick pay cover who draw only income support and/or housing benefit.

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the tables.

Table 1 Statutory sick pay beneficiaries in Great Britain

Year ended	*Number*	*Percentage of population*
1985	4,963,000	14.7
1986	5,059,000	14.9
1987	5,203,000	15.3
1988	5,386,000	15.7
1989	5,497,000	16.0
1990	5,871,000	17.0
1991	5,664,000	16.4
1992	5,283,000	15.3
1993	4,822,000	13.9

Notes:

1. Statutory sick pay was introduced on 6 April 1983, and was payable for a maximum of eight weeks in any one tax year. This increased to 28 weeks from 6 April 1986 and the tax year limit removed. Data are not available for the year ending April 1984.

2. An employee may have more than one spell of statutory sick pay in the year.

3. The figures are in respect of the number of employees who received statutory sick pay in the year ended April.

4. Statutory sick pay is not payable to men aged 65 and over. Prior to 6 April 1994 it was not payable to women aged 60 and over.

5. There are a limited number of cases where the region within the United Kingdom is not known, which are not included within the Great Britain figure.

6. Population in Great Britain aged 16 to 59 for a woman, 16 to 64 for a man, each mid-year, supplied by OPCS.

Sources:

1. 1 per cent. sample of employer tax returns in respect of their employees, rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Estimated mid-year resident population figures supplied by OPCS.

Table 2A Recipients of invalidity benefit (IVB) and sickness benefit (SB) with and without supplementary benefit (SuppB)/income support (IS) and housing benefit (HB)

Number of recipients—Thousands

	Invalidity benefit recipients				*Sickness benefit recipients*			
Year	*All*	*With SuppB/IS only (a)*	*With SuppB/IS and HB*	*With HB only*	*All*	*With SuppB/IS only (a)*	*With SuppB/IS and HB*	*With HB only*
1964	—	—	—	—	876	—	—	—
1965	—	—	—	—	923	—	—	—
1966	—	—	—	—	900	—	—	—
1967	—	—	—	—	903	—	—	—
1968	—	—	—	—	934	—	—	—
1969	—	—	—	—	923	16	—	—
1970	—	—	—	—	932	16	—	—
1971	—	—	—	—	857	21	—	—
1972	414	110	—	—	455	20	—	—
1973	435	—	—	—	449	—	—	—
1974	442	72	—	—	455	18	—	—
1975	450	54	—	—	403	15	—	—
1976	—	48	—	—	—	17	—	—
1977	505	45	—	—	452	17	—	—
1978	557	42	—	—	472	16	—	—
1979	610	33	—	—	430	11	—	—
1980	615	34	—	—	384	13	—	—
1981	633	43	—	—	353	19	—	—
1982	683	55	—	—	393	24	—	—
1983	737	63	—	—	338	21	—	—
1984	797	83	—	—	190	24	—	—
1985	849	—	—	—	180	—	—	—
1986	899	92	—	—	179	25	—	—
1987	968	112	—	—	110	20	—	—
1988	1,047	97	—	—	117	23	—	—
1989	1,126	102	—	189	109	27	—	9
1990	1,209	110	4	205	103	12	11	9
1991	1,306	51	53	237	110	13	17	13
1992	1,439	65	65	260	138	16	16	11
1993	1,580	80	77	267	147	16	17	11

Notes:
1. See notes to table 2B

Table 2B—As a percentage of all people of eligible age for invalidity benefit/sickness benefit

	Invalidity benefit recipients				*Sickness benefit recipients*			
Year	*All*	*With SuppB/IS only (a)*	*With SuppB/IS and HB*	*With HB only*	*All*	*With SuppB/IS only (a)*	*With SuppB/IS and HB*	*With HB only*
1964	—	—	—	—	2.5	—	—	—
1965	—	—	—	—	2.7	—	—	—
1966	—	—	—	—	2.6	—	—	—
1967	—	—	—	—	2.6	—	—	—
1968	—	—	—	—	2.7	—	—	—
1969	—	—	—	—	2.7	*	—	—
1970	—	—	—	—	2.7	*	—	—
1971	—	—	—	—	2.5	0.1	—	—
1972	1.2	0.3	—	—	1.3	0.1	—	—
1973	1.3	—	—	—	1.3	—	—	—
1974	1.3	0.2	—	—	1.3	0.1	—	—
1975	1.3	0.2	—	—	1.2	*	—	—
1976	—	0.1	—	—	—	*	—	—
1977	1.5	0.1	—	—	1.3	*	—	—
1978	1.6	0.1	—	—	1.4	*	—	—
1979	1.8	0.1	—	—	1.2	*	—	—
1980	1.8	0.1	—	—	1.1	*	—	—
1981	1.8	0.1	—	—	1.0	0.1	—	—
1982	2.0	0.2	—	—	1.1	0.1	—	—
1983	2.1	0.2	—	—	1.0	0.1	—	—
1984	2.3	0.2	—	—	0.5	0.1	—	—
1985	2.5	—	—	—	0.5	—	—	—
1986	2.6	0.3	—	—	0.5	0.1	—	—
1987	2.8	0.3	—	—	0.3	0.1	—	—
1988	3.0	0.3	—	—	0.3	0.1	—	—

Table 2B—As a percentage of all people of eligible age for invalidity benefit/sickness benefit

	Invalidity benefit recipients				Sickness benefit recipients			
Year	All	With SuppB/IS only (a)	With SuppB/IS and HB	With HB only	All	With SuppB/IS only (a)	With SuppB/IS and HB	With HB only
1989	3.3	0.3	—	0.5	0.3	0.1	—	*
1990	3.5	0.3	*	0.6	0.3	*	*	*
1991	3.8	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.3	*	*	*
1992	4.2	0.2	0.2	0.8	0.4	*	*	*
1993	4.6	0.2	0.2	0.8	0.4	*	*	*

Notes: — not available

* less than 0.1 per cent.

(a) All supplementary benefit income support claimants prior to 1990.

1. Males aged 16 to 69 and females aged 16 to 64. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Income support and housing benefit figures are for claimants only, i.e. partners are not counted and include claimants with statutory sick pay.

3. Housing benefit data not available prior to 1989.

4. Income support replaced supplementary benefit in 1988.

5. Invalidity benefit was introduced on 23 September 1971, and is payable from the 169th day of incapacity.

6. From 1972 to 1982 invalidity benefit figures are at May/June, and thereafter at March/April.

7. The sickness benefit information for 1964, 1965 and 1966 in respect of claimants, may include a number of cases where benefit was not in payment.

8. Statutory sick pay was introduced on 6 April 1983, and was payable for a maximum of 8 weeks in any one tax year. This was increased to 28 weeks from 6 April 1986 and the tax year limit removed.

9. From 1964 to 1982 sickness benefit figures are at May/June, and thereafter at March/April.

Sources:

Supplementary benefit/income support statistics annual inquiries 1969–1993.

Housing benefit management information statistics.

Sickness benefit based on a 5 per cent. sample of claimants up to 1969, 2.5 per cent. between 1970 and 1975, 2 per cent. for 1977 and 1978 and 1 per cent. thereafter.

Invalidity benefit based on a 2.5 per cent. sample of claimants up to 1975, 2 per cent. for 1977 and 1978 and 1 per cent. thereafter.

Table 3A—Sick and disabled claimants of supplementary benefit (SuppB)/income support (IS) and housing benefit (HB) but without invalidity benefit (IVB), sickness benefit and statutory sick pay (SSP)

Number of claimants—thousands

		Long term sick and disabled				Short term sick
Year	All sick and disabled(a)	All	With SuppB/IS only (b)	With SuppB/IS and HB	With HB only	With SuppB/IS
1964	—	—	—	—	—	—
1965	—	—	—	—	—	—
1966	—	—	—	—	—	—
1967	—	—	—	—	—	—
1968	—	—	—	—	—	—
1969	310	—	—	—	—	—
1970	307	—	—	—	—	—
1971	284	—	—	—	—	—
1972	168	—	—	—	—	—
1973	—	—	—	—	—	—
1974	170	—	—	—	—	—
1975	173	—	—	—	—	—
1976	178	—	—	—	—	—
1977	167	—	—	—	—	—
1978	165	—	—	—	—	—
1979	163	—	—	—	—	—
1980	158	—	—	—	—	—
1981	159	—	—	—	—	—
1982	160	—	—	—	—	—
1983	157	—	—	—	—	—
1984	168	—	—	—	—	—
1985	—	—	—	—	—	—
1986	185	—	—	—	—	—
1987	220	—	—	—	—	—
1988	—	—	—	—	—	—
1989	349	270	258	—	12	79
1990	386	307	297	—	10	79
1991	421	353	348	—	5	68
1992	470	390	206	176	8	80
1993	562	481	235	237	9	81

Note:

1. See notes to Table 3B

Table 3B As a percentage of people of eligible age for invalidity benefit/sickness benefit

Year	All sick and disabled (a)	Long term sick and disabled				Short term sick
		All	With SuppB/IS only (b)	With SuppB/IS and HB	With HB only	With SuppB/IS
1964	—	—	—	—	—	—
1965	—	—	—	—	—	—
1966	—	—	—	—	—	—
1967	—	—	—	—	—	—
1968	—	—	—	—	—	—
1969	0.9	—	—	—	—	—
1970	0.9	—	—	—	—	—
1971	0.8	—	—	—	—	—
1972	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1973	—	—	—	—	—	—
1974	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1975	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1976	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1977	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1978	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1979	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1980	0.4	—	—	—	—	—
1981	0.4	—	—	—	—	—
1982	0.4	—	—	—	—	—
1983	0.4	—	—	—	—	—
1984	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1985	—	—	—	—	—	—
1986	0.5	—	—	—	—	—
1987	0.6	—	—	—	—	—
1988	—	—	—	—	—	—
1989	0.9	0.7	0.7	—	*	0.2
1990	1.0	0.8	0.8	—	*	0.2
1991	1.1	0.9	0.9	—	*	0.2
1992	1.3	1.0	0.6	0.5	*	0.2
1993	1.5	1.3	0.6	0.6	*	0.2

Notes:
"—" not available
"*" less than 0.1 percent
(a) Sick and disabled supplementary benefit claimants only prior to 1988.
(b) All income support claimants from 1989 to 1991
1. Males aged 16 to 69 and females aged 16 to 64. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Income support and housing benefit figures are for claimants only, ie partners are not counted.
3. Supplementary benefit figures include all claimants (males under 65, females under 60) who are sick and disabled without invalidity benefit, sickness benefit or statutory sick pay. Long-term sick or disabled income support claimants without invalidity benefit, sickness benefit and statutory sick pay are those who qualify for a disability premium or a higher pensioner premium (males aged 60 to 64 only) in their own right, ie not because of their partners' condition, and those in residential care or nursing homes (males aged under 65, females aged under 60). Short-term sick income support claimants without invalidity benefit, sickness benefit or statutory sick pay are those aged under 60 who are incapable of work but who have not yet qualified for a disability premium.
4. Long-term sick or disabled housing benefit claimants without invalidity benefit, sickness benefit or statutory sick pay are those who qualify in their own right for a disability premium, ie not because of their partners' condition.
It is not possible to identify short-term housing benefit claimants without invalidity benefit, sickness benefit or statutory sick pay.
5. Housing benefit data not available prior to 1989.
6. Income support replaced supplementery benefit in 1988.
Sources:
Supplementary benefit/income support statistics annual inquiries 1969–1993.
Housing benefit management information statistics.

Family Credit

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families receive family credit; and how many of these also pay income tax and/or national insurance.

Mr. Roger Evans: Some 572,000 families receive family credit, of whom 456,000 pay income tax and/or national insurance.

Source: Five per cent. sample of family credit recipients as at July 1994.

National Disability Council

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on the composition of the national disability council.

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend and I were both fully involved in the discussions on the provisions within the Disability Discrimination Bill, including those relating to the composition of the national disability council.

Child Support Agency

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many cases of mothers with care successfully claiming as a good cause not to co-operate with the Child Support Agency's request about an absent father in (a) Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole, were based upon (i) emotional distress, (ii) mental

illness or (iii) welfare of the child in the period April 1993 to March 1994;

(2) What is his estimate of the number of mothers with care in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole who had their claim of a risk of violence if they revealed the father's name accepted by the Child Support Agency;

(3) how many of the cases in which the Child Support Agency accepted that parent had good cause not to co-operate to the latest available date involved parents with care in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole;

(4) how many of the requirements to co-operate cases between April 1993 and March 1994 involved parents with care in *(a)*Scotland and *(b)*the United Kingdom as a whole;

(5) how many parents with care in *(a)*Scotland and *(b)*the United Kingdom as a whole gave authorisation or information concerning absent parents when issued with a formal requirement to co-operate order between April 1993 and March 1994;

(6) how many reduced benefit directives were referred by the Child Support Agency to the Benefits agency in *(a)*Scotland and *(b)*the United Kingdom as a whole between April 1993 and March 1994.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 6 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of state for Social Security about the requirements to co-operate.

The information is not available in the format requested. Figures are only available for Great Britain as the Agency does not collect separate statistics for Scotland, and has no responsibility for the UK as a whole. Northern Ireland has a separate Child Support Agency, which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Between April 1993 and March 1994, the requirement to co-operate was considered in 64,800 cases. After investigation, good cause not to co-operate was accepted in 31,700 cases. Of these 8,400 were cases where the parent with care was unable to name the parent of the child; 15,800 were cases where there was a risk of violence and 7,500 were cases where other reasons such as emotional distress, emntal illness or concern for the welfare of the child were accepted. After interview, 14,200 parents with care subsequently provided their authorisation or the necessary information. Good cause not to co-operate was not accepted in 18,900 cases.

Six hundred and twenty-seven benefit directions were issued in this period.

Between April 1993 and November 1994, the Agency had investigated 124,300 cases, of which good cause not to co-operate was accepted in 60,000.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) in how many cases of absent parents in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole the Benefits Agency made deductions from income support at the behest of the Child Support Agency in the period April 1993 to March 1994;

(2) how many absent parents assessed by the Child Support Agency between April 1993 and March 1994 in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom were in receipt of income support;

(3) how many assessments made by the Child Support Agency in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole in the period April 1993 to March 1994 resulted in the absent parents being assessed as being unable to pay more than the minimum contribution of £2.30.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 7 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of absent parents assessed by the Child Support Agency during 1993/94 who were in receipt of Income Support (IS) and the number of absent parents who were assessed as only being able to pay the minimum contribution of £2.30.

Information is only available for Great Britain as the Agency does not collect separate statistics for Scotland and has no responsibility for the UK as a whole.

From launch to March 1994, a total of 40,450 absent parents (AP) receiving IS were assessed for child maintenance.

Information is not available for the total number of APs who were assessed, during 1993/94, as being unable to pay more than the minimum contribution of £2.30, or on the total number of APs who had deductions made from IS.

I hope that this is of help.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many parents with care in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom have relinquished income support and are now dependent on maintenance payments;

(2) what is his estimate of the number of parents with care in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom who relinquished income support in the period April 1993 to March 1994 and who are now in receipt of family credit and maintenance.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 7 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of parents with care who no longer qualify for Income Support and now receive Family Credit as a result of receiving maintenance assessed by the Child Support Agency.

Since launch, 12,000 parents with care (PWC) ceased to receive Income Support (IS) because child maintenance payments, assessed by the CSA, led to their income exceeding their entitlement to IS. It should be noted that child maintenance may not have been the only income received by the PWC in these cases. Other income such as part time earnings, Child Benefit and One Parent Benefit, which the PWC would continue to receive in addition to any child maintenance payments, may have contributed to the gross amount of weekly income exceeding entitlement IS.

No information is presently available on how many PWCs are presently receiving Family Credit and child maintenance following an assessment by the Agency.

I hope that this is of help.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases in which the mother with care was unable to name the father involved women living in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 7 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about parents with care who were unable to name the absent parent.

My letter to you in reply to PQ 789 sets out the position for the period April 1993 to March 1994.

Since April 1994, these cases are no longer considered under the requirement to cooperate provisions. This is because it is clear that a parent with care who cannot name the absent parent is not refusing to co-operate, but in fact is unable to co-operate. The information you request is therefore no longer collected.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many maintenance application forms issued in the period April 1993 to March 1994 were sent to parents with care in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole; and of these how many were given to parents with care who (i) were not in receipt of any social security benefits, (ii) parents with care in receipt of family credit, (iii) in receipt of disability working allowance and (iv) in receipt of income support;

(2) how many maintenance application forms issued in the period April 1993 to March 1994 in Scotland were sent to parents with care who were *(a)* new applicants for income support or *(b)* repeat applicants for income support.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 7 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of state for Social Security about the number of maintenance application forms issued by the Child Support Agency during 1993/94.

Information is only available for Great Britain as the Agency does not collect separate statistics for Scotland and has no responsibility for the UK as a whole.

The agency issued 858,000 maintenance assessment forms (MAF) between April 1993 and March 1994. 29,650 of the forms issued were sent to parents with care (PWC) who were not receiving benefit; 223,800 MAFS were sent to PWCs receiving Family Credit (FC) and Disability Working Allowance (DWA). It is not possible to separately identify recipients of FC and DWA from within this group.

A further 534,000 MAFs were sent to recipients of Income Support (IS). Information on how many of those forms were sent following new or repeat applications for IS is not available.

I hope that this is of help.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by social security district office *(a)* the number of people who have been refused benefits for failing the habitual residence test since its introduction and *(b)* how many have successfully appealed.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 6 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for statistical information in connection with the habitual residence test for each Benefits Agency district office.

Information about the number of people refused Income Support after failing the habitual residence test has been collated for the period 1 August 1994 to 31 December 1994 and is provided at Annex A. The table shows the twenty one Benefits Agency Area Directorates that make up Great Britain and lists the districts that make up each area. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits information is not yet available and is collected by the Department of Social Security from Local Authorities annually.

Data regarding the number of successful appeals, in cases where Income Support has been disallowed as a result of the test's application, is not collected in the format requested; this could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of unemployment benefit claimed in the Merseyside area during the past 12 months.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime (Policy)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications of the British crime survey results for Government policy on crime.

Mr. Maclean: The British crime survey is one measure of the extent of crime, the results of which are disseminated widely throughout the criminal justice system. Its findings have informed thinking about crime prevention in several ways, most broadly in identifying the highest risk areas and groups, and the offences which pose the greatest numerical problem. It also yields information which is helpful in monitoring some of the services of the criminal justice system, including public satisfaction with the police, police complaints procedures and victim support schemes.

The Government's policy on crime remains that no amount of crime is acceptable. The protection of the public, the punishment of offenders, the support of victims and the prevention of crime will remain our priorities.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of alleged miscarriages of justices are currently being dealt with by officials in C3 division; when each case was received by

his Department; and what is the number of personnel assigned to this work.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: At the beginning of 1995, 188 representations of wrongful conviction were under consideration in C3 division. Information about the date of receipt of each of these cases is not readily available in this form, but 106 of those cases had been outstanding for more than six months. Nineteen staff are engaged in work relating to allegations of wrongful conviction.

Prison System and Police Forces (Expenditure)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the annual expenditure on *(a)* the English prison system and *(b)* the English police forces for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Howard: Table A shows expenditure on the English prison system since 1979–80. Details of expenditure attributable to English police forces, shown at table B, are readily available only for the years 1984–85. For the years 1979–80 to 1983–84 inclusive, the table shows figures for English and Welsh police forces combined. All figures are at 1994 prices.

Annual expenditure on the English Prison System since 1979 at 1994 prices

Financial year	*Expenditure at 1994 prices £ million*
1979–1980	944.3
1980–1981	876.7
1981–1982	867.4
1982–1983	898.1
1983–1984	959.1
1984–1985	985.3
1985–1986	979.1
1986–1987	977.4
1987–1988	1,054.6
1988–1989	1,303.9
1989–1990	1,451.2
1990–1991	1,598.8
1991–1992	1,627.6
1992–1993	1,564.8
1993–1994	1,558.5

Note:

1. The figures are taken from the published appropriation accounts adjusted for the costs of the three prisons in Wales. Historic cash expenditure figures for individual prisons are not easily available and we have used the total costs of the Welsh prisons as shown in the Prison Service's annual report (copies are available in the House of Commons Library). The expenditure on the English prisons may therefore be very slightly understated.

Expenditure on the English police system

Financial Year	*Police expenditure at 1994 prices (£ million)*
1979–80	[1]3,542.8
1980–81	[1]3,552.4
1981–82	[1]3,931.5
1982–83	[1]4,067.5
1983–84	[1]4,216.4
1984–85	4,391.4
1985–86	4,096.9
1986–87	4,274.5
1987–88	4,475.8
1988–89	4,672.9
1989–90	4,976.7

Expenditure on the English police system

Financial Year	*Police expenditure at 1994 prices (£ million)*
1990–91	5,109.1
1991–92	5,365.1
1992–93	5,599.6
1993–94	5,741.7

[1] Combined expenditure figures for England and Wales forces.

Passports

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many United Kingdom passports have been *(a)* issued and *(b)* revoked since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Figures for passport services are kept for financial years April to March. The numbers of each of the years since 1978–79 are:

Year	*Numbers*
1978–79	1,614,382
1979–80	1,995,401
1980–81	2,168,344
1981–82	1,748,241
1982–83	2,014,687
1983–84	1,966,019
1984–85	1,800,440
1985–86	2,193,489
1986–87	2,588,426
1987–88	2,485,312
1988–89	2,841,888
1989–90	3,194,418
1990–91	3,116,939
1991–92	3,227,522
1992–93	3,368,060
1993–94	3,699,526

Withdrawal of a passport would be considered:

a. if it came to the Passport Agency's attention on replacement that it had been issued incorrectly; and

b. on the same basis as the refusal of an application. That is in the case of:

(i) a minor whose journey was known to be contrary to a court order, to the wishes of a parent or other person or authority to whom a court had awarded custody, care and control or to the provisions of section 25(1) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, as amended by the Children Act, 1989, or section 56 of the Adoption Act 1976;

(ii) a person for whose arrest a warrant had been issued in the United Kingdom or who was wanted by the police on suspicion of a serious crime;

(iii) in very rare cases, a person whose past or proposed activities were so demonstrably undesirable that the grant or continued enjoyment of passport facilities would be contrary to the public interest;

(iv) a person repatriated at public expense until the debt has been repaid.

No records are kept of the numbers, but it is very rare for a passport to be withdrawn.

Pardons

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* absolute and *(b)* conditional pardons have been granted to persons convicted of criminal offences since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Since 1979, 1,253 free and three conditional pardons have been granted under the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy.

Sponsor Interviews

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will establish a central record of requests made by overseas entry clearance officers and others for sponsors in the United Kingdom to be interviewed by immigration officers; and if he will arrange for all requests for interviews to be acknowledged and sponsors or their representative to be notified and for action to be taken if such interviews are not held within a reasonable period;

(2) what representations he has received about delays in interviewing sponsors in the United Kingdom in relation to entry clearance applications; if he will arrange for a procedure to record and monitor progress in sponsor interviews at all overseas posts on the Indian sub-continent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested on representations about sponsor interviews is not available. Such interviews are received, recorded and despatched by immigration service headquarters. Monitoring the progress and action is a matter for local managers who are aware of the objective to complete them within three months where practicable.

I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs that overseas posts already record and monitor requests for interview and generate reminders as necessary and that applicants are informed at the time of their interview that their application is deferred pending an interview with their sponsor. A further acknowledgement is not necessary.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average delay at *(a)* Leeds-Bradford airport and *(b)* other ports once a sponsor has been interviewed in reports being sent to his Department; and what is the average delay between the receipt of such reports and their dispatch to British overseas posts with particular reference to Islamabad.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Reports are normally sent from the interviewing office direct to the overseas post. A record is not kept of the average time taken to prepare and dispatch such reports. Local managers are responsible for ensuring that they are completed and despatched promptly. In the case of Leeds-Bradford airport, a sample study of such cases indicates that it took between four and seven days and that the time taken in cases originating from Islamabad took about four days.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he is having with *(a)* ministerial colleagues and *(b)* officials to expedite sponsor interviews and reports of such interviews being received by overseas ports.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I have asked officials to continue with measures which will help to achieve the objective of three months for the completion of such interviews.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *681*, who determines if capacity for conducting interviews exists at another port; who informs Leeds-Bradford of such capacity; in the last year, to date, how many sponsors waiting to be interviewed at Leeds-Bradford have been invited for interview at another port; and if he will list the ports where those interviews have been conducted.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The capacity for conducting interviews at any port is identified by local managers in consultation with immigration service headquarters.

Invitations have been sent to 20 sponsors to attend interview at other ports and offices in the north-east. Hull, North Shields, Stockton and south Humberside will be used for this purpose.

Prevention of Terrorism Powers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many non-United Kingdom nationals in each year to date, have been *(a)* detained, *(b)* charged, *(c)* prosecuted and *(d)* released without charge under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The information requested is not available. The statistics, which are collected centrally, and which are published in statistical bulletins issued by my Department and by the Northern Ireland Office, do not categorise by nationality those detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Police Vehicle Maintenance

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his plans for introducing competition into the provision of police motor vehicle maintenance and repair and the cleaning of police buildings.

Mr. Howard: The initial proposals for the extension of compulsory competitive tendering to police motor vehicle maintenance and repair, and the cleaning of police buildings, sought to recognise the operational and security requirements of the police service. In the case of the former, the proposed 40 per cent. competition requirement was intended to allow a core of sensitive vehicles to be serviced within secure in-house facilities. The 90 per cent. level initially proposed for cleaning provided an option to retain in-house staff to clean sensitive areas, or remote and small stations for which CCT might not be cost-effective.

Detailed consultation proposals for both services were issued by the Home Office on 11 April 1994. The Government have now considered the responses received from the police service, local authority associations and other interested parties.

For the cleaning of police buildings, the consultation exercise sought specific comment on the need for a competition-free element. Many responded that a larger competition-free element was necessary to safeguard the cleaning of sensitive areas, and small and remote stations. The Government are satisfied that a sound case has been made, and intend, therefore, that the competition level should now be set at 80 per cent. We are confident this will achieve a rigorous competitive regime, bring improvements in service and value for money, while providing the police service with the flexibility it requires.

For police motor vehicle maintenance and repair, the initial proposals were specifically designed to cater for concerns about security and operational effectiveness. The

results of the consultation exercise have been looked at against the other initiatives being developed within police fleet management, such as centrally negotiated purchasing arrangements. The Government are now satisfied that the introduction of CCT to police motor vehicle maintenance and repair would not, in this case, add greatly to the gains being made in other areas. We have, therefore, decided that the existing exemption should be retained.

The introduction of CCT to the police service is, of course, more than just achieving better value for money. It is also about providing a strong impetus for organisational change and service review. The Government remain committed to the value of these processes within public services, and hope to announce in the near future our initial plans for introducing CCT to police while collar support services.

Emergency Calls

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to reduce the number of non-urgent and hoax 999 telephone calls.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office sponsors a 999 liaison committee, which brings together the public telephony operators, the emergency services and Oftel and provides a forum in which problems can be addressed. A number of initiatives are being carried out to reduce the incidence of non-urgent and hoax 999 calls; these include sending warning letters to customers and school visits by emergency service personnel. A report will be submitted to the 999 liaison committee in March 1995, documenting progress and making recommendations for the development of a national strategy.

Crime Prevention

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's crime prevention policy.

Mr. Maclean: The Government's crime prevention policy is based on partnership and is being developed on a broad front. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 respectively strengthen the powers of the courts to deal with offenders and lay the foundations for a new more effective partnership between the Government, the police and the public to fight crime. The recently launched "Partners Against Crime" initiative puts a new emphasis on the individual citizen as a partner with the police, whether as a member of neighbourhood watch or street watch or as a neighbourhood or special constable.

At national level, the ministerial group for crime prevention co-ordinates activity across Government Departments and the National Board for Crime Prevention continues to disseminate best practice. At local level, the Government continue to support crime prevention projects and partnerships through, for example, the expansion of our successful safer cities programme, the single regeneration budget, and the work of Crime Concern, the independent crime prevention organisation.

The Government also attach particular importance to the use of new technology in the fight against crime. We are pushing forward with a number of major new initiatives on crime reduction through technology, including the promotion and funding of closed circuit television in public places, and co-operation with vehicle manufacturers on car security.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civilian staff of the Metropolitan police have been made subject to early retirement against their wishes in the last two years; and what pension entitlement is available in such cases where retirement occurs at age 60 years.

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner that the normal contractual age of retirement for Metropolitan police civil staff is 60 years, at which age the pension paid is the full entitlement based on reckonable service and pensionable pay. Those leaving the service under the provisions of early retirement schemes do so by agreement.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the population of the Metropolitan police area, *(b)* the number of police officers and *(c)* the number of officers per head of the population in Greater London in (i) 1979, (ii) 1985 and (iii) the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Information on population figures for police areas, the number of police officers per force and the number of police officers per head of population can be found in the annual reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, copies of which are in the Library.

Colombian Nationals

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's estimate of the number of Colombian nationals resident in this country; and how many of those are thought to be here illegally.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1991 census of population indicated that there were 5,682 persons resident in Great Britain on census night who were born in Colombia. There is no estimate available of the number of those who are Colombian nationals nor those who might be here illegally.

Wiltshire Police Authority

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much initial financing grant is to be made available to the new Wiltshire police authority to help its parallel running with the existing police authority; and what guidelines are issued by his Department for its use.

Mr. Maclean: New police authorities have each received an initial financing grant of £97,560 under section 32 of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. This grant enables the new authorities to function during 1994–95 in preparing to assume their full statutory function of securing the maintenance of an efficient and effective police force for their areas on 1 April 1995, when the current police authorities will cease to exist. Guidance on the use of this grant was provided in a Home Office letter of 8 July 1994 to chief constables and clerks of police authorities. New police authorities will be expected to submit to the Home Office an account of the expenditure in respect of which initial financing grant was

made. District auditors will provide a further check on how the money has been spent.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations underlay his assessment of the needs of the Wiltshire police force in allocating grant to facilitate the change over to the new Wiltshire police authority; and what representations he has received concerning the level of grant.

Mr. Maclean: Under section 32 of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 initial financing grants totalling £17 million are available for police force use in preparing to assume their new role from 1 April 1995 of being answerable to new free-standing police authorities.

Claims from police forces for initial financing grant for police force use were measured against the relative need of each police force as assessed with the assistance of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

A provisional claim for initial financing grant for police force use was submitted by the chief constable of Wiltshire in a letter of 26 August 1994. A detailed claim was submitted by the clerk of the Wiltshire police authority in a letter of 15 December 1994.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much initial financing grant is to be made available to the Wiltshire police force to facilitate the change over to the new Wiltshire police authority; and what guidelines are issued by his Department for its use.

Mr. Maclean: Under section 32 of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, an allocation of £400,000 of initial financing grant for use by Wiltshire constabulary has been provisionally approved.

Guidance on the use of this grant was provided in a Home Office letter of 8 July 1994 to chief constables and clerks of police authorities.

Police forces will be required to submit formal claims for their initial financing grants with accompanying evidence of incurred or committed expenditure before the end of the current financial year. Subsequently, district auditors will provide a further check on how the money has been spent.

Appeal Applications

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications have been made in the last year by the immigration department for leave to appeal against a decision of an immigration adjudicator; in how many cases leave has been given; and in what percentage of cases where leave has been given the subsequent appeal by the Home Office was successful.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: According to the records of the immigration appellate authorities, in 1994 the Home Office made 691 applications for leave to appeal against adjudicators' determinations; leave was granted in 195 cases. It is not possible to give the percentage of cases where the subsequent appeal was successful because the appeal has yet to be heard in some of the cases in which leave was granted in 1994. Of the Home Office appeals which came before the Immigration Appeal Tribunal in 1994, 113 were successful.

Unique Identification Numbers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what reasons he is continuing to require police officers to wear visible unique identification numbers;

(2) what plans he has to discontinue the requirement for police officers to wear unique identification numbers visible on their uniforms.

Mr. Maclean: Issues relating to police uniforms are primarily operational matters which are for decision by chief officers of police, but I continue to agree with the advice given by the then Home Secretary—now Lord Callaghan in Home Office circular 13/1968—that

"it is in the interests both of the public, and of the police themselves, that the police should continue to wear numbers on their uniforms".

Junior Doctors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken to process work permits for appointments of junior doctors to health authorities and as a percentage of the overall average for all work permits; how many junior doctor applicants were appointed to jobs in *(a)* the Yorkshire and Humberside health region and *(b)* nationally in the last year for which figures are available; how many are currently before his Department; and when the initial application was made for each one.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information relates to post-graduate doctors and dentists undergoing further medical training, for which a work permit is not required, and to qualified doctors and dentists who are in employment, for which a work permit is required. The average time taken in 1994 to grant extensions of leave to remain in these categories and to all trainees or persons in work permit employment is given in the table. The other information requested is not available.

Average time between application and the grant of leave to remain, 1994

Category of leave to remain	[1]*Number of days*
Post-graduate medical trainees	29
All trainees	33
Doctors and dentists in employment	49
All employment cases	50

[1] Excludes the time which some cases spent, during the first half of 1994, in Lunar house before being passed to the casework section and may thus understate slightly.

Mud Deposits (Roads)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been in each of the last three years for the depositing of dangerous amounts of mud on public roads by agricultural vehicles.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available centrally.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the organisations invited to comment on the draft inter-agency circular on domestic violence; which organisations responded; and what was the length of time allowed for consultation on the draft circular.

Mr. Maclean: Following initial consultations with a number of organisations in June and July 1994, the Home Office wrote to the organisations listed on 15 September to invite comments on the draft circular by 7 October. I understand that, in addition to this, the Department of Health wrote to a number of statutory and voluntary agencies on 21 September and 4 October inviting responses by 7 and 12 October respectively.

(*denotes those organisations from which responses were received).

Organisations contacted by the Home Office

Allied Dunbar Charitable Trust Ltd.
Association of County Councils
Association of District Councils*
Association of London Authorities
Association of Metropolitan Authorities*
Association of Chief Officers of Probation
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council*
Central Probation Council
Charnwood Borough Council Domestic Violence Panel*
Crime Concern*
Domestic Violence Intervention Project, London
Dorset Police Headquarters Child Protection Unit*
Essex Probation Service*
Family Welfare Association
Federation of Army Wives*
Hammersmith and Fulham Domestic Violence Forum*
Health Visitors' Association*
Hereford Women's Aid
Islington Council, Women's Equality Unit*
Jewish Marriage Council*
Jewish Women's Aid*
Keighley Domestic Violence Forum
Leeds Inter-Agency Project*
London Boroughs Association*
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Community Safety Unit*
Manchester, Crown Prosecution Service*
Merseyside Probation Service*
Metropolitan Police Community Affairs Branch*
MIND
Mid Glamorgan County Crime Prevention Co-ordinating Committee*
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux*
National Association of Probation Officers
National Board of Catholic Women*
Network*
Northern Ireland Women's Aid
Nottinghamshire County Council*
Nottinghamshire Domestic Violence Forum*
ONE plus ONE*
Pro-Act*
Probation Managers Association*
Refuge*
Relate*
Roehampton Institute, Department of Sociology and Social Administration*
Royal College of General Practitioners*
Royal College of Midwives
Royal College of Nursing*
Royal College of Psychiatrists*
Royal College of Surgeons
Scottish Women's Aid
Somerset County Council Social Services Department*
Southall Black Sisters*
South Glamorgan Probation Service*
South Somerset Domestic Violence Project*
South Yorkshire Probation Service*
Swindon Women's Aid*
Tavistock Marital Studies Institute*
Thames Valley Police, Family Protection Unit*
The Body Shop Foundation
The Housing Corporation*
The Samaritans*
The Sanctuary
Trades Union Congress Equal Opportunities Department
Unison
University of Bradford, violence, abuse, and gender relations unit*
University of Bristol, Domestic Violence Research Group*
University of Wales Department of Social and Administrative Studies*
Victim Support*
Wales Assembly of Women*
Wearside Women in Need*
West Midlands Probation Service*
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council Social Services Department*
Williscroft and Co.
Wolverhampton Domestic Violence Forum
Women's Aid Federation (England)*
Women's National Commission*
Welsh Women's Aid*

Organisations contacted by the Department of Health

Bradford Community NHS Trust
Bradford Health Authority
British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse
Catholic Child Welfare*
Childline*
Children's Legal Centre*
Family Rights Group
Hammersmith and Fulham Social Services Department*
Home-Start UK*
Kensington and Chelsea Social Services Department*
Kidscape*
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services*
Leeds Health Authority*
Leeds Family Health Services Authority*
Liverpool Social Services Department*
National Children's Bureau*
National Children's Homes for Action*
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children*
NEWPIN
Parents against Injustice
Parentline Opus
Standing Committee on Sexual Abuse of Children
The Michael Seiff Foundation*
United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust*
Voluntary Organisations Liaison Council for Under Fives*

Mr Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend his review of the charge of murder to include the case of female victims of domestic violence who kill their partners.

Mr. Maclean: No. I have made it clear that the review will look at the law of murder specifically in the light of the concerns expressed by the House of Lords in the case involving Private Clegg. That case related to the use of lethal force in the maintenance of law and order.

Market Testing

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been paid thus far to KPMG management consultants as a result of their work on the market testing of the internal research function of his Department.

Mr. Howard: KPMG Peat Marwick management consultants have been paid for 10 days' work as part of the scoping study for the market test of the internal research function of the Home Office research and planning unit. Information on the costs of individual contracts with consultants is commercial in confidence and it is not the practice to disclose these details.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the scoping study into the proposed market test of internal research function of the research and planning unit.

Mr. Howard: I expect the scoping study report to be completed towards the end of February. It is not the general practice to publish market-testing scoping study reports, which are internal working documents and can contain commercially sensitive information about potential service suppliers.

Drivers (Visual Acuity)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions of drivers failing to satisfy the required standards of visual acuity there have been in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

SCOTLAND

Ancillary Workers

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ancillary workers were directly employed by health boards and NHS trusts in Scotland; and how many were employed by private contractors in each of the past five years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of ancillary staff directly employed by health boards and NHS trusts is shown in the table. Information about ancillary staff employed by private contractors is not collected centrally.

Ancillary staff employed in the NHSIS: at 30 September

	Headcount	*Whole time equivalent*
1990	24,113	16,181.3
1991	22,686	15,021.6
1992	21,493	13,974.2
1993	20,583	13,286.4
1994[1]	19,133	12,285.1

[1] Provisional at 30 September 1994.

Scottish Homes

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* direction he has issued to Scottish Homes to abandon its role as landlord; and if he will place copies of these documents in the Library.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under section 3A of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988, Scottish Homes' power to dispose of its housing stock may be exercised only with the consent of my right hon. Friend. He issued guidance to Scottish Homes in February 1989 and February 1991, following which Scottish Homes published its own procedures for the large-scale voluntary disposal of its stock. Copies of these guidance documents, entitled "Scottish Homes: Arrangements for Evaluating the Suitability of Proposals for Acquisition of Stock by Other Landlords: Note by SDD" and "Guidance on Scottish Homes Stock Disposals: February 1991", are available in the Library. No directions have been issued to Scottish Homes on this matter.

NHS Trust Chief Executives

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much the chief executives in each NHS trust in Scotland earned in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what steps he is taking to monitor the level of such earnings.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally. NHS trusts are now required to publish in their annual reports information about the remuneration of chief executives.

Housing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many tenant-led housing associations have been successfully established from previous Scottish Homes tenants; and how many tenants and how many non-tenants are on the management committees of each.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ballots have been held for Scottish Homes tenants under its large-scale stock transfer procedure; who conducted these ballots for Scottish Homes; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the full ballot result in each case.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member and he has agreed to arrange for a copy of his reply to be placed in the Library.

Nursery Education

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many three and four-year-olds were receiving nursery education in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* each local education authority area in Scotland in September 1994.

Mr. Lang: The information requested for September 1994 is not yet available. The latest available information is given in the following table.

	Education authority nursery schools and departments; independent schools with nursery departments Number of children [1] as at September 1993 aged:		*Private nursery schools Number of children [2] as at March 1994 aged:*	
	3 years	*4 years*	*3 years*	*4 years*
Borders	38	454	138	76
Central	732	2,267	76	18
Dumfries and Galloway	165	1,051	19	7
Fife	752	3,648	67	28
Grampian	918	3,964	409	231
Highland	114	720	203	188
Lothian	3,146	6,612	268	198
Strathclyde	6,645	12,659	1,283	1,188
Tayside	1,064	2,711	518	311
Orkney	37	172	—	—
Shetland	84	180	—	—
Western Isles	—	—	—	—
Scotland	13,693	34,438	2,981	2,245

[1] Age as at December 1993. [2] Age as at March 1994. Private nursery schools registered with local authority social work departments.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much expenditure was incurred by each local education authority in Scotland on the provision of nursery education in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93 and *(c)* 1993–94.

Mr. Lang: Net current expenditure by education authorities on nursery education in 1991–92 and 1992–93 is given in the table. These figures exclude the costs of school meals, home-to-school transport and central administration. Comparable figures for expenditure in 1993–94 are not yet available.

£000

	1991–92	*1992–93*
Border	449	456
Central	2,585	2,838
Dumfries and Galloway	476	833
Fife	3,156	3,484
Grampian	4,027	4,935
Highland	909	902
Lothian	9,611	10,433
Strathclyde	25,698	27,698
Tayside	3,915	4,338
Orkney	33	96
Shetland	307	337
Western Isles	—	—
Total	51,166	56,350

Local Government Finance

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will express in both cash and constant price terms the amount of capital allocated, in terms of consent to borrow, to local authorities for schools buildings in every year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities in Scotland receive an allocation of consent to incur liability to meet capital expenditure on educational buildings. Within this overall level of consent they are free to determine which educational building projects will proceed. They are also free to transfer consent between certain other capital programmes and to augment their consent levels in other ways, for example by utilising resources raised from the disposal of assets or by funding capital projects from current revenue. Information on the level of the total capital allocations for education, and the assumed schools element included in them, is given in the table.

	Total allocation for educational building		*Assumed schools element*	
Year	*At cash prices*	*At 1994-95 prices*	*At cash prices*	*At 1994-95 prices*
1979–80	53,605	134,240	49,810	124,736
1980–81	56,678	119,959	53,813	113,895
1981–82	62,213	120,059	59,988	115,765
1982–83	53,669	96,686	49,579	89,317
1983–84	45,755	78,775	40,940	70,485
1984–85	40,310	66,080	36,623	60,036
1985–86	50,275	78,132	42,950	66,748
1986–87	47,480	71,628	39,785	60,019
1987–88	53,175	76,164	44,279	63,422
1988–89	61,315	82,315	52,069	69,902
1989–90	65,555	82,261	54,390	68,251
1990–91	62,619	72,748	52,055	60,475
1991–92	73,291	80,112	61,049	66,731
1992–93	85,647	90.033	75,355	79,214
1993–94	78,489	80,059	75,510	77,020
1994–95	71,489	71,489	68,510	68,510

Note:

1. The total allocations for educational building include elements for further education from 1979–80 to 1992–93 and for community education from 1985–86

Students

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage increase or decrease in real terms for spending per capita on students *(a)* at universities and

(b) in further and adult education from 1982–83 to 1992–93.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Per capita spending—Universities Grants Committee and Universities Funding Council grants for teaching and research, and from tuition fees—for students on full-time courses who were charged fees at the home rate decreased by 27 per cent. in real terms between 1982–83 and 1992–93 in the then eight universities in Scotland. Over this period, the number of students in these universities increased by 42 per cent. The estimate of spending does not include spending by the research councils, funding provided for maintenance and loans, or fees paid by part-time and overseas students and does not take account of changes in funding arrangements, such as the transfer of research funds within the dual support system from UFC to the research councils.

Similar information on expenditure per student in further and adult education is not available.

Generic Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the proportion of generic prescribing for each family health services authority, divided by *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders in each of the last three years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* This information is not available in the form requested except at disproportionate cost. The table offers a partial response. It gives an estimate of generic prescribing by general practitioner fundholders and non-fundholders based on a full analysis of one month in each of the years compared with a full analysis for all prescribers for each complete year.

	Percentage generic prescriptions			
Health boards	*1992–93 Fundholders*	*1992–93 Non-fundholders*	*1993–94 Fundholders*	*1993–94 Non-fundholders*
Argyll and Clyde	40.91	35.55	45.16	39.51
Ayrshire and Arran	39.37	33.96	43.08	37.17
Borders	—	44.83	54.93	49.44
Dumfries and Galloway	—	37.01	40.42	39.79
Fife	43.19	38.70	45.02	41.06
Forth Valley	37.44	39.28	41.15	43.27
Grampian	40.45	38.73	44.34	42.78
Greater Glasgow	42.83	39.50	46.67	43.13
Highland	38.95	37.93	41.81	40.87
Lanarkshire	38.67	33.25	43.51	37.73
Lothian	44.07	43.24	47.90	47.51
Orkney	—	39.29	—	42.38
Shetland	—	35.75	—	36.68
Tayside	47.97	41.25	51.92	45.04
Western Isles	—	46.35	—	49.27
Scotland	41.38	38.97	45.49	42.37

Pre-school Education

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pre-school education places were available in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland at the latest available date; and in each case what percentage these figures represent of the total number of the children in the relevant age group.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The available information given is for children attending education authority nursery schools, nursery departments of primary schools, nursery departments of independent schools and private nursery schools.

	Education authority nursery schools and departments; nursery departments of independent schools[1]		*Private nursery schools*[2]	
	Number attending at September 1993	*Percentage of population*[3]	*Number attending at March 1994*	*Percentage of population*[3]
Strathclyde	19,661	33.9	2,864	4.9
Scotland	49,194	38.6	6,982	5.5

[1] Includes all those under five years old attending independent schools with nursery departments.
[2] Registered with local authority social work departments. Includes all children aged under five.
[3] Based on the mid-1993 estimates of the three and four-year-old population prepared by the General Register Office for Scotland.

Long-stay Mental Hospitals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which long-stay mental hospitals in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole do not yet have an agreed closure plan; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what are the closure dates of the long-stay mental hospitals in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole;

(3) what plans he has to close remaining long-stay mental hospitals in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The Secretary of State has announced approval to the closure of Gartloch hospital and Woodilee hospital, in 1996; Ravenspark hospital, this year and Gogarburn hospital in 1999. No other long-stay mental hospital in Scotland has an agreed closure plan.

The pace of change in long-stay sector is directed by patient needs. The organisation of long-stay care and care services in the community are determined by continuous joint assessment of local needs involving health boards and local authorities. The aim is to secure the most effective package of services, both in hospital and the community, that meet the specific needs of patients and carers.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many long-stay mental hospitals remain open.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Numbers of mental hospitals currently open which have patients resident for more than one year are shown in the table:

	Type of Hospital		
	Mental illness	*Psychiatric unit*	*Mental handicap*
Scotland Total	33	37	23

Source:
Information and statistics division, NHS in Scotland.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many long-stay mental hospitals have closed in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past four years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Closure dates in the past four years of mental hospitals which had patients resident for more than one year are listed in the table:

	Closure date	*Type of hospital*
Strathclyde		
Dunlop House Hospital	3 December 1991	(mental handicap)
Stoneyetts Hospital	19 February 1992	(mental illness)
Bellefield Hospital, Lanark	1 December 1993	(mental illness)
Rest of Scotland		
County Hospital, Stornoway	1 October 1992	(mental illness)
House of Daviot Hospital, Inverurie	31 March 1994	(mental illness)

Source:
Information and statistics division, NHS Scotland.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of patients in long-stay mental hospitals in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Information on the number of patients who have been resident in mental hospitals for one year or more is shown in the table:

Residents in hospital as at 31 December whose stay is one year or more

	Hospital type	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Strathclyde		5,362	5,092	4,779	4,512
	Mental Illness	3,445	3,315	2,934	2,671
	Psychiatric Unit	280	283	348	508
	Mental Handicap	1,637	1,494	1,497	1,333
Scotland		12,154	11,560	11,115	10,733
	Mental Illness	7,569	7,275	6,798	6,463
	Psychiatric Unit	627	723	871	1,056
	Mental Handicap	3,958	3,562	3,446	3,214

Source:
The information and statistics division, NHS in Scotland.

Health Care (Strathclyde)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total cost of all health care provided outwith the NHS in each year since 1979 at 1979 constant prices, in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The table has been derived from health board annual accounts and contains costs of health care purchased from the private sector by *(a)* health boards within the Strathclyde region area and *(b)* all health boards in Scotland. No figures are held centrally by the national health service for other health care provided by the private sector.

Year	*Argyll and Clyde health board £000s*	*Ayr and Arran health board £000s*	*Greater Glasgow health board £000s*	*Lanarkshire health board £000s*	*Total £000s*	*All Scotland £000s*
1979–80	722	0	3,421	514	4,657	7,241
1980–81	772	0	3,008	124	3,904	7,437
1981–82	707	0	2,396	554	3,657	7,019

Year	Argyll and Clyde health board £000s	Ayr and Arran health board £000s	Greater Glasgow health board £000s	Lanarkshire health board £000s	Total £000s	All Scotland £000s
1982–83	860	5	1,885	524	3,274	6,358
1983–84	681	0	1,444	476	2,601	5,855
1984–85	794	0	969	435	2,198	5,485
1985–86	731	11	899	408	2,049	5,141
1986–87	755	48	930	460	2,193	5,299
1987–88	749	84	1,129	479	2,441	5,675
1988–89	717	69	1,171	550	2,507	5,753
1989–90	803	179	1,396	573	2,951	6,403
1990–91	851	243	1,450	590	3,134	6,979
1991–92	688	157	2,683	662	4,190	8,406
1992–93	731	5	3,212	1,046	4,994	9,015
1993–94	434	613	3,148	1,069	5,264	6,621

Note:
1. Figures have been calculated at 1979 prices using the GDP deflator.

Winter Death Rate

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the excess winter death rate in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* There is no universally accepted definition of excess winter deaths and it would not be possible to calculate a rate for these. The total numbers of deaths by month are given in the table.

Deaths in Scotland and Strathclyde by month, 1984–1993

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
(a) Strathclyde										
January	2,829	2,970	3,485	2,630	2,569	2,711	3,243	2,662	2,616	2,641
February	2,532	2,497	2,784	2,397	2,496	2,279	2,299	2,340	2,342	2,314
March	2,690	2,704	2,384	2,772	2,508	2,487	2,380	2,252	2,482	2,938
April	2,716	2,655	2,674	2,408	2,351	2,254	2,451	2,573	2,327	2,449
May	2,537	2,376	2,277	2,186	2,458	2,485	2,363	2,328	2,205	2,287
June	2,063	2,052	2,297	2,389	2,210	2,297	2,130	2,078	2,361	2,292
July	2,235	2,357	2,153	2,206	2,004	2,146	2,192	2,276	2,105	2,136
August	2,169	2,097	2,133	2,091	2,367	2,246	2,178	2,073	2,169	2,286
September	2,062	2,043	2,371	2,152	2,174	2,103	1,900	1,982	2,119	2,220
October	2,458	2,480	2,223	2,396	2,185	2,358	2,381	2,567	2,324	2,305
November	2,375	2,434	2,136	2,430	2,397	2,728	2,282	2,328	2,401	2,967
December	2,626	2,927	2,647	2,804	2,524	3,986	2,527	2,601	2,597	2,881
Total	29,292	29,592	29,564	28,861	28,243	30,080	28,326	28,060	28,048	29,716

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
(b) Scotland										
January	6,126	6,324	7,456	5,741	5,609	5,976	6,884	6,014	5,894	5,762
February	5,376	5,383	5,774	5,197	5,385	4,944	4,958	5,218	5,274	4,913
March	5,723	5,759	5,226	5,943	5,539	5,507	5,091	5,046	5,343	6,084
April	5,827	5,685	5,743	5,112	5,088	4,837	5,276	5,451	5,040	5,361
May	5,249	5,191	4,943	4,704	5,387	5,328	5,144	4,974	4,666	5,049
June	4,476	4,462	4,900	5,109	4,825	5,010	4,685	4,466	4,962	4,948
July	4,783	5,072	4,730	4,758	4,488	4,689	4,805	4,861	4,684	4,571
August	4,642	4,613	4,471	4,585	5,075	4,823	4,734	4,500	4,630	4,921
September	4,406	4,669	5,072	4,753	4,689	4,622	4,198	4,453	4,710	4,722
October	5,280	5,201	4,797	5,137	4,891	5,158	5,211	5,328	4,960	4,930
November	4,947	5,302	4,659	5,191	5,329	5,569	4,960	5,024	5,117	6,531
December	5,510	6,306	5,696	5,784	5,652	8,564	5,581	5,706	5,657	6,257
Total	62,345	63,967	63,467	62,014	61,957	65,017	61,527	61,041	60,937	64,049

Hypothermia

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people died of hypothermia other than when engaged in outdoor pursuits in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* It is not possible to identify those hypothermia deaths where the deceased had been engaged in outdoor pursuits.

Numbers are already published regularly—in the Registrar-General's four-weekly "Vital Statistics Return", available in the Library—of total deaths with any mention of hypothermia on the death certificate. Figures for Scotland and Strahtclyde are given.

Deaths with any mention of hypothermia on the death certificate, 1984 to 1993. Strathclyde and Scotland:

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
(a) Strathclyde	73	90	101	80	72	68	67	43	47	64
(b) Scotland	175	231	208	153	138	150	136	99	115	141

Public Bodies

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to how many agencies and non-departmental public bodies his Department makes appointments; how many appointments have been made to these bodies; and what was their total budget in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department to which I make appointments are listed in the Cabinet Office annual publication "Public Bodies 1994" which was published today and copies of which are held in the Library of the House. The information includes the number of appointments I make to each body, the gross expenditure of the body and the amount funded by central Government. Further information on the financial affairs of each executive non-departmental public body may be obtained from the annual report of the body.

I appoint two non-executive directors to the board of the Scottish Prison Service and one non-executive director to the management board of registers of Scotland.

Details of my responsibilities with respect to the appointments of individual chief executives for each of my eight executive agencies can be found in the agency framework documents, copies of which are held in the Library of the House.

Information about the running costs of each of my executive agencies is set out in the table. Agencies came into being on various dates during this period. To give a consistent time series a full five-year run of figures has been prepared irrespective of when the agencies were created. The table shows outturn expenditure since information is not readily available over the full five-year period on a budget basis.

£ millions

	1989–90 Outturn	1990–91 Outturn	1991–92 Outturn	1992–93 Outturn	1993–94 Outturn
(a) Historic Scotland	8.6	9.8	11.4	12.7	12.6
(b) Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	3.6	4.0	4.0	4.5	4.7
(c) Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	9.5	10.0	10.8	11.2	12.1
(d) Scottish Office Pensions Agency	3.8	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.5
(e) Student Awards Agency for Scotland	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.6
(f) Scottish Prison Service	97.9	105.0	119.4	114.8	135.3
(g) Registers of Scotland	14.6	20.8	26.3	28.6	27.5
(h) Scottish Record Office	2.9	3.3	3.8	4.1	4.0

Council Housing

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council house tenants have brought their homes under the right-to-buy scheme; and how many subsequently sold their homes in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The most recent information on right-to-buy sales is published in the statistical bulletin HSG/1994/9 a copy of which is available in the Library. Information on the resale of dwellings bought under the right-to-buy scheme is not held centrally.

Special Transitional Grant

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give by regional and island authority the amount of special transitional grant for 1993–94 spent on *(a)* nursing home placements, *(b)* residential home placements and *(c)* non-residential services.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Local authorities in Scotland have received funding of £85.8 million in 1993–94 to support their new community care responsibilities. The comparable figures for 1994–95 and 1995–96 are £176 million and £241 million respectively. These include resources equivalent to the special transitional grant which applies in England only. Outturn expenditure data for 1993–94 are not yet available.

"Progress in Partnership"

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), *Official Report*, columns *353–54*, if it is his intention to create a priority partnership area in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow or *(b)* Inverclyde as a whole; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* In announcing the outcome of the review of urban regeneration policy in Scotland my right hon. Friend noted that further consultation on the implementation of the new arrangements would be conducted. Once this process is completed, we plan to issue detailed guidance to local authorities and other local partners on the operation of the new arrangements and then enter into discussions with these bodies on a range of matters, including the selection of priority areas. An announcement will then be made, probably later this year, on the designation of the first priority partnership areas. The needs of Greenock, Port Glasgow and Inverclyde as a whole will be considered, alongside those of other areas, during this process.

Population Estimates

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the total number of people in Scotland over the age of 65 years in 2001.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The population of Scotland aged 65 years and over is projected to be 805,000 in 2001.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of operations for breast cancer in 1993–94 were performed in hospitals where *(a)* more than 100 such operations took place, *(b)* between 50 and 100 took place and *(c)* fewer than 50 took place.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The estimated number of discharges from Scottish NHS hospitals in 1993–94 following an operation for breast cancer is given in the following table.

Estimated discharges from Scottish hospitals following an operation for breast cancer for the financial year ending March 1994[1]

	Frequency	*Percentage of total cases*
Female Breast Cancer		
Hospitals with frequency over 100 cases	3,996	75
Hospitals with frequency between 50 and 100	929	18
Hospitals with frequency between 0 and 49	370	7
Total cases	5,295	100
Male Breast Cancer		
Hospitals with frequency between 0 and 49	31	100

[1] 1994 Dates are provisional.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 8 February 1995

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Oxygenated Petrol

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what research his Department has carried out into oxygenated petrol; what plans he has for research into the environmental suitability of oxygenated petrol; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: This is a development issue which is being pursued by the fuel industry, but the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council is considering launching a programme into fundamental combustion research aimed at raising the efficiency and reducing the harmful emissions of the combustive process.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary on 6 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *69*.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I received one item from Ian Greer last week. It was an invitation to a reception which my constituency secretary declined on my behalf.

Child Witnesses

Mrs. Llin Golding: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all fast-tracking initiatives being made to reduce delays faced by child witnesses; and if these initiatives are to be evaluated for broader application.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Fast-tracking schemes are currently in place at the following Crown court centres: Leeds, Lincoln, Newcastle, covering cases from Durham; Peterborough; Plymouth, pilot scheme; Preston and Winchester, pilot scheme. Area criminal justice liaison committees are still considering whether similar schemes can be set up in other Crown court centres. However, a number of informal schemes are also in existence, in response to the duty on the courts to ensure that waiting times in cases involving child witnesses are kept to a minimum.

The Criminal Justice Consultative Council is due to review the introduction of fast tracking schemes in the Crown court at its next meeting in April, when a decision will be taken as to further action.

TREASURY

VAT

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table comparable to table 3 of appendix 7 of HC 289 of Session 1990–91 giving estimates of the increase in VAT payments between 1991–92 and 1995–96 by decile group.

Mr. Nelson: Latest estimates of VAT paid by decile of income are given in the Central Statistical Office article "Effects of taxes and benefits upon household income 1993" on the December 1994 edition of "Economic Trends". VAT payments in 1995–96 will depend on what happens to earnings and prices, and on household composition and spending patterns.

Lending Package (Mexico)

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the short-term lending package for Mexico authorised by central banks through the bank of international settlement has been promised by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Nelson: No formal lending proposal has yet been received from the BIS.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the costs of collecting capital gains tax for each of the previous five years.

Sir George Young: The figures for the five tax years to 1993–94—the latest figure available—are:

	£ million
1989–90	34.3
1990–91	39.0
1991–92	43.3
1992–93	38.4
1993–94	41.9

The figures quoted exclude tax on gains made by companies included in corporation tax. Some of the costs associated with companies, however, cannot be separately identified and are therefore included in the costs figures for CGT rather than corporation tax.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the monthly changes in the retail prices index since January 1989, with January 1989 being taken as 100.

Mr. Nelson: Monthly percentage changes in the retail prices index are available from the Central Statistical Office database—series CZEQ—which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Rebasing the index by using January 1989 as 100 rather than the official January 1987 = 100 base has little effect on monthly changes. There are, however, slight differences due to the retail prices index methodology of calculating percentage changes from index numbers rounded to 1 decimal place. The figures requested are listed below.

Monthly percentage changes in the Retail Prices Index (January 1989 = 100)

	January	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
Year												
1989	—	0.7	0.5	1.8	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.2
1990	0.7	0.6	1.0	3.0	0.9	0.4	0.1	1.1	1.0	0.8	–0.3	–0.1
1991	0.3	0.5	0.4	1.3	0.3	0.4	–0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.1
1992	–0.1	0.5	0.3	1.5	0.4	0.0	–0.4	0.1	0.4	0.3	–0.1	–0.4
1993	–1.0	0.6	0.4	1.0	0.3	–0.1	–0.2	0.4	0.4	0.1	–0.1	0.2
1994	–0.4	0.5	0.3	1.2	0.4	0.0	–0.5	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.5

Beer Excise Duty

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reconsider the Government's position on beer excise duty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government's position with respect to the excise duty on beer and other alcoholic drinks was made clear in my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget statement and in his further statement to the House. The increase in duty which took effect from 1 January 1995 resulted from the decision to leave the rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power at 8 per cent.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from Yorkshire brewers regarding the excise duty on beer.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Representations have been received from the Yorkshire Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department has carried out into the effects of maintaining a higher level of duty on beer in the United Kingdom than in other European Union member states.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: HM Customs and Excise has considered the effects of the differing level of beer duty among EU member states, the impact these have had on UK production and revenue receipts, the findings of consultants engaged by the European Commission and the various representations made by trade and other bodies.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the extent to which the exchange rate would have fallen against the deutschmark and the United States dollar since the end of June 1994 if interest rates had not been raised since then.

Mr. Nelson: Interest rates are set to deliver the Government's inflation objective. Movements in exchange rates depend on many factors beside interest rates, and it is not possible to estimate the effect of any one factor with any degree of confidence.

Customs and Excise Office, Ellesmere Port

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made on the effectiveness of anti-drug smuggling activities in relation to the proposed closure of Ellesmere Port Customs and Excise office.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The estimation of the effectiveness of anti-smuggling activity in a particular area is a matter for the head of the local Customs and Excise executive unit.

Customs has examined the effect of moving its operational anti-smuggling base from Ellesmere Port to Liverpool and has concluded that there will be no adverse effect on anti-smuggling control.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Newton: None.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects the accounts of the parliamentary contributory pension fund for 1993–94 to be presented to Parliament.

Mr. Newton: The accounts of the parliamentary contributory pension fund for 1993–94 were laid in the House on 11 January 1995—HOC paper 129.

Badge Messengers

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission what was the longest period of continuous duty worked by a badge messenger in the weeks commencing *(a)* 23 January and *(b)* 30 January and for what hours he or she worked; what was the longest week worked by any badge messenger; what plans the Commission has to review the working hours of badge messengers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: There are no current plans for the Commission to review the working hours of badge messengers, but they will be included in any examination of alteration of patterns of work caused by revised sittings arrangements of the House. I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to write to the right hon. Member with the operational details that he requests.

Official Paid Post Cards

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many official paid post cards to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of a communication have been printed with an air mail marking; what was the cost; for what reasons it was necessary to produce them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* In 1991, the House of Commons Services Committee gave approval in principle for the free provision of telephone calls and postal services to the main institutions of the European Community and the offices of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of the Western Europe Union. These proposals were approved subsequently by the Commission, and a range of stationery for use by Members in correspondence to approved official destinations in Europe was subsequently made available. I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to write to the hon. Member about the cost of the postcards.

Disabled People Access

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what measures *(a)* have recently been taken and *(b)* will be taken to assist people with disabilities to gain better access to the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Ray Powell: The Committee has given detailed and careful consideration to the consultant's report on access by disabled people commissioned by the Parliamentary Works Directorate and submitted to the Committee on 30 June 1993. The report is a very comprehensive study dealing with the Palace and 1, The Abbey garden. The cost of implementing all the recommendations proposed by the consultant was estimated by the Director of Works to be £1,272,700.

In addition to receiving written evidence, the Committee also took oral evidence on four occasions including sessions with the all-party disablement group, English Heritage, the consultant and Officers of the House. Oral and written evidence received by the Committee during the inquiry will be published in due course: the consultants report will be deposited in the Library and in the Record Office, House of Lords. The relevant minutes of proceedings of the Committee are being published today.

Many of the consultant's proposals were considered uncontroversial by the Committee and have already been implemented by the Parliamentary Works Directorate. Other schemes needing greater expenditure have been endorsed and will be included in the programme of works. A full list of the items undertaken or planned has been placed in the Library. The consultant's report also recommended several projects which, in the committee's view, would be highly controversial, if implemented. The committee has therefore considered these proposals in greater detail. As with other recommendations, it has been necessary, in seeking to make possible dignified access to the various parts of the building for people with disabilities, to take into account the need to preserve the historic fabric of the Palace, which is a grade 1 listed building of national and international importance. The committee was concerned that the provision of access to certain areas should not subject disabled people, particularly those in wheelchairs, to increased risk if an emergency evacuation of the premises became necessary, and has asked the Serjeant at Arms and the Director of Parliamentary Works to conduct a further study into this aspect.

One of the areas where access for disabled people is most difficult is the Grand Committee Room and Jubilee Room. The consultant's proposal was for a lift from Westminster Hall to the Grand Committee Room level, involving a cavity being opened up in the 12th century walls of Westminster Hall, at a total cost of £230,000. The Committee was aware, in considering this proposal, that the adjacent Westminster Hall cafeteria is due to be converted to a visitor centre following approval by the House on 12 July 1994 of a report by the Catering Committee on *Refreshment Provision for Line of Route visitors*, HC, 1993–94, 307. The Committee therefore considered that the design work for the conversion should contain a requirement for the architect to consider how a lift could be incorporated in this area. This would have less impact on Westminster Hall and the Grand Committee Room. As the conversion to a visitor centre cannot take place until a suitable alternative for the present lunchtime users of the cafeteria is provided, the Committee also proposes that a replacement for the current chairlift which would allow disabled people to remain in their wheelchairs should be sought as a matter of urgency. The Committee also agreed to support the provision of a disabled person's toilet outside the Grand Committee Room.

Another area which presents considerable difficulty for anyone using a wheelchair is the Crypt Chapel. Public access is via entrances in Old Palace Yard and Westminster Hall. The Committee has asked the Serjeant at Arms to examine whether alternative access arrangements via the Cloisters are practicable. The Committee does not, however, favour the solution proposed by the consultant, of a chair lift.

Access by disabled people to the Ground, Principal, Committee and Upper Committee floors by disabled people is also vital. The Committee supports the proposal of the Parliamentary Works Directorate to upgrade lift No.15 to ensure that these floors are easily accessible.

The consultant proposed that a central handrail should be provided on the stairs leading to St. Stephens Hall. As there are already handrails at the side of this staircase, the entrance is narrow, and as a separate route is available for people in wheelchairs, the Committee did not support this

proposal. Other proposals supported by the Committee included the provision of a tactile model of the building and consideration of a sound guide on the line-of-route to assist visually impaired visitors; and further improvements to the existing induction loop provision to include all Committee Rooms.

As part of the review, and in the light of the anticipated beneficial effects of the provision of the New Parliamentary Building (Phase 2), the design for which includes improved facilities for people with disabilities, the Committee has invited the Serjeant at Arms to give further consideration to what organisational or administrative changes might be made to assist disabled people.

I understand that similar arrangements are being made in another place to implement the consultant's proposals.

The measures and recommendations outlined above are the result of careful and sympathetic consideration by the Accommodation and Works Committee and, when complete, will enable people with disabilities to reach all but the most difficult parts of this historic building in a dignified manner. The Committee will continue to consider the needs of people with disabilities as new works projects are proposed.

WALES

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Redwood: During 1 January 1994 to 31 December 1994 the Welsh Office purchased five training courses costing more than £5,000 each. Details are as follows:

Course title	*Course objective*	*Organisation*	*Total cost (exclusive of VAT)* £	*Responsibility of participants*
Developing a Strategic Approach	To enable senior managers to develop and encourage their staff to take a more strategic view of their work.	Nexus consulting 12 Whitworth Close Wellesbourne Warwickshire	7,050	Senior Managers
Management Skills for Senior Managers	To show senior managers how they can help staff develop and how to gain the co-operation of their staff by demonstrating leadership.	Weavers Down Seymour Hall Bratton Seymour Somerset	8,947	Senior Managers
Effective Presentation Skills for Senior Managers	To help senior staff to develop effective oral communicatin techniques in the context of advice and presentations to Ministers and presentations to senior officials in theprivate and public sectors.	Weavers Down	5,070	Senior Managers
Developing Personal Effectiveness	To encourage staff to consider their personal effectiveness, future potential and development needs and to show them how to make practical action plans to take their development forward.	Nexus Consulting	8,225	Junior and Middle Managers
Development Training for HEO/SEO staff	To develop the following important skills for middle managers: policy and planning; setting objectives; managing staff; teamwork; written and oral communication; managing meetings; making decisions.	Weavers Down	6,267	Junior and Middle Managers

Note:
1. The courses were evaluated by scrutinising the participants' course reaction questionnaires and tutors' reports.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what initiatives he is taking to obtain more speech therapists in Wales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he will set up a north Wales training scheme for speech therapists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The recruitment and retention of speech therapists is a matter for employers. They will need to liaise with the education sector over the number of students entering the appropriate training.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many speech therapy vacancies have been vacant for six months or more; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

Language Units

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will visit language units in Clwyd; and if he will make a statement.

(2) what is his policy concerning language units in maintained schools in Wales;

(3) which language units he has visited in *(a)* Clwyd and *(b)* Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I has yet paid a specific visit to a language unit but I will bear it in mind for my future programme. It is the responsibility of local education authorities and schools to make appropriate provision for pupils, including those children with special educational needs who may need support from a speech and language unit.

Opencast Coal Sites

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the opencast coal sites in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: There are currently 17 operational licensed opencast sites in Wales. These are as follows:

Site	*County*
East Pit Extension	Dyfed
Ffos Las	Dyfed
Gilfach Iago	Dyfed
Lane End	Clwyd
Springhill Quarry	Clwyd
The Smelt	Clwyd
Kays and Kears	Gwent
Great White Tip	Mid Glamorgan
Helid Colliery	Mid Glamorgan
Llanilid West Revised	Mid Glamorgan
Henllan Uchaf	Powys
Blaenpergwm South	West Glamorgan
Brawds Level	West Glamorgan
Derlwyn 2	West Glamorgan
Lletty'r Crudd	West Glamorgan
Nant Helen	West Glamorgan
Tyn y Craig	West Glamorgan

School Playing Fields

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on school playing fields.

Mr. Richards: The Government's policy on school playing fields is laid down in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981, which set minimum area standards. In addition, policy planning guidance note 17 states that, with the needs of the wider community in mind, playing fields should normally be preserved.

Art Collection

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that the Welsh Arts Council's art collection will be available for viewing by the general public.

Mr. Richards: The Secretary of State has no powers of direction in this matter; it is an issue for the Arts Council of Wales.

Pre-school Playgroups

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pre-school playgroups there are in each of the counties of Wales.

Mr. Richards: The latest available figures provided by Wales PPA are for 1993–94. They are taken from "Statistics from Wales PPA Facts and Figures 1993–94" and are as follows:

	Number
Clwyd	79
Dyfed	45
Mid Glam	80
South Glam	89
West Glam	17
Gwent	68
Gwynedd	32
Powys	34
Wales	444

These do not include combined parent and toddler groups/playgroups.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Redwood: No items have been received from Ian Greer.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 6 February, *Official Report*, column *69*, by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current ratio of staff to prisoners at *(a)* Doncaster, *(b)* the Wolds, *(c)* Lindholme, *(d)* Wakefield, *(e)* New Hall and *(f)* Wakefield prisons; and what was the figure (i) six months and (ii) 12 months ago.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 8 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the ratio of staff to prisoners at Doncaster and Wolds, both of which are local prisons, at Lindholme, a category C prison, New Hall which is a closed women's prison and Wakefield, a dispersal prison.

The number of prisoners per member of staff at each prison is as follows.

Prison	December 1993	June 1994	December 1994
Doncaster	not open	0.49	1.75
Wolds	1.45	1.17	1.47
Lindholme	1.44	1.49	1.45
Wakefield	1.00	1.07	1.10
New Hall	0.85	0.80	0.89

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to alter the arrangements for incentives and privileges for prisoners.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Prison Service is developing a national framework for incentives and earned privileges. The emphasis will be on prisoners earning privileges by good behaviour and participation in work or other constructive activity. I will be making an announcement later.

Poisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of *(a)* category A, *(b)* category B and *(c)* category C places available in each of the Prison Service regions; and if he will list the changes that have taken place during the last 12 months between those categories.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 8 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the total number of Category A, B and C places available in each Prison Service region.

Prisons are defined by operational function and an establishment will have, according to its particular function, accommodation designed for holding prisoners up to a particular security category.

Information on the security standard of accommodation available in each of the Prison Service areas at closed training prisons and local prisons is given in the attached tables. Copies of these tables have been placed in the Library of the House.

Table 1: Number of adult male prison places available for prisoners categorised A, B or C at 31 December 1994 (March 1994 figures are shown in brackets)

Area	Category A	Category B	Category C
Central	362 (362)	1,841 (1,695)	1,361 (1,660)
Chilterns	—	932 (890)	776 (776)
East Midlands	—	1,437 (1,433)	1,526 (1,572)
East Anglia	—	992 (1,088)	1,259 (1,259)
Kent	—	1,231 (1,208)	859 (838)
London North	534 (534)	2,141 (2,039)	1,127 (1,277)
London South	301 (334)	2,964 (2,976)	151 (145)
Mercia	—	168 (168)	—
North East	1,014 (1,051)	1,173 (1,140)	1,307 (1,307)
North West	—	854 (894)	1,116 (1,097)
South Coast	—	2,213 (2,047)	721 (768)
Trans Pennine	727 (637)	2,614 (2,077)	794 (751)

Table 1: Number of adult male prison places available for prisoners categorised A, B or C at 31 December 1994 (March 1994 figures are shown in brackets)

Area	Category A	Category B	Category C
Wales and West	—	1,078 (1,130)	270 (256)
Wessex	—	936 (970)	1,192 (1,304)
Yorkshire	—	320 (320)	408 (394)
Total	2,938 (2,918)	20,895 (20,075)	12,867 (13,404)

Notes:

1. Figures for Category A places comprise total number of places available in dispersal prisons which are suitable for Category A and Category B prisoners; and the number of places in the Category A Unit at HMP Belmarsh.

2. Figures for Category B places comprise the total number of places in non-dispersal training prisons and local prisons. Some of the more secure local prisons also hold Category A prisoners as and when necessary. A formal maximum number of places for this purpose is not designated.

3. The Category B figures include 127 (145) places immigration detainees at HMHC Haslar.

Table 2: Number of places available for convicted and sentenced Category A female prisoners

Area	Category A	Category B	Category C
North East	48	—	—

Notes:

1. There is currently only one sentenced Category A female prisoner.

2. With the exception of those categorised A, convicted and sentenced female prisoners are not categorised, but are allocated to open or closed conditions.

Misuse of Drugs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects to introduce legislation to outlaw the illicit supply of anabolic steroids;

(2) if he will publish the minutes of the January meeting of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The technical committee of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs met on 24 January. The meeting considered, in the light of the decision to control anabolic steroids and similar substances under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, precisely which substances should be brought under control. The Committee's conclusions will be considered by the full council at its next meeting on 11 May, a date which I understand it would not now be practicable to bring forward. We intend to bring forward the necessary draft order and regulations as quickly as possible thereafter. It is not the practice to publish the minutes of meetings of the advisory council or its committees.

Police Authorities

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the estimated percentage increase in population for each police authority area since 1979 and *(b)* the estimated percentage increase in police establishment since 1979.

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the table.

Police authority	Population 1979	Population 1993[2]	Percentage increase	[1]Police establishment 1979[3]	[1]Police establishment 1994[3]	Percentage increase
Avon and Somerset	1,334,000	1,447,000	8.5	2,953	3,087	4.5
Bedfordshire	499,000	539,000	8.0	947	1,162	22.7
Cambridgeshire	579,000	683,000	18.0	1,140	1,241	8.9
Cheshire	926,000	972,000	5.0	1,805	1,920	6.4
City of London	5,000	4,000	-20.0	1,022	803	-21.4
Cleveland	569,000	559,000	-1.8	1,418	1,502	5.9
Cumbria	470,000	490,000	4.3	1,113	1,190	6.9
Derbyshire	898,000	951,000	5.9	1,712	1,850	8.1
Devon and Cornwall	1,371,000	1,526,000	11.3	2,673	2,928	9.5
Dorset	591,000	667,000	12.9	1,164	1,302	11.9
Durham	603,000	608,000	0.8	1,349	1,389	3.0
Dyfed-Powys	433,000	471,000	8.8	934	972	4.1
Essex	1,377,000	1,489,000	8.1	2,533	2,950	16.5
Gloucestershire	497,000	544,000	9.5	1,116	1,184	6.1
Greater Manchester	2,648,000	2,579,000	-2.6	6,766	7,109	5.1
Gwent	436,000	450,000	3.2	975	1,010	3.6
Hampshire	1,575,000	1,718,000	9.1	3,034	3,269	7.7
Hertfordshire	808,000	849,000	5.1	1,533	1,700	10.9
Humberside	850,000	884,000	4.0	1,939	2,034	4.9
Kent	1,456,000	1,540,000	5.8	2,842	3,150	10.8
Lancashire	1,370,000	1,421,000	3.7	3,138	3,229	2.9
Leicestershire	836,000	910,000	8.9	1,706	1,867	9.4
Lincolnshire	534,000	601,000	12.5	1,182	1,206	2.0
Merseyside	1,532,000	1,441,000	-5.9	4,451	4,705	5.7
Metropolitan Police	7,353,000	7,420,000	0.9	26,589	27,736	4.3
Norfolk	686,000	765,000	11.5	1,265	1,446	14.3
North Wales	611,000	656,000	7.4	1,309	1,369	4.6
North Yorkshire	663,000	722,000	8.9	1,368	1,418	3.7
Northamptonshire	523,000	592,000	13.2	978	1,190	21.7
Northumbria	1,446,000	1,445,000	-0.1	3,325	3,613	8.7
Nottinghamshire	974,000	1,028,000	5.5	2,260	2,344	3.7
South Wales	1,295,000	1,329,000	2.6	3,069	3,168	3.2
South Yorkshire	1,301,000	1,306,000	0.4	2,752	3,031	10.1
Staffordshire	1,000,000	1,054,000	5.4	2,066	2,215	7.2
Suffolk	598,000	646,000	8.0	1,123	1,233	9.8
Surrey	725,000	770,000	6.2	1,602	1,685	5.2
Sussex	1,298,000	1,440,000	10.9	2,811	3,014	7.2
Thames Valley	1,760,000	2,001,000	13.7	3,005	3,812	26.9
Warwickshire	469,000	494,000	5.3	876	1,020	16.4
West Mercia	987,000	1,109,000	12.4	1,834	2,067	12.7
West Midlands	2,696,000	2,634,000	-2.3	6,509	6,991	7.4
West Yorkshire	2,064,000	2,102,000	1.8	5,104	5,295	3.7
Wiltshire	516,000	583,000	13.0	1,032	1,181	14.4
Total	49,162,000	51,439,000	4.6	118,322	126,587	7.0

[1] Figures exclude officers seconded to regional crime squads and central services.
[2] Population figures are provided by the OPCS. 1993 is the latest available estimate.
[3] At 31 December.

Child Witnesses

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the steering group on child evidence will next meet; and what policy decisions arose from the last meeting.

Mr. Maclean: The steering group on child evidence will next meet on 23 March.

At its last meeting, the steering group discussed the causes of delay in bringing child abuse cases to court, and the action being taken by the relevant agencies to reduce delays.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has commissioned in respect of delays faced by child witnesses in cases of alleged abuse; and if he will outline the scope of any such research project.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office and the Department of Health are funding research by Ms Joyce Plotnikoff and Mr. Richard Woolfson into the delays in bringing prosecutions in child abuse cases. The purpose of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Government's policy to give priority to such prosecutions, to identify factors causing delay and to recommend mechanisms for reducing delays.

Reconviction Rates

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the current reconviction rates for persons discharged from *(a)* first custodial sentences, *(b)* subsequent custodial sentences and *(c)* custodial sentences generally.

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows:

Percentage of offenders reconvicted[1] within a two-year period following discharge from a custodial sentence in 1990 by whether or not the current sentence was a first custodial sentence.

History of imprisonment	Number discharged	Per cent. reconvicted
First custodial sentence	28,298	52
Subsequent custodial sentence	18,701	53
All discharges[2]	47,473	52

[1] Reconvicted of a serious offence as defined by the standard list in Appendices 4 and 5 of Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1993.
[2] Includes 474 cases where the previous history of imprisonment is not known.

Comparisons between reconviction rates are affected by differences in the age, sex, previous convictions and other characteristics of offenders.

Woodcock Report

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his detailed timetable for the implementation of each of the recommendations of the Woodcock report.

Mr. Howard: I have today placed in the Library a timetable for implementation of the 64 recommendations in Sir John Woodcock's report on Whitemoor. The timetable may be subject to amendment in the light of any comments made by Sir John Learmont when he reports on his review of security in the Prison Service. I have asked Sir John Learmont to report to me by the end of the year on how far the recommendations of Sir John Woodcock have been implemented.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extensions of detention under the Prevention of Terrorism Act were made in each month in 1994; and how many of these resulted in a criminal charge.

Mr. Howard: The information requested is shown in the table.

Extensions of detention under the Prevention of Terrorism Act by outcome: United Kingdom in 1994

Month	Number of extensions: Great Britain	Number of extensions: Northern Ireland	Number of extensions: Total	Number of criminal charges: Great Britain	Number of criminal charges: Northern Ireland	Number of criminal charges: Total
January	—	43	43	—	9	9
February	2	46	48	2	12	14
March	—	36	36	—	16	16
April	—	81	81	—	14	14
May	1	70	71	[1]—	16	16
June	1	39	40	[1]—	18	18
July	—	17	17	—	6	6
August	—	41	41	—	14	14
September	—	7	7	—	[2]3	3
October	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—
November	—	2	2	—	[2]—	2
December	—	—	—	—	[2]—	—

Note:
[1] The two persons whose detention was extended in Great Britain in May and June were both subsequently served with exclusion orders.
[2] Provisional figures.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many exclusion orders made under the provision of the Prevention of Terrorism Act were in force in 1994; and how many were reveiwed, replaced, revoked or scrapped.

Mr. Howard: The information requested is shown in the table.

Exclusion orders: United Kingdom 1994

	Orders made by Home Secretary	Orders made by Northern Ireland Secretary
Orders in force on 1 January	71	9
New orders made	4	1
Orders reviewed, of which	28	—
Orders renewed or replaced	14	—
Orders revoked or allowed to lapse	14	—
Deaths	3	—
Orders in force on 31 December	58	10

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the review for 1994 of the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Mr. Howard: I received Mr. Rowe's report on 3 February and shall arrange for it to be made available in the usual way in good time for the debates on the future of the legislation.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Howard: None.

Asylum

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has reviewed the working of the asylum appeals system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have today placed in the Library a report by the consultancy firm KPMG Peat Marwick on the operation of the asylum appeals procedures. The study arose from the commitment which was given at the time of the adoption of the Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1993 to review the new regulations after a year of operation. The consultants analysed over 200 appeal cases and looked at all aspects of the asylum appeal determination system from an operational perspective. They have produced a helpful report, and have made a number of recommendations of a mainly operational and procedural nature, which the Lord Chancellor and I are considering.

Police National Computer

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of Sate for the Home Department if he will make a statement about future arrangements for delivering the police national computer and other police information technology.

Mr. Howard: We are currently discussing with the police service proposals to set up a new body to deliver police IT more effectively and efficiently on a partnership

basis between chief constables, police authorities and the Home Office. The discussions are based in part on proposals from the police, and are focusing on the scope for bringing into a single organisation the responsibility for centrally provided IT services, such as the police national computer, and delivery of the police information services/information technology initiative which was launched last November.

Following a detailed study, I have decided that the market test of the Hendon Data Centre should not proceed to competitive tendering at present. The existing police national computer system, which is provided by the centre, has been in service since 1991 and planning for its eventual replacement has already begun. A decision about the future management of the centre and the possibility of contracting-out the service will be taken in about 18 months when the likely nature, size and scope of the new system is clearer. Whatever arrangements are made in future for the provision of the police national computer system, the ownership and use of the criminal records held on it will remain firmly under the control of the police.

Data Protection Directive

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the nature of the data rules applying to banks recently approved by the EC; what will be the cost of the measures; what benefit will stem from the rules; and if Her Majesty's Government voted for the measures.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The directive is intended to help the operation of the single market by ensuring common standards of data protection within the European Union. It is likely to require the elaboration of existing United Kingdom data protection rules and will involve their application to manual as well as computerised records. The initial proposals would have imposed substantial additional costs on the banks and other data users; modifications made to the proposals in the course of subsequent negotiations have gone a significant way to reducing those burdens.

Political agreement was reached on the directive in the Foreign Affairs Council on 6 February: the UK said that it would be abstaining when the matter is put to a formal vote, probably later this month. The UK's abstention was conditional upon, among a number of other points, the Council and the Commission expressing their agreement to greater flexibility in applying the directive to existing manual records.

Prison Escapes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of escapes from prison in each year since 1979 stating *(a)* which prison the prisoner escaped from, *(b)* what the offence of the prisoner was and *(c)* for how long each prisoner was at large.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 8 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for details of the number of escapes from prison in each year since 1979 stating *(a)* which prison the prisoner escaped from *(b)* what the offence of the prisoner was and *(c)* for how long each prisoner was at large.

Before 20 June 1988, records were not kept centrally on escapes. The attached table lists the number of prisoners who have escaped and the prison establishment concerned from that date until 31 December 1994. A copy of this table has been placed in the Library of the House.

The information on the offence of the prisoner involved and the length of time these prisoners were unlawfully at large could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Establishment	*20 June 1988–31 Dec. 1989*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Acklington	2	6	11	6	2	3	0
Aldington	1	6	6	16	14	1	4
Ashwell	7	3	2	6	1	4	4
Bedford	1	0	0	3	0	0	1
Belmarsh	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Birmingham	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Blakenhurst	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Blantyre House	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
Blundeston	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Brinsford	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Bristol	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Brixton	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Brockhill	0	0	0	4	0	0	1
Buckley Hall	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Bullwood Hall	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Camp Hill	1	1	3	1	4	1	2
Campsfield House	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Canterbury	0	2	1	2	0	0	0
Cardiff	0	0	1	2	5	0	0
Castington	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Channings Wood	2	5	3	9	8	2	6
Chelmsford	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Coldingley	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Dartmoor	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
Deerbolt	0	12	5	5	6	0	4
Doncaster	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Dorchester	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Dover	0	0	0	7	4	0	0
Downview	0	0	0	3	4	6	5
Durham	0	0	5	0	0	0	1
Eastwood Park	0	1	5	1	1	0	0
Elmley	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Erlestoke	0	4	7	4	1	4	0
Everthorpe	0	0	0	4	12	4	2
Exeter	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
Featherstone	6	4	5	5	3	10	11
Feltham	20	3	0	14	18	3	0
Frankland	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Glen Parva	6	0	0	5	8	2	2
Gloucester	0	0	8	3	8	0	0
Guys Marsh	0	0	0	0	4	18	0
Haslar	0	5	0	0	7	5	8
Haverigg	0	1	6	4	3	10	5
Hewell Grange	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Highdown	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Highpoint	14	28	11	15	17	2	3
Hindley	6	6	0	1	3	0	1
Holloway	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
Huntercombe	0	0	7	3	4	0	0
Hull	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Kingston	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Kirklevington	0	1	0	3	1	1	1
Latchmere House	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Lancaster	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Lancaster Farms	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Leeds	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Leicester	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Establishment	20 June 1988–31 Dec. 1989	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Lewes	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Leyhill	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Lincoln	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Lindholme	11	4	7	29	9	8	6
Littlehey	2	0	5	1	5	7	1
Liverpool	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Maidstone	0	0	0	1	2	0	2
Manchester	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Moorland	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
The Mount	1	2	1	12	2	4	2
New Hall	0	0	0	1	9	1	1
Northeye	0	5	4	3	0	0	0
Norwich	2	4	9	7	5	3	0
Nottingham	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Onley	0	0	2	4	0	9	2
Oxford	0	2	3	3	0	0	0
Parkhurst	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Pentonville	3	1	1	0	1	0	3
Portland	1	3	4	24	10	17	4
Preston	0	0	3	1	0	3	0
Pucklechurch	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Ranby	4	9	29	11	14	22	9
Risley	0	0	0	4	3	1	4
Rochester	0	0	0	3	2	2	1
Rollestone	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Send	0	0	4	4	3	3	1
Shepton Mallet	0	0	4	2	0	3	0
Stafford	0	5	1	1	0	3	1
Stocken	1	3	2	0	3	0	0
Stoke Heath	0	0	0	8	0	3	0
Styal	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sudbury	0	0	1	1	1	0	1
Swaleside	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Swansea	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Thorn Cross	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Thorp Arch	1	2	3	0	1	0	6
USK	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
The Verne	3	5	3	1	6	8	2
Wandsworth	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Wayland	2	0	7	7	3	0	1
Wellingborough	0	0	2	4	5	7	3
Werrington	0	0	0	4	7	8	9
Wetherby	0	3	0	2	3	5	10
Whatton	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Whitemoor	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Winchester	0	0	0	2	3	0	0
The Wolds	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Wormwood Scrubs	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Wymott	3	11	5	18	1	0	0
Total	103	161	195	303	254	204	156

TRANSPORT

Train Cancellations and Delays

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains arrived more than five minutes late during peak hours; how many of these cancellations were attributable to *(a)* train breakdowns, *(b)* signal failures, *(c)* track/points failures, *(d)* leaves on the line, *(e)* staff shortages, *(f)* adverse weather conditions and *(g)* other factors; and what percentage of peak hour trains arrived more than five minutes late on each of the Network SouthEast divisions in each four week period during (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (ii) 1994.

Mr. Watts: BR publishes details of train service performance against passengers charter targets for punctuality and reliability every four weeks. However, the detailed information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Heathrow Airport (Night Flights)

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many flights land at, and take off from, Heathrow airport on average *(a)* between 2300 hours and 0600 hours and *(b)* between 2330 hours and 0630 hours.

Mr. Norris: At Heathrow, the night quota period runs from 2330 to 0600. In the 1994 summer season—27 March 1994 to 23 October 1994—there were 3,204 runway movements in the night quota period, of which 2,905 counted against the movements limit, an average of 15 per night. Data for times outside the night quota period are not readily available on an equivalent basis. Very few movements are scheduled for the period 2300 to 2329, but actual numbers of movements in this period fluctuate considerably per night depending on whether flights have been delayed from earlier in the day. Movements in the period 0601 to 0630 are mostly arrivals. Analysis of data for sample weeks during the summer shows an average of about 16 movements per night during this half hour. There can be considerable variation in the number of movements in the half hours immediately before and after 0600 on a particular night due to the weather.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has had on diversion of traffic from the Severn bridge to rural routes in Gloucestershire.

Mr. Watts: In July last year, a study carried out on behalf of the Highways Agency by Gloucestershire county council showed that while, on average, some 2,700 more vehicles than might be expected—allowing for traffic growth—travelled west through the county each day, only 1,500 of these could be positively identified as avoiding the bridge tolls. The extra traffic was distributed fairly evenly over the M50 and three other diversion routes, the A48 (T), A40(T)/A4136 and B4215.

Roll-on-roll-off Ferries

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the percentage reduction, or other measure of reduction, of vehicle-carrying capacity of roll-on-roll-off ferry vessels that would be occasioned by the installation of removable bulkheads.

Mr. Norris: This is a technical matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Robin Bradley to Mr. Nigel Spearing, dated 8 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about loss of vehicle carrying capacity on ro-ro ferries if removable bulkheads are installed.

No general estimate has been made of the reduction in capacity consequent upon installing removable bulkheads on the car deck. The reduction of vehicle capacity will depend upon the size of the

ship and the vehicle loading and stowage arrangement. During the second half of 1990 a study was made into modifications that would be needed for existing ferries to meet the requirements known as SOLAS 90. The details are contained in the International Maritime Organization paper SLF 35/inf.7 a copy which is attached, and which you may find of interest.

Railway Signalling

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much will be invested in railway signalling infrastructure in Great Britain in 1994–95; and how much has been invested in each of the previous five years at *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices.

Mr. Watts: In 1994–95, Railtrack expects to invest about £175 million in railway signalling infrastructure.

Investment in the previous five years in signalling and track projects is as follows. Figures for signalling alone are not available before 1992–93.

	£ million cash				
	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Signalling and track projects[1]	91	141	189	214	242
Signalling only (included in above)	—	—	—	126	140

	£ million 1994–95 prices[2]				
	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Signalling and track projects	114	164	207	225	247
Signalling only (included in above)	—	—	—	132	143

[1] Major resignalling schemes are often combined with alterations to track layouts eg. to simplify traffic flow at junctions.
[2] Using GDP deflator.

RSS Report

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the terms of reference of the report being carried out on the RSS office in Cardiff; and on what date this report is due.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Robin Bradley to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 8 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about the review being carried out on the RSS Office in Cardiff.

The terms of reference of the review are to:

(a) follow up initial work carried out by the Department's internal auditors and make such further enquiries as are necessary to ensure that the requirements of propriety and effective operation, management and control are being met throughout RSS;

(b) make recommendations on any changes to policy, procedures or practice needed to achieve the above;

(c) make recommendations on any personnel or training issues arising;

(d) consider whether the service level agreement under which RSS operates provides a suitable basis as presently written for the future management of RSS.

The review is a management review being carried out on my behalf and the report is due to be made to me by 31 March 1995.

Cycle Helmets

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current Government policy on cycle helmets; and what plans he has to change it.

Mr. Norris: The Government actively promote the benefits of cycle helmet wearing, but we have no plans to make them compulsory.

Rail Consultants

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff are currently employed full-time and part-time on contract and as consultants on property matters for British Railways; and what were the figures for the same time last year.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for British Rail.

Merchant Fleet

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to meet the chairman of the Chamber of Shipping to discuss the future plans for the British merchant fleet.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport meets the president of the Chamber of Shipping from time to time to discuss a range of shipping issues.

Cellos and Double Basses (Rail Transport)

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with *(a)* the chairman of British Rail, *(b)* the Musicians Union and *(c)* representatives of leading British orchestras concerning problems experienced by musicians transporting cellos and double basses by rail.

Mr. Watts: None.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he proposed to take to ensure that all British Rail staff responsible for the issuing and examination of tickets are aware of the fares policy for the transportation of cellos and double basses by rail.

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for the British Railways Board and its train operating units. However, I understand that ticket retail and examining staff are issued with manuals detailing current fares policy.

Hunting (Damage)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the damage caused by the York and Ainsty North hunt to the York to Harrogate railway in January.

Mr. Watts: I understand that no damage was caused either to Railtrack north-east's infrastructure or to the train operated by Regional Railways north-east.

Red Routes

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest timetable for implementation of his Department's proposals for red routes in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The traffic director for London is currently considering a revised timetable for implementing the red route measures with the objective of having the network operational in 2000.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Rail Services

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what external financing limits have been set for British Rail and Railtrack for 1995–96; and what estimates he has made for Government grant support to passenger services for 1995–96.

Mr. Watts: The British Rail and Railtrack EFLs have been set respectively at contributions of £817 million and £128 million. These contributions are based on an estimate of grant support, comprising franchising director and metropolitan railway grants, of £1,800 million for 1995–96. This estimate of grant includes metropolitan railway grant paid by the Scottish Office to Strathclyde regional council. These external finance contributions and the estimated level of grant support are consistent with the combined external finance limits for BR/Railtrack and European passenger services/Union Railways announced in the Budget statement last November, after allowing for a transfer of £15 million from EPS to Railtrack for investment to be carried out by Railtrack on behalf of EPS. Any adjustments to these figures will be notified to Parliament.

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what external financing limit has been set for the railway industry in 1994–95.

Mr. Watts: The railway industry external finance limit (EFL) for 1994–95 is currently £1,496 million, as previously announced in reply to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) on 29 November 1994, *Official Report* column *659*. However, the Government have agreed to increase the EFL by up to a further £64 million, if required, to meet certain working capital requirements. If the EFL is increased, the external finance contribution of British Rail, which is currently £272 million, will be reduced by a corresponding amount. Parliament will be notified of any adjustments.

ISYS Warning System

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the safety advantages of using the ISYS warning system to avoid collisions.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* My Department is not aware of this system.

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has reached arising out of the report by the Marine Accident Board on the findings of the Oceaneering Technologies investigation into the wreck of MV Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* My right hon. Friend is still considering the chief inspector of marine accidents' assessment of the material provided by the International Transport Workers Federation, and whether further action needs to be taken.

Electrical Shock Weapons

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now institute an inquiry into how British Midland Security allowed ICL Technical Plastics to carry an electro-shock weapon on a British Midland flight from Glasgow on 25 November 1994 arriving in London Heathrow at 10.20 a.m.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* My Department has made inquiries of both British Midland and BAA at Glasgow. Neither can trace the incident.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list the severance payment made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 7 February 1995, column *69*.

ENVIRONMENT

Homelessness

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *574–75*, if he will list the contribution each of the 10 authorities receives from homelessness indicators in the SSA formula, in descending order.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Homelessness is one of a large number of general indicators that are included within composite indices in the personal social services and all other services service blocks. It is the overall value of an index which is important in determining an authority's SSA and not the value of an individual indicator within an index. Subject to that qualification, the 10 authorities which have the highest contribution from homelessness indicators, and the amounts, are:

	£ millions
Birmingham City Council	13.323
Manchester City Council	9.807
London Borough of Lambeth	6.356
London Borough of Hackney	5.789
London Borough of Southwark	5.319
London Borough of Islington	4.891
Walsall Metropolitan Borough	4.775
Bradford City Council	4.003
London Borough of Haringey	3.944
Westminster City Council	3.519

Lord Government Finance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional amount was needed on Nottingham's 1995–96 local government finance settlement in order to keep pace with inflation; and what further amount beyond this was allocated.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Adjusted for changes of function, the increase in total standard spending for England between 1994–95 and 1995–96 is 0.8 per cent. The Treasury forecast for underlying inflation for the same period is 2.5 per cent. The distribution of resources to individual local authorities is dependent on needs assessments, which vary from year to year.

Departmental Staff

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the numbers and grades of staff, broken down by programme where possible, allocated and to be allocated by each department to each Government office for the regions, in each of the financial years 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Sir Paul Beresford: The number of staff by grade and Department in each Government office for the regions as at 31 January 1995 is shown in the table below. There are no equivalent figures for 1993–94, since the Government offices came into being only in April 1994. Staffing arrangements in the Offices in 1995–96 have yet to be finalised. Details will be available in the Government office MINIS returns, which will be published in the spring.

Grade	*GO— NE DTI*	*GO— NE DOE*	*GO— NE DOT*	*GO— NE ED*	*GO— N W DTI*	*GO— NW DOE*	*GO— NW DOT*	*GO— NW ED*	*GO— M DTI*	*GO— M DOE*	*GO— M DOT*	*GO— M ED*
G2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
G3	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
G4	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
G5	1	2	—	1	—	2	—	1	1	2	—	1
G6	2	1	—	2	2	1	—	3	—	—	—	1
G7	7	9	1	11	8	17	2	16	3	4	1	6
SEO+ EQV	14	10	1	4	13	11	1	4	2	5	—	3
HEO+EQV	24	14	4	10	22	22	1	20	13	10	1	8
EO+EQV	32	21	7	10	31	34	2	14	12	17	—	8
AO+EQV	26	24	7	12	31	46	1	19	8	20	1	8
AA+EQV	21	8	1	2	18	23	—	4	9	5	—	2
SGB1	—	1	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
SGB2	3	8	—	—	7	6	—	2	2	1	—	—
TECH	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	131	99	21	52	135	164	7	83	50	65	3	37

Grade	*GO— YH DTI*	*GO— YH DOE*	*GO— YH DOT*	*GO— YH ED*	*GO— WM DTI*	*GO— WM DOE*	*GO— WM DOT*	*GO— WM ED*	*GO— EM DTI*	*GO— EM DOE*	*GO— EM DOT*	*GO— EM ED*
G2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
G3	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
G4	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
G5	—	2	—	1	—	3	—	1	1	—	—	1
G6	2	—	—	1	2	—	—	2	2	1	—	2
G7	8	9	2	12	7	11	1	12	5	9	2	12
SEO+EQV	8	21	1	5	15	13	1	3	8	10	1	4
HEO+EQV	25	20	2	16	28	19	2	17	21	15	1	12
EO+EQV	25	24	1	22	32	23	2	12	22	16	3	12
AO+EQV	19	24	2	11	42	37	1	13	16	35	1	18
AA+EQV	19	25	—	8	30	13	2	9	17	9	—	3
SGB1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	2	—	—
SGB2	3	8	—	1	3	—	—	1	3	6	—	—
TECH	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	111	134	8	78	160	120	9	71	96	104	8	64

Grade	ER DTI	ER DOE	ER DOT	ER ED	SW DTI	SW DOE	SW DOT	SW ED
G2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
G3	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
G4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
G5	1	2	—	1	1	1	—	1
G6	—	1	1	2	1	3	1	2
G7	3	11	2	11	4	7	1	10
SEO+EQV	3	8	1	5	4	8	—	6
HEO+EQV	11	8	1	12	14	16	2	7
EO+EQV	14	19	2	12	18	18	3	16
AO+EQV	18	13	3	4	26	18	2	13
AA+EQV	7	9	—	5	18	5	—	5
SGB1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SGB2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TECH	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	57	71	10	53	86	77	9	60

Grade	SE DTI	SE DOE	SE DOT	SE ED	L DTI	L DOE	L DOT	L ED
G2	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
G3	—	—	1	—	—	1	1	—
G4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
G5	1	2	1	1	1	4	2	1
G6	1	—	—	3	1	2	1	3
G7	3	12	2	14	3	21	13	19
SEO+EQV	6	10	1	2	2	14	7	5
NEO+EQV	14	17	2	13	11	30	5	22
EO+EQV	17	25	2	13	17	30	8	16
AO+EQV	24	18	2	14	17	21	13	11
AA+EQV	8	5	—	1	7	7	4	2
SGB1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SGB2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
TECH	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	74	90	11	61	59	131	54	79

Local Government Commission

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the environment when he expects to announce his response to the Local Government Commission's recommendations for Staffordshire.

Mr. Curry: We are still considering the Local Government Commission's recommendations about the future structure of local government in Staffordshire, and will announce a decision as soon as possible.

Water Charges

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from local authorities, voluntary organisations and other consumer groups concerning future options for charging for the provision of water supplies.

Mr. Atkins: The Department has received representations from a number of local authorities and other interested bodies such as the Consumers' Association and Age Concern.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Gummer: None

Water Meters

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of households with water meters which have been installed *(a)* voluntarily and *(b)* compulsorily.

Mr. Atkins: The Office of Water Services estimates that 1.1 million households in England and Wales currently have water meters. Information on the proportion of households metered voluntarily and compulsorily is not available.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each programme of expenditure under the single regeneration budget in each London borough or London training and enterprise council area, the commitments predating the single regeneration budget for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* I am placing this information in the Library of the House.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

The Attorney-General: None.

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Attorney-General if he will place in the Library the advice given by his Department to the CBI on the application of the TUPE regulations.

The Attorney-General: By convention, the Law Officers do not normally disclose whether advice has been given on a particular issue or the substance of any advice that they may have given.

PRIME MINISTER

European Union

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what consultations have taken place on the European content on the draft framework document on Northern Ireland with *(a)* heads of Government in the EU other than the Taoiseach, *(b)* ministerial councils of EU states other than the Irish Republic, *(c)* the President of the EU and *(d)* individual commissioners of the EU.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to ensure that so long as Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland interests will continue to be represented in the European Union's various ministerial Councils exclusively by Ministers answerable to the Parliament at Westminster; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Under article 146 of the treaty of Rome, as amended by the treaty on European Union, member states' representatives on the Council must be authorised to commit the Government of that member state. United Kingdom Ministers are answerable to the Parliament of Westminster, and will continue to represent the United Kingdom.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

The Prime Minister: None.

Chequers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost to public funds of the meeting held at Chequers on 13 January to review British foreign policy; and what are the rules determining which expenditures at Chequers shall be met from public funds.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer Tuesday 7 February]:* It is not my usual practice to give the costs of individual meetings or receptions.

Expenses incurred by Ministers and officials meeting at Chequers in the course of official duty are met by the Cabinet Office.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Medical Negligence

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a table showing the number of cases of medical negligence settled and the total cost of damages awarded together with legal costs, in each year since 1990–91, by health board area.

Mr. Moss: The number of cases of medical negligence settled since 1990–91 along with total costs of damages and legal costs by health and social services board area is as follows:

	Eastern			*Northern*	
	Cases paid	*Settlements* £	*Legal costs* £	*Cases paid*	*Settlements* £	*Legal costs* £
1990–91[1]	22	770,500	76,116	10	132,250	51,109
1991–92	49	302,200	361,726	14	204,650	98,861
1992–93	31	409,268	260,942	12	332,766	102,507
1993–94	43	4,025,707	576,461	7	33,700	40,974

	Southern			*Western*	
	Cases paid	*Settlements* £	*Legal costs* £	*Cases paid*	*Settlements* £	*Legal costs* £
1990–91[1]	9	140,248	31,902	4	45,250	10,339
1991–92	15	637,644	158,550	10	199,750	92,247
1992–93	6	855,550	190,361	12	194,842	83,129
1993–94	13	1,031,500	68,364	10	268,148	61,985

[1] Information is only available for the last six months of 1990–91.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many firms in Northern Ireland have received Government assistance under the small firms loan guarantee scheme in the last five years.

Mr. Ancram: The number of loans guaranteed under the small firms loan guarantee scheme in Northern Ireland over the past five years was 101. Some companies may have received more than one loan.

Funeral Costs

Dr. Hendron: to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the average cost of a funeral in *(a)* Belfast and *(b)* Northern Ireland; and what comparisons he has made with funeral charges outside Northern Ireland;

(2) what plans he has to make higher provision for the costs of a funeral in Northern Ireland following the Secretary of state for Social Security's recent decision that social fund payments to cover funeral costs are to be limited to £875.

Mr. Moss: Information on the average cost of funerals in Belfast and Northern Ireland is not available.

Costs of funerals vary considerably within and between local areas and regions of the United Kingdom. The social fund funeral payment scheme cannot be expected to meet the cost of all variations and eventualities.

The Government have referred their proposals to the Social Security Advisory Committee and will consider its report when it has been completed.

Anglo Irish

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration has been given in the Anglo-Irish discussions to the Irish Government's proposal to hold elections in 1995 for senators representative of Irish people living outside the Republic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Sir John Wheeler: None.

Roads Service Budget

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many amendments have been made to date in the Department of the Environment's roads service budget during the year 1994–95; and what has been the effect of each amendment, in financial terms, for each division of the roads service.

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* Apart from a number of technical adjustments which have no financial effect for any of the six divisions of the Department's roads service, five amendments have been made in the roads service budget during the current financial year resulting in additional funding for those Divisions as follows:

Divisional allocation of additional funds (£000)

Functional heading	*Ballymena*	*Belfast*	*Coleraine*	*Craigavon*	*D'Patrick*	*Omagh*
1. Capital works						
(a) Carried over form 1993–94	—	—	—	900	—	—
(b) Development schemes	—	—	715	—	—	—
(c) Bridge strengthening	147	231	95	50	122	150
2. Structural maintenance	358	453	359	450	426	654
3. Plant and building	—	133	127	—	—	—

Some of these changes are subject to Parliament's approval of the Spring supplementary estimates for 1994–95.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 6 February 1995 by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, *Official Report*, column *69*.

HEALTH

Mental Illness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in London were diagnosed as mentally ill and detained *(a)* on medical wards, *(b)* in prison or *(c)* in police cells in the latest year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available centrally in the form requested.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients on psychiatric wards are legally detained under the Mental Health Act.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients have been detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983 in each year since 1990;

(2) how many patients are currently detained under the Mental Health Act 1993 in private psychiatric hospitals.

Mr. Bowis: A bulletin and booklet on legal status statistics 1987–88 to 1992–93 containing figures on admissions of patients detained under the 1983 Mental Health Act to national health services facilities, private

nursing homes and to the special hospitals are shortly to be published. Copies of both publications will be placed in the Library.

Private Psychiatric Hospitals

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to *(a)* monitor and investigate deaths of patients in private psychiatric hospitals and *(b)* monitor standards of care in private psychiatric hospitals.

Mr. Bowis: All hospitals in all sections, which are caring for patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 should notify the Mental Health Act Commission of the death of any such patient. Health authorities and national health service trusts purchasing services from private psychiatric hospitals should ensure that their contract allows for the procedures outlined in circular HSG(94)27 to be initiated following the death of any NHS—funded patient. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Arrangements for monitoring the standards of care given to NHS patients in private psychiatric hospitals are agreed between health authorities and NHS trusts and the private hospital as part of the contracting process. The Mental Health Act Commission visits detained patients in private psychiatric hospitals regularly.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations are being carried out into the deaths of Oswald Morson, Grant Anstead, Alex Clements and Alan Bannister at the Kneesworth House private psychiatric hospital.

Mr. Bowis: These cases have been investigated by the coroner. An inquest into the death of Alexander Clements was held in Sheffield on 19 December. In the case of Alan Bannister, the coroner has decided that an inquest is not required. An inquest into the death of Oswald Morson will be held on 6 March. An inquest into the death of Grant Anstead has been opened and adjourned to a date yet to be fixed.

In each case, the hospital managers have held an internal inquiry and made a full report on the outcome to the health authority responsible for funding the patient's care.

The Mental Health Act Commission is currently carrying out a review of the circumstances of these patients' deaths, as it does in all such deaths.

Death With Dignity Act

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the recent vote in Oregon on the Death With Dignity Act; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Government's firm view is that the deliberate taking of life should remain illegal. The House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics rejected the case for legalising euthanasia or assisting a person to commit suicide, and the Government wholly share the Committee's view. The vote in Oregon does not change our position on the matter.

Cannabis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the BMA regarding the views of hospital doctors on the possibility of cannabis being made available on prescription.

Mr. Bowis: None, as far as I am aware.

Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received regarding shortfalls in the availability of psychiatric beds.

Mr. Bowis: We have received a number of representations concerning alleged shortfalls in psychiatric beds. The requirement for beds must be judged locally and cannot be viewed in isolation from other provision for mentally ill people.

Pharmacy Licences

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make it her policy that the grant of a licence for the establishment of a pharmacy is conditional upon the establishment of such a pharmacy within a specified time scale;

(2) what plans she has to prevent companies from holding licences for the establishment of pharmacies which they do not intend to use.

Mr. Malone: Under the provisions of the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992, as amended, a pharmacy which is given permission to open must do so within six months of permission being granted. A family health services authority, or on appeal, the family health services appeal unit, may extend this period, up to a maximum of 24 months from the date of the original grant, if it considers there is good cause for so doing.

GP Fundholders

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the impact on surgical provision in individual hospitals of general practitioner fundholders switching moneys from hospital to hospital.

Mr. Malone: The precise pattern of care to meet patients' needs in a particular locality is agreed in contracts between national health service purchasers—health authorities and fundholding general practitioners—and hospitals. Fundholding general practitioners, like health authorities, are expected to provide six months' notice of their intention to make significant changes to their contracts.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has given to ensure that a loss of general practitioner fundholders' money for non-emergency surgery in hospitals does not lead to a reduction of emergency services for the same fundholder.

Mr. Malone: None.

District health authorities are responsible for purchasing emergency services for the patients of both fundholding and non-fundholding general practitioners. It is for purchasers and hospitals to agree contracts which best meet patients' needs.

General Practitioners

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received in the last

12 months from doctors about funding out-of-hours work by general practitioners; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Throughout the period, we have had regular discussions with representatives of the medical profession. These discussions are continuing.

Neuroleptic Drugs

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to instigate research into deaths of psychiatric patients associated with neuroleptic drugs.

Mr. Bowis: We are discussing with the Royal College of Psychiatrists the possibility of extending the remit of the confidential inquiry into homicides and suicides by mentally ill people to cover the deaths of psychiatric patients associated with neuroleptic drugs.

Consultants

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she intends to take to monitor the allocation of time by NHS consultants between their NHS responsibilities and their private practices.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 2 February, *Official Report* columns *837–38.*

Rights of the Child

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she intends to take to take to implement the British Government's obligations under article 44 of the United Nations convention following the committee's report on the rights of the child in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The government fulfilled their obligations under article 44 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child by publishing the United Kingdom national report in February 1994.

Regional Health Authorities

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department offers to regional health authorities on the premium of intensive care beds on the same site as elective surgical beds.

Mr. Sackville: None

Private Health Insurance

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had private health insurance for each year from 1990.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the number of people with private health insurance is not collected by the Department.

NHS Beds

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide figures of *(a)* the number of surgical beds *(b)* the number of intensive care beds and *(c)* the number and locations of surgical beds without same site access to an intensive care unit for (i) North Thames regional health authority and (ii) South Thames regional health authority.

Mr. Sackville: Information on beds is collected by ward classification and not by clinical speciality. Details of the average daily number of intensive care beds available and the average daily number of general and acute beds available for each national health service trust in the North Thames regional health authority and the South Thames regional health authority is published in "Bed availability for England, Financial year 1993–94", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive therapy unit beds there were in London in each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave on 2 February, *Official Report* column *846.*

Children in Care

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children looked after by local authorities were placed in the area of another local authority in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: During the year ending 31 March 1993, it is estimated that 4,200 children looked after by local authorities in England started foster placements in the area of other authorities. At 31 March 1993, the total number currently placed in that way was 5,700. Corresponding figures are not available centrally for other types of placement.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children looked after by local authorities were placed in residential care *(a)* in privately registered children's homes under section 63 of the Children Act 1989, *(b)* in residential care homes registered under the Residential Homes Act 1984 and *(c)* in voluntary children's homes registered under the Children Act 1989 in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: Estimates for the year ending 31 March 1993 are shown in the table:

Children looked after by local authorities and placed in selected types of residential care homes; England estimates for the year ending 31 March 1993.

Type of Home	*Number[1] starting a placement during the year*	*Number[1] at 31 March*
a. In privately registered children's homes under section 63 of the Children Act 1989	690	670
b. In residential care homes registered under the Registered Homes Act 1984	60	60
c. In voluntary children's homes registered under the Children Act 1989	550	620

Notes:

[1] Figures are provisional and are estimated to the nearest 10. They exclude children accommodated in a series of short-term placements under one agreement under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when information on the placement of children looked after by local authorities for the year 1993–94 will be available.

Mr. Bowis: In due course.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children looked after by local authorities were absent for more than one week from agreed placements; and, of those children, in how many absences their whereabouts were unknown in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: Out of some 85,000 children looked after by local authorities during the year ended 31 March 1993, it is estimated that 680 were absent for more than one week from their agreed placements.

The number of absences of these children where the whereabouts was unknown was 520.

Private Children's Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private children's homes were listed in each local authority for each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Hospital Social Workers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances a hospital social worker would be expected to undertake the role of keyworker for an individual.

Mr. Bowis: It may be agreed, as part of the arrangements for a psychiatric patient's discharge under the care programme approach, for a hospital social worker to be his key worker.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to monitor the level of referrals to hospital social workers.

Mr. Bowis: It depends on the referral of whom or what.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers were based in hospitals in 1993.

Mr. Bowis: The number of social work staff directly employed by local authority social services departments in hospitals and other health related settings in September 1993 is given in "Local Authority Social Services Statistics: Staff of Local Authority Social Services Departments at 30 September 1993; England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times her Department has received requests for secure accommodation for young people in each of the last four years.

Mr. Bowis: None.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the secure facilities currently available for young people provided by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* the voluntary sector and *(c)* the private sector.

Mr. Bowis: A list of secure units in England providing accommodation for young people is contained in the publication "Children Accommodated in Secure Units During the Year Ending 31 March 1994"—series number A/F 94/21—copies of which are available in the Library.

Social Day Care Places

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social day care places were available for *(a)* the elderly, *(b)* those with learning disabilities, *(c)* those with physical disabilities and *(d)* mentally ill people in (i) local authorities, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) the private sector in each year since 1979.

Mr. Bowis: The information requested on day centre places, covering survey weeks in 1992 and 1993, is published in "Personal Social Services: Day and domiciliary services for adults 1993", statistical bulletin 1994–98. Data before 1992 were collected on a different basis and for local authority provision only and were published in "Adult Training Centres for People with Learning Disabilities and Local Authority Day Centres for Adults", up to 1991, A/F91/8; and in "Adult Training Centres for Mentally Handicapped People and Day Centres for Mentally Ill, Mentally Handicapped, Elderly and Younger Physically Handicapped People" up to 1989, A/F89/8. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Mental Handicap Hospitals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *248*, if she will make it her policy to collate the number of long-stay mental hospitals which have gained trust status.

Mr. Sackville: No.

Community Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *634*, what statistics are collected from local authorities on their use of independent sector residential accommodation and day and domiciliary services.

Mr. Bowis: Information on the detail of the routine statistics on residential accommodation and day and domiciliary services was published in the minutes of evidence following the appearance of the director of statistics on 21 April 1993 before the Health Select Committee—paper 624 of Session 1992–93, annexes C, D and E. Information on data sources is also provided in the "Personal Social Services Statistical Information Directory April 1994", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Hostel Places

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hostel places were available for people with mental health problems in each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis: Hostels are not defined or identified within our information collection system.

Doctors, St. Thomas's Hospital

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors are currently working over 72 hours a week at St. Thomas's hospital, London.

Mr. Malone: St. Thomas's has reported to the South Thames region task force that at 30 September 1994, there were 41.5 junior doctors contracted for an average of

more than 72 hours a week. None of these posts was in the hard-pressed specialties which are now subject to a ceiling of 72 hours a week. Task forces were set up in each region to help implement and monitor the new deal on junior doctors' hours. They report progress to the national health service executive.

In December, I announced that £64 million—£14 million more than last year—would be spent in 1995 on tackling junior doctors hours. The extra £14 million will be enough to set up 230 fully funded posts.

Hospital Closures

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has provided to district health authorities on taking local opinion into account when deciding to close a hospital.

Mr. Sackville: Guidance about consultation on hospital closure and substantial changes in service provision was attached to an executive letter—EL(90)185—issued in September 1990, copies of which are available in the Library.

Hinchingbrook Hospital

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there have been at Hinchingbrook hospital in each year since 1990; and how many times the hospital has had to close to emergencies through lack of beds in the last year.

Mr. Sackville: The hospital has not had to close to emergencies through lack of beds in the past year.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many projects at the Hinchingbrook hospital are currently being considered or have been considered over the last three years which involve ownership of the hospital or part of the hospital by the private sector.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. This is a matter for the Hinchingbrooke Health Care national health service trust and Anglia and Oxford regional health authority. The right hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust, Mr. Ken Spink OBE, and the chairman of the health authority, Sir Stuart Burgess, for details.

Cardiac Centres and Cancer Services

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 31 January, *Official Report,* column *876,* how many cardiac centres and cancer services there are in London; what is her estimate of the number needed; and if she will explain her reference to a great duplication and concentration of specialty services in London.

Mr. Malone: The Tomlinson report found

"unwarranted duplication of specialist services, sometimes at great expense",

referring inter alia to 14 cardiac centres and 13 cancer centres providing regional specialty services in inner London. The reports in June 1993 to the London implementation group of an independent review of specialist services in London confirmed Tomlinson's findings and said, of cardiac services, that

"there is a clear case for rationalisation to create fewer, larger and stronger centres"

and, of cancer services,

"there are several serious disadvantages in the current pattern of small centres".

Both reports recommended some consolidation in order that high-quality clinical care, teaching and research should be sustained. The advice of these and the other specialty reviews remains available to inform health authorities and NHS hospital trusts.

Leeds General Infirmary

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future practice of pathology services at the Leeds general infirmary.

Mr. Sackville: It is for trusts to determine the best means of delivering pathology services to secure high-quality patient care and the most cost-effective use of resources. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. David Hall, the chairman of the United Leeds Teaching Hospitals national health service trust for further details.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress on the capital investment programme at the Leeds general infirmary with particular reference to whether the programme is running in line with budget targets.

Mr. Sackville: The capital investment programme currently in progress for the United Leeds Teaching Hospitals national health service trust, which includes the Leeds general infirmary, is running within budget and on time.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many items she has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Sackville: From the available information, no items have been received from Ian Greer in the last month.

Propofol

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adverse reactions and how many fatalities reported to the Medicines Control Agency were associated with the use of anaesthetic propofol since 27 February 1986.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Since 27 February 1986, the Medicines Control Agency has received 1,072 yellow card reports for propofol describing 1,987 suspected adverse reactions, 35 of which were fatal. The large number of suspected adverse reactions is a reflection of the extensive use of this drug as an anaesthetic agent. No anaesthesia is without risks; the adverse reaction profile for propofol is not significantly different from other widely used anaesthetic agents. A report of a suspected reaction to a drug does not necessarily mean that the drug itself caused the reaction.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Drugs

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what services the European monitoring centre for drugs and drug addiction will be

able to offer to developing countries attempting to replace drug-linked cultivation and defeat drug production and trafficking.

Mr. Baldry: The European monitoring centre for drugs and drug addiction is set up to provide the Community and its member states with objective, reliable and comparable information at the European level on drugs and drug addiction and their consequences. The centre's future work programme has not yet been decided. The centre does not have a remit to offer specific services to less-developed countries. However, subject to member states' obligations on transmission of information under the provisions of United Nations drugs conventions, the centre may promote the inclusion of data it collects into international monitoring and drug control programmes, particularly those established by the UN.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total sum the United Kingdom has made available to the UN drug control programme for each year since 1994 and the percentage of these figures used for drug control programmes in developing countries.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom made £4.8 million available to the UN international drug control programme in the financial year 1993–94, the latest complete year for which figures are available. Sixty-two per cent. of this sum was used for UNDCP programmes in less developed countries. The remainder was used for UNDCP programmes in central and eastern European countries.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the criteria, under the draft European action plan to combat drugs which will be used to assess a country's progress in drug control.

Mr. Baldry: The scope and extent of co-operation between the European Community and third countries is set out in individual association agreements. These agreements cover all subjects of common interest, including illicit drugs, and aim to promote co-operation and facilitate joint initiatives. They also provide for a continuing process of consultation and co-ordination. Drugs clauses in these agreements may, for example, include co-operation on measures to tackle the supply, trafficking and demand for illicit drugs, as well as action against money laundering and misuse of chemical precursors.

The draft European action plan to combat drugs proposes that failure by recipient governments to achieve the drugs objectives in association agreements would allow the Union to consider suspension or termination of specific aspects of relations, including imposition of political, economic or financial sanctions.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with European counterparts with regard to the European action plan to combat drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has been actively involved in discussions with European partners about Commission draft proposals for a new European Union action plan to combat drugs. The proposals require further refinement and improvement, within the mechanisms set up under the treaty on European Union, to produce a balanced multidisciplinary plan for effective action. The draft plan is to be submitted to the European Council during the current French presidency.

We welcome this work within the European Union to consolidate and further improve anti-drugs co-operation between member states and between the EU and other regions and countries. Drug trafficking and misuse remain a serious and growing threat to the UK, other countries in the European Union and most other countries around the world. Drug traffickers are quick to exploit new markets and routes for their pernicious trade. Firm national action by all Governments is fundamentally important. But effective practical action and international co-operation are also essential if we are to succeed in defeating the global menace of the illicit drug trade.

The UK has played, and will continue to play, a leading role in the international fight against drugs, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in particular through the UN international drug control programme, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

Sudan

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consult with the French Government about relations with the Government of Sudan; and if he will make it his policy that while France has the Presidency of the EU, the EU will maintain a united policy towards Sudan with respect to the sale of arms and respect for human rights.

Mr. David Davis: We exchange views regularly with the French Government and other EU partners in the framework of the common foreign and security policy. We have no evidence to suggest that any EU country intends to change its policy towards Sudan with respect to the sale of arms and respect for human rights.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arms or military training the Government of France are providing to the Government of Sudan.

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to my earlier reply today. The EU agreed an arms embargo against Sudan in March 1994. This remains in force.

Western Sahara

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings representatives of his Department have had with representatives of the Polisario Front; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Polisario representatives have met FCO officials on a number of occasions.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions at the United Nations Security Council the United Kingdom representatives has raised the issue of the performance of the MINURSO force in the Western Sahara.

Mr. Goodlad: The subject of MINURSO and its performance has been raised and discussed in the UN Security Council on numerous occasions, most recently on 13 January 1995.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the statement made to the United States Congress House Appropriations Committee on 25 January by Frank Ruddy concerning the United Nations operation in Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We understand that no transcript or detailed record was made of Mr. Ruddy's comments to the appropriations sub-committee of the United States House of Representatives on 25 January, and have made no assessment of them.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what visits have been made to the Western Sahara by representatives of Her Majesty's Government; and which diplomatic post deals with relations with the Polisario.

Mr. Baldry: Three visits were made to the Western Sahara by FCO officials in 1994. We do not have formal relations with Polisario.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution Britain currently makes to MINURSO; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The United Kingdom does not at present contribute personnel to MINURSO. The mission continues to operate from an unencumbered balance assessed on member states in 1991, the UK contribution to which was US $8.2 million.

Mr.Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions have been taken by the United Kingdom to assist giving effect to the United Nations Security Council resolution 973, concerning the future of the Western Saraha.

Mr. Goodlad: The United Kingdom will be paying its share of the cost of the reinforcements for MINURSO which are provided for in Security Council resolution 973. Implementation of the resolution is primarily a matter for the UN secretariat. The British ambassadors in Tunis and Addis Ababa have, with French, American and Spanish colleagues, lobbied the President of Tunisia—the current President of the Organisation of African Unity—and the OAU Secretary-General to provide extra observers for the UN's identification process in Western Sahara.

Rwanda

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of the Government of France in respect of providing arms or military training to the military, or the militias, loyal to the out-going Government of Rwanda.

Mr. Baldry: The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has informed us that the French Government do not provide arms or military training to the supporters of the former Government of Rwanda.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which country it is proposed to hold the international tribunal into war crimes in Rwanda.

Mr. Baldry: The location of the tribunal has yet to be decided but the UN Secretary General is due to report on this and other matters relating to the tribunal soon. In the meantime, a prosecutor's office is being established in Kigali to allow investigations to continue.

Legislatures

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to place in the Library the names and details of each member of the local legislatures for each colony and dependent territory.

Mr. Baldry: I will place such lists in the Library.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by which method it is possible for *(a)* the chief minister and *(b)* individual member of colony and dependent territory legislatures to bring to the attention of Her Majesty's Government or hon. Members of the House any grievance they have about the stewardship or conduct of governors or official members of the local government and legislature in respect of those matters for which the governors or official members are directly responsible.

Mr. Baldry: All British dependent territories citizens have the right to approach us or Members of the House on any matter they wish to raise.

Chief Ministers and members of the legislature in the dependent territories can and frequently do raise issues in connection with the Governors' reserve powers with us and hon. Members.

Colonies and Dependent Territories

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the total cost and any other subventions paid from United Kingdom public funds to the *(a)* defence, *(b)* administration, *(c)* economic and social generation and *(d)* promotion of interest for each colony or dependent territory in each of the last five years.

Mr. Baldry: The total amount paid from United Kingdom public funds to the dependent territories over the past five financial years is estimated to be in the region of £1 billion.

To provide a breakdown per subject and territory, as requested by the hon. Member, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the total contribution to imperial functions and services paid to the Exchequer from the local governments by each of the colonies or dependent territories over each of the last five years; and if he will list the contributions made towards the cost of *(a)* defence, *(b)* the civil list and *(c)* consular and other services provided by his Department abroad.

Mr. Baldry: The total contribution to United Kingdom public funds made by the dependent territories over the past five financial years is estimated to be £382 million.

To provide a breakdown per territory and subject heading, as requested by the hon. Member, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by which method voters in the colonies and dependent territories are able to influence *(a)* foreign policy, *(b)* defence policy and *(c)* policing policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: All three policy areas fall within the reserve powers of the governors of dependent territories, as laid down in the respective constitutions.

However, control of the individual budgets for some of these powers rests with the elected local government—for example, the police budget in the Caribbean dependent territories—and this allows the electorate to influence policy decisions. Members of legislative councils may appeal to the governor in respect of decisions relating to his reserve powers and in some territories the governor takes advice from statutory advisory bodies and public committees, for example, the Police Complaints Committee in Hong Kong.

Governors have authority to delegate aspects of their reserve powers to elected Ministers, examples of which include certain policing matters in Bermuda and contacts with regional organisations in Anguilla and Montserrat.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of all the governors of the colonies and dependent territories, with the names and functions of each official member of the local government or legislature who are appointed by his Department or governor.

Mr. Baldry: The following are the names of the governors of the dependent territories and the names of official members of the government or legislature appointed by governors:

Anguilla

Governor: Alan W. Shave, CVO, OBE

Deputy Governor and ex-officio member of the House of Assembly: Harry McCrory, LVO, OBE

Attorney General and ex-officio member of the House of Assembly: Kurt DeFreitas

Second Nominated Member to the House of Assembly (Governor's appointee): Vacant

British Indian Ocean Territory

Commissioner: David Maclennan (non-resident)

Turks and Caicos Islands

Governor: Martin Bourke

Chief Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Assembly: Roger Cousins

Attorney General and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: David Ballantyne

Second Nominated member of the Legislature Assembly (Governor's appointee): Vacant

Montserrat

Governor: Frank Savage, LVO, OBE

Attorney General and ex-officio member of the Legislative Assembly: Mrs. Gertel Thom

Financial Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Assembly: Charles John

First Nominated Member of the Legislature Assembly (Governor's appointee): Frank Edwards

Cayman Islands

Governor: Michael Gore, CVO, OBE

Chief Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Assembly: James Ryan, MBE, JP

Attorney General and ex-officio member of the Legislative Assembly: Richard Coles

Financial Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Assembly: George McCarthy, OBE, JP

British Virgin Islands

Governor: Peter Penfold, OBE

Deputy Governor and Chief Secretary: Elton Georges

Attorney General and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: Mrs. Dancia Penn

Bermuda

Governor and Commander-in-Chief: The right hon. Lord Waddington, D.L. QC

President of the Senate: Senator Albert Jackson MBE, (Appointed by the Governor)

Vice President of the Senate: Senator Norma Astwood (appointed by the Governor)

Senator Alfred Oughton, MBE, Governor's nominated member in the Senate.

Pitcairn Islands

Governor: Robert Alston CMG (resides in Wellington)

Member of Island Council (voting): Mrs Betty Christian

Member of the Island Council (non-voting): Mrs Phillipa Foley

Gibralter

Governor and Commander-in-Chief: Field Marshall Sir John Chapple, GCB, CBE

Deputy Governor: A. Carter

Acting Attorney General and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: P. Dean

Financial Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: B. Traynor

Hong Kong

Governor: The Rt Hon Christopher Patten

Chief Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: Mrs Anson Chan, CBE, KBE, JP

Financial Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: Sir Hamish Macleod, KBE, JP

Attorney General and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: J. F. Matthews, CMG, JP

Falkland Islands

Governor: D. E. Tatham, CMG

Attorney General and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: D. Lang, CBE, QC

Financial Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: D. Howatt

Chief Executive and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: A Gurr.

St.Helena

Governor and Commander-in-Chief: A. N. Hoole, OBE

Chief Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: J. G. Perrott

Financial Secretary and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: R. J. Perrott

Attorney General and ex-officio member of the Legislative Council: D. J. Jerimiah

Ascension Island

Administrator: B. N. Connelly (appointed by the FCO)

Tristan da Cunha

Administrator: B. Dalley (appointed by the FCO)

Member of the Island Council: Mrs. J. Green

Member of the Island Council: D. Rogers

Member of the Island Council: S. Swain

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Commissioner: D. E. Tatham CMG (appointed by FCO)

Asst Commissioner: C. S. Shelton (Appointed by FCO)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his most recent estimate of the population of each colony or dependent territory excluding Hong Kong, with the total population.

Mr. Baldry: The most recent estimates of the population of each colony or dependent territory, excluding Hong Kong, are as follows:

Territory	*Population*
Anguilla	9,000
Ascension Island	1,132
Bermuda	70,000
British Antarctic Territory	Nil
British Indian Ocean Territory[1]	3,500
British Virgin Islands	17,000
Cayman Islands	30,000
Falkland Islands	2,120
Gibraltar	29,000
Montserrat	11,000
Pitcairn Islands	54
St. Helena	5,390
Tristan da Cunha	294
Turks and Caicos Islands	14,000
Total (including Hong Kong)	6,212,490

[1] No indigenous population.

Tivar to Bari Ferry

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response has been made by the international community to the assertion by the President of Albania regarding the use made by Serbia of the Tivar to Bari ferry route; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We are not aware of such an assertion. According to the international sanctions monitors there is no ferry service operating between Tivar and Bari. The only service operating under UN Security Council resolution 943 is that which links the ports of Bar and Bari.

Refugee Camps (Zaire)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which countries the United Nations appealed for troops to police Rwanda refugee camps in Zaire; and what was the response.

Mr. Goodlad: The United Nations approached a total of 60 potential troop-contributing nations seeking troops to police the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire. Of those 60, we understand that only one responded positively. A list of the countries concerned is not available.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice he is currently giving to British citizens in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Baldry: We have advised British citizens that dependents, and those with no pressing need to stay, should leave the country as soon as possible. We are monitoring developments closely, and will review our advice in the light of changing circumstances.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the present security situation in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Baldry: Over the last few weeks there has been a substantial increase in attacks on people and property over a large area of Sierra Leone with many reported deaths. At least 17 foreign citizens including six Britons are being held captive. We have advised British citizens with no pressing need to remain to consider leaving the country. We continue to follow the situation closely and are working for the release of those held captive. We are also responding to requests for emergency aid for those who have been displaced by the latest fighting.

Civil Servants, Hong Kong

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent discussions with the Chinese Government concerning the pensions of Hong Kong civil servants after 1997.

Mr. Goodlad: The Hong Kong Government intend to establish a HK$7 billion pension reserve fund to reinforce existing statutory pension safeguards and the guarantees in the Sino-British joint declaration on the continued payment of Hong Kong public service pensions. This subject has been discussed by the British and Chinese Governments in the Sino-British joint liaison group.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further representations he will make to the Government of Burma for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Mr. Goodlad: The continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi without charge is indefensible. We have repeatedly called for her early and unconditional release. We will continue to express our concerns directly to the State Law and Order Restoration Council and through the relevant international forums.

Burma

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to review Her Majesty's Government trade policy in respect of Burma.

Mr. Goodlad: Our policy with Burma is kept under regular review. For the present we ensure that British firms are aware of trade opportunities not covered by the EU arms embargo. But we offer no financial support to them.

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Burma to end their offensive against the Karen ethnic group.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 3 February, at column *883*.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Goodlad: To my knowledge there were none.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 to 24 January.

Mr. David Davis: The Council began with an open debate on the French presidency programme. All member states broadly endorsed the presidency's plans.

The Commission then set out its timetable for follow-up work to the Essen European Council. Commission priorities include the White Paper on the integration of the central and eastern European states into the single market, proposals on financing for trans-European networks and a paper on the Mediterranean.

The Council agreed the text of the EC/Vietnam co-operation agreement.

The presidency's proposals for handling the preparations for the Euro-Mediterranean conference were agreed.

The presidency reported on progress in the negotiations on customs union with Turkey and on preparations for the review of Cyprus' application for EU membership. This was remitted for further discussion at the 6 February FAC.

Ministers discussed events in Chechnya and issued a statement.

The presidency outlined plans for the preparation for the Council's report to the 1996 IGC study group.

The Council agreed a statement on Algeria which confirmed the EU's support for all initiatives aimed at encouraging dialogue between those who reject terrorism and violence. The EU also confirmed its willingness to support a policy of democratic development and economic restructuring in Algeria.

Over lunch, the Italian Foreign Minister, Ms Agnelli, said the new Italian Government were ready to resume discussions soon with Slovenia over obstacles to the EU/Slovenia agreement.

Ministers took note of the Danish candidacy to succeed Switzerland as OSCE chairman in office in 1997.

The Council heard a report from Lord Owen and exchanged views on the situation in the former Yugoslavia. They approved a declaration on Bosnia and Croatia. They agreed to consider in March whether to begin negotiations on an EU/Croatia trade co-operation agreement. The Council also adopted a common position and Council regulation continuing sanctions relief for Serbia-Montenegro.

The presidency and the Commission informed Ministers about preparations for the concluding conference to adopt the stability pact in Paris on 20–21 March.

The French Foreign Minister, Mr. Juppe, and Sir Leon Brittan briefed the Council on the agenda for their 26–27 January visit to Washington. Mr. Juppe said that he would raise EU/United States relations, former Yugoslavia, the middle east peace process, Latin America, Russia and Chechnya, and the director-generalship of the WTO.

Sir Leon Brittan reported briefly on relations with Japan and looked forward to a full debate at the April FAC. He introduced the Commission's communication on Korea, proposing a Commission negotiating mandate for an EU/Korea trade and co-operation agreement.

The Council approved a statement expressing interest in the Singaporean proposal for an EU/Asian Summit and requesting the political committee and Coreper to present it with a report in March.

The presidency noted that the Commission would shortly come forward with a draft mandate for article XXIV.6 negotiations with the United States and others to compensate for tariff increases arising from EU enlargement.

There was a preliminary discussion on trade aspects of the mid-term review of the fourth Lomé convention, and on the size of the eighth European development fund.

Mr. Martin—Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Latin America, the middle east and Asia—reported on progress in negotiations with Israel, Morocco and Tunisia.

The Council agreed on an early ministerial Troika visit to Lebanon, Syria, Israel and the Occupied Territories.

A partnership and co-operation agreement between the EU and Kazakhstan was signed on 23 January.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Drugs

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research his Department has carried out into the effectiveness of crop replacement programmes in zones of drug-linked cultivation in developing countries.

Mr. Baldry: The ODA has carried out research in Peru and North Morocco, and has funded desk studies covering the main coca growing areas of South America and the opium growing areas of Asia. Alternative crops have been identified, but their exploitation depends on social, economic and infrastructural changes. Since 1985, the ODA has committed £7 million to promote crop substitution in northern Pakistan.

Algeria

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid, by way of grant, loans, credit or otherwise, has been provided to Algeria by the European Community or European Union and their institutions in the last four years.

Mr. Baldry: European Community support to Algeria is provided through its programme of grant and European Investment bank loan funded assistance to the mediterranean region and loan financed balance of payments support.

Under the Community's mediterranean programme, through the fourth financial protocol, 1992–96, Algeria is eligible for 350 mecu, or £276 million, comprising 280 mecu or £220 million, EIB loans, 18 mecu, or £14.2 million, risk capital and 52 mecu, or £41 million grant aid. By the end of January 1995, 88 per cent. of the budget funds had been committed and 64 per cent. of the EIB

loans. Algeria has also received a loan of 55 mecu, or 43.3 million, from the mediterranean structural adjustment facility as balance of payments support.

Since 1991, Algeria has been granted a total of 600 mecu, or £473 million, loan funded balance of payments support. Of this, 400 mecu, or £315 million, was agreed in 1991 and a further 200 mecu, or £157 million, subject to continuing compliance with its IMF programme, in December 1994. The first tranche of the further 200 meco—100 mecu, or £78.9 million—has already been disbursed.

Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the value of Britain's multilateral and unilateral aid to Trinidad and Tobago for each of the last five years; and what is the projected aid for the next two years.

Mr. Baldry: Gross bilateral aid expenditure for Trinidad and Tobago comprises primarily disbursements by the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Total gross United Kingdom bilateral aid for the last five years is as follows:

Year	*£ thousands*
1989–90	556
1990–91	808
1991–92	5,310
1992–93	11,659
1993–94	5,725

The latest figures available for the estimated United Kingdom share of multilateral disbursements of net official development assistance to Trinidad and Tobago are:

Year	*£ million*
1989	0.29
1990	0.97
1991	0.33

The distribution of aid resources for the public expenditure survey period 1995–96—1997–98 is currently being considered and no final decisions have yet been made.

Refugees (Guinea)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what humanitarian assistance is being given to refugees from Sierra Leone in Guinea.

Mr. Baldry: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme are providing food, blankets and shelter materials for an estimated 24,000 Sierra Leonean refugees who have recently fled to Guinea, in addition to sustaining relief assistance to over 500,000 Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea's forest region over the past five years.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the costs of training consultancy visits to Indonesia by British specialists working with the Indonesian police force in each year since 1990; and in each year how many consultants visited Indonesia.

Mr. Baldry *[holding reply 3 February 1995]:* The costs of consultancy visits have been as follows.

	Costs of consultancy visits to Indonesia £	*Number of UK consultants visiting*	*Total number of visits by consultants*
1990–91	155,000	4	6
1991–92	106,000	4	7
1992–93	155,000	4	9
1993–94	99,000	4	8

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list all aid and trade provision projects in Indonesia since 1980, in each case specifying the date of the agreement, the cost to the aid budget and the name of the British companies involved;

(2) if he will list dates when aid and trade provision government-to-government agreements and exchanges with Indonesia were signed in each year since 1980;

(3) if he will list all aid and trade provision contracts with Indonesia since 1980 stating the year and month in which the agreement was reached, the lead United Kingdom company, the value of aid given, and in each case the date of the formal appraisal documents submitted by the Overseas Development Administration and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* A list of all aid and trade provision projects in Indonesia on which government-to-government agreements have been concluded is set out in the attached table. Details of appraisal documents for aid projects are not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

ATP agreements with Indonesia concluded since 1980

Country	*Project*	*Company*	*EOL date*	*Type*	*Export value £ million*	*ATP value £ million*	*Sector*
ATP agreements concluded during 1982							
Indonesia	Mrica Hydro Project	Balfour Beatty	22 October 1982		44.646	12.075	Power
ATP agreements concluded during 1983							
Indonesia	Jambu Aye Hydroelectric Dam Study	RendelWilliamson Hydro	1983		0.200	0.200	Power
Indonesia	Ombelin Coal Mine Project	Dowty Meco	30 August 1983		19.200	4.445	Mining

ATP agreements with Indonesia concluded since 1980

Country	Project	Company	EOL date	Type	Export value £ million	ATP value £ million	Sector
ATP agreements concluded during 1984							
Indonesia	AIS Submarine Cable	STC	12 November 1984		104.000	3.093	Telecom
Indonesia	Education Equipment Study	British Council	27 November 1984		0.036	0.036	Misc
Indonesia	Jabotabek Railway Study	L H Manderstan	1 June 1984		1.000	1.000	Transport
ATP agreements concluded during 1985							
Indonesia	S Bengkulu Oil Palm Study	Massey Ferguson	1985		0.400	0.400	Misc
Indonesia	Isolated Diesels	HSPE	26 March 1985		38.400	12.515	Power
Indonesia	Bukit Asam Rail Bridges	Balfour Beatty	15 July 1985		0.750	0.152	Transport
Indonesia	Offshore Supply Vessels	Marine Design Consultants	14 August 1985		2.156	0.571	Transport
Indonesia	Ombelin Coal Mine Training	Dowty Meco	1985		0.655	0.655	Mining
ATP agreements concluded during 1986							
Indonesia	Jabotabek Feasibility Study	Manderstan/F Wheeler	5 September 1986		0.007	0.007	Transport
Indonesia	Railway Track Turnouts	Henry Boot Railway Eng Ltd	6 March 1986	ATP/TC	0.259	0.259	Transport
ATP agreements concluded during 1987							
Indonesia	Steel Bridging	Mabey and Johnson	2 April 1987	SL	9.930	6.642	Transport
Indonesia	Navigational Aids	Pharos Marine	29 April 1987	SL	9.906	6.386	Transport
Indonesia	Coal Fired Power Station Training	British Electricity International	4 June 1987	ATP/TC	0.533	0.533	Power
Indonesia	Marine Diesel Engines	Mirrlees Blackstone (STPT) Ltd	10 February 1987	ATP/TC	0.048	0.048	Transport
ATP agreements concluded during 1988							
Indonesia	Batam Island Power Development Study	Kennedy and Donkin Power Systems Ltd	17 June 1988	ATP/TC	0.194	0.194	Power
Indonesia	Bandung Television Studios	Quantel Link Systems	24 October 1988	SL	11.735	9.734	Telecom
Indonesia	Radio/Rehabilitation	David Whittle Associates	29 February 1988	ATP/TC	0.156	0.156	Telecom
ATP agreements concluded during 1989							
Indonesia	Cigading Port Extension	Tarmac International Special Projects	1 March 1989	SL	17.280	13.266	Transport
Indonesia	Radio Studios	David Whittle Associates	2 November 1989	ATP/TC	0.651	0.651	Telecom
Indonesia	Satellite Remote Sensing	Technology Applied Systems	—	—	0.028	0.028	Telecom
Indonesia	Scattered Diesels	GEC Diesels Ltd	25 January 1989	SL	6.887	5.891	Power
Indonesia	Ombilin Coalmine I	Dowty Meco Ltd	1.89	ATP/TC	0.211	0.211	Mining
ATP agreements concluded during 1990							
Indonesia	Citayam/Cibinong Railway	Foster Wheeler World Services	30 Novembeer 1990	SL	23.000	20.105	Transport
Indonesia	Cigading/Serpong Railway Rehabilitation	Davy/British Railway International	15 March 1990	SL	31.861	24,690	Telecom
Indonesia	Radio Communication System for the Ministry of Forestry	Philips Radio Communication Systems	30 November 1990	SL	37.234	34.111	Telecom
Indonesia	Radio Studio Rehabilitation	Audix Ltd	1 February 1990	SL	6.330	5.040	Telecom
Indonesia	Shortwave Radio Transmitters	Marconi	30 November 1990	SL	29.000	26.911	Telecom
Indonesia	Aircraft Simulator Consultancy	CAA	14 February 1990	ATP/TC	0.050	0.050	Transport

ATP agreements with Indonesia concluded since 1980

Country	Project	Company	EOL date	Type	Export value £ million	ATP value £ million	Sector
ATP agreements concluded during 1991							
Indonesia	Western Universities Equipment	Philip Harris International/ Gallenkamp	14 May 1991	SL	14.284	13.671	Misc
Indonesia	Bali and Medan Airport Security	IAL International Aeradio Ltd	21 August 1991	SL	11.452	10.455	Misc
Indonesia	Jambi Power Station	Mirrlees Blackstone (STPT) Ltd	21 August 1991	SL	5.740	5.345	Power
Indonesia	Flight Simulator	Aeronautical Systems Designers	20 June 1991	SL	4.969	4.659	Transport
Indonesia	Steel Bridging II	Mabey and Johnson	22 May 1991	SL	3.831	3.669	Transport
Indonesia	Cikampek/Padalarang Toll Road	Cementation	15 October 1991	ATP/TC	1.700	1.700	Transport
Indonesia	Auto Industry Development Study	De Montfort Management Ltd	7 January 1991	ATP/TC	0.489	0.489	Transport
ATP agreements concluded during 1992							
Indonesia	Western Universities Training Centre	Sunderland Engineering Education Services	29 August 1992	ATP/TC	2.214	2.214	Education
Indonesia	Flight Simulator	CAA	24 January 1992	ATP/TC	0.389	0.389	Transport

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost in each year since 1990 of supporting work with the Indonesian national police force.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Costs from 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1994 were as follows:

Year	£
1990–91	247,000
1991–92	178,000
1992–93	283,000
1993–94	126,000

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost of scholarship awards in Britain for Indonesian police officers in each year since 1990.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Costs from 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1994 were as follows:

Year	£
1990–91	33,200
1991–92	26,000
1992–93	66,500
1993–94	3,000

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of the Indonesian national police force have visited the United Kingdom for training purposes in each year since 1990.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The numbers of such members financed by the Government were:

1990–91: 14

1991–92: 13

1992–93: 21

1993–94: 1

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cost to his Department of annual study tours to the United Kingdom for Indonesian police officers in each year since 1990, in each case stating which British police forces are involved.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The cost of study tours, which last up to one month, was as follows:

	UK police forces	Study tour participants	Cost per year £
1990–91	Surrey	10	31,000
1991–92	Surrey	10	30,000
1992–93	Surrey	15	43,000
1993–94	—	0	0

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Indonesian police officers have received scholarship awards in each year since 1990, in each case specifying the recipient's rank, the cost and duration of the scholarship.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Scholarship awards involving training for one month or more have been made as follows:

Name of police officer	*Rank*	*Cost of Awards per year £*	*Duration (months)*
1990–91			
Mr. Yusnar Arsyad	Lieutenant Colonel	8,300	4
Mr. Adjie Rustarn Ramdja	Major	8,300	4
Mr. Deddy S. K.	Lieutenant Colonel	8,300	4
Mr. Medhy Chumadi	Lieutenant Colonel	8,300	4
1991–92			
Mr. Minton Mariaty Simanjuntak	Major	8,000	3
Mr. Soekamid	Major	9,000	8
Mr. Yadi Ermlady	Captain	9,000	8
1992–93			
Mr. Soekamid	Major	13,500	12
Mr. Yadi Ermlady	Captain	13,500	12
Mr. Pengasihan Gaut	Major	8,500	3
Mr. Adjie Ramdja	Major	8,500	3
Mr. Pepe Tjhjana	Lieutenant Colonel	8,500	3
Mr. Tito Karnavian	First Lieutenant	14,000	12
1993–94			
Mr. Herman Rasyld	Colonel	3,000	1

NATIONAL HERITAGE

BBC

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for the capital receipts from privatising the transmission services of the BBC to be *(a)* retained by the corporation and *(b)* paid over to Her Majesty's Treasury.

Mr. Dorrell: I am currently considering the options for the future of the BBC transmission service.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the BBC's annual transmission costs broken down by revenue, capital and regions.

Mr. Dorrell: Information about the BBC's internal costs and charges is primarily a matter for the BBC. We do not routinely hold such information.

Contemporary Arts

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what provision he is making for the encouragement of active participation by the elderly in contemporary arts;

(2) what plans he has to enable regional arts boards to fund educational work with people beyond the age of 25 years.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department provides funds to the Arts Council, and through it to the regional arts boards, which themselves take decisions on how those funds are used. In doing so they take into account both artistic objectives and other issues of the kind the hon. Gentleman mentions.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Dorrell: The public bodies for which I am responsible are all listed in "Public Bodies 1994", which was published on 6 February and is available in the Library. None of the bodies for which I am responsible has been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no record of any items received from Ian Greer in the last month.

Women's Football

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to ensure that women can play league football.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* Responsibility for the development of women's football in this country rests with the Football Association. The FA is currently developing a strategy document outlining its aims and objectives for the future development of the women's game.

EMPLOYMENT

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the median weekly earnings of full-time working men and women on adult rates in Yorkshire and Humberside and the north in 1994 and 1984.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information showing the median weekly earnings of full-time men and women employees on adult rates in each region of England can be found in part E, table 116 of the "New Earnings Survey", copies of which are available in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the change in earnings for full time employees for every year, a cumulatively, since 1979 of the top and bottom (i) 1 per cent., (ii) 5 per cent. and (iii) 10 per cent. of the earnings distribution as recorded in the "New Earnings Survey", also breaking down the data by gender.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The top and bottom deciles are published in part A, table 1 of the "New Earnings Survey" from 1979 to 1994, copies of which are available in the Library. Information on the top and bottom 1 and 5 per cent. points of the earnings distribution is not available.

Investors in People

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest available figures for the number of employees in each training and enterprise council area who have been recognised as achieving investors in people standard; and what percentage of the employees potentially eligible for receipt of the award this represents in each area.

Mr. Paice: The latest figures, at 4 December 1994, for employers in each training and enterprise council area in England and Wales, who have been recognised as achieving the investors in people standard are shown in the following table. It is not possible to provide information on what percentage of the employees potentially eligible for receipt of the award this represents in each area. Organisations committed to, or recognised as, investors in people employ between them 17 per cent. of the UK work force.

Employers recognised as investors in people—as at 4 December 1994

TEC	*Employers*
Greater Nottingham	7
Leicestershire	11
Lincolnshire	6
Northamptonshire	16
North Derbyshire	11
North Nottinghamshire	17
Southern Derbyshire	28
Bedfordshire	10
CAMBSTEC	3
Essex	11
Greater Peterborough	2
Hertfordshire	7
Norfolk and Waveney	16
Suffolk	7
County Durham	18
Northumberland	14
Teeside	19
Tyneside	22
Sunderland City	6
Barnsley/Doncaster	17
Bradford and District	5
Calderdale/Kirklees	9
Humberside	48
Leeds	18
Rotherham	10
Sheffield	7
Wakefield	4
North Yorkshire	14
Bolton/Bury	14
Cumbria	6
ELTEC	22
LAWTEC	7
Manchester	19
METROTEC	6
NORMIDTEC	23
Oldham	7
Rochdale	2
South and East Cheshire	16
Stockport/High Peak	7
Birmingham	17
Central England	20
Coventry/Warwickshire	15
Dudley	6
HAWTEC	13
Sandwell	3
Shropshire	7
Staffordshire	5
Walsall	5
Wolverhampton	6

Employers recognised as investors in people—as at 4 December 1994

TEC	*Employers*
Mid Glamorgan	18
South Glamorgan	11
Gwent	10
Powys	4
North East Wales	5
North West Wales	6
West Wales	21
Avon	20
Devon and Cornwall	58
Dorset	39
Gloucestershire	89
Somerset	10
Wiltshire	16
Hampshire	30
Heart of England	14
Wight Training and Enterprise	1
Kent	9
Milton Keynes	4
Surrey	16
Sussex	15
Thames Valley Enterprise	39
AZTEC	8
North London	3
North West London	7
CILNTEC	4
CENTEC	10
London East	5
SOLOTEC	7
West London	8
South Thames	4
CEWTEC	15
Merseyside	32
QUALITEC	3

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Portillo: None.

Pre-pension Income

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the economic status of men and women just prior to reaching the statutory pension age for the latest year for which information is available.

Mr. Oppenheim: Estimates from the "Labour Force Survey" of the economic activity of men aged 64 and women aged 59 are given in the following table:

Economic activity of Men aged 64 and Women aged 59 Great Britain—Summer 1994

	Men aged 64	*Women aged 59*
	Thousands	
In employment	95	123
ILO unemployment	11	[1]—
Economically inactive[2]	160	155

[1] Estimate below 10,000 not shown. [2] Includes long-term sick and disabled and people looking after the home.

Source:

LFS

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the percentage of cases cleared by individual Child Support Agency centres during the first two quarters of 1994–95 *(a)* in under 40 days, *(b)* between 40 days and 100 days and *(c)* in over 100 days; and when he expects to be able to provide detailed information on the average time taken for each stage of the assessment process.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief Executive. She will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 8 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's clearance times for the maintenance application process.

The information you require is shown in the tables in Annex A. Table 1 includes figures on all cases cleared by the Agency, many of which have been outstanding for a long period. Table 2 provides details of the average time taken for each stage of the assessment process.

I hope that this is helpful.

ANNEX A

Table. 1 Time taken to clear the percentage of cases across all Child Support Agency Centres 1st quarter: April to June 1994

Child support area centre	*40 days or less Per cent.*	*More than 40 days, less than 100 days Per cent.*	*More than 100 days Per cent.*
Belfast	45.63	27.63	34.41
Birkenhead	58.72	17.04	24.25
Dudley	45.63	19.66	34.71
Falkirk	34.68	30.52	34.81
Hastings	42.27	21.00	36.74
Plymouth	27.97	24.35	47.70
Agency	41.20	23.37	35.43

2nd quarter: July to September 1994

Child support area centre	*40 days or less Per cent.*	*More than 40 days, less than 100 days Per cent.*	*More than 100 days Per cent.*
Belfast	38.85	19.21	41.95
Birkenhead	56.11	9.89	34.00
Dudley	43.68	11.82	44.51
Falkirk	43.34	8.03	48.63
Hastings	36.51	15.96	47.53
Plymouth	30.53	11.31	58.16
Agency	41.50	12.70	45.80

Table 2. Average times taken for each stage of the Agency's assessment process.

Stages of assessment process	*Average time (days)*
Period from the issue of the maintenance application form (MAF) to the parent withcare to the date it was returned to the Agency.	39
Period from the return of the MAF to the Agency to the date when a maintenance enquiry form (MEF) was issued to the absent parent.	69
Period from issue of the MEF to the date it was returned to the Agency.	47
Period from the return of the MEF to the date a maintenance assessment was completed.	86
Overall period.	[1]175

[1] This figure does not equal the sum of the first four stages due to the variation in sample sizes which arises when cases are withdrawn.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the 2,269 outstanding Child Support Agency cases referred to in his answer of 18 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *526*, in which paternity was being disputed at the end of March 1994, have now been resolved; if he will consider monitoring disputed paternity cases to establish the outcomes; in how many cases dealt with by the Child Support Agency between April and October 1994 the alleged absent parent disputed paternity; how many of these cases have been resolved without reference to court; how many disputed paternity cases have been referred to court by the agency; how many cases have been heard to date; in how many paternity has been established by the court,; and what is the total number of unresolved paternity disputes to-date.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 8 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about disputed paternity cases dealt with by the Child Support Agency.

Improvements were introduced during April 1994 to the Agency's management information systems which improved the monitoring of paternity cases. As a result it has been ascertained that at the end of April 1994 there were 5,350 paternity cases on hand, just over 3,000 more than had previously been reported at the end of March 1994.

Between the end of April and October 1994 there were a further 5,693 cases of disputed paternity. Of these, 4,316 cases were resolved without reference to Court. There were 178 applications to Court for a hearing, and 51 cases were heard. Paternity was established in each of these cases.

At the end of October 1994, 5,976 cases were on hand, of these, 1,761 were more than 6 months old. In addition to the 51 cases where Court action was completed, there have been applications to Court for a hearing in a further 127 cases.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what considerations underlay the decision to transfer from child support offices to area managers the responsibility for issuing reduced benefit directions under the requirement to co-operate procedure in the special cases sections of the regional centres; whom the Child Support Agency consulted before changing the procedure; what training has been given to area managers when taking over this responsibility; and what systems are in place for monitoring the decisions made by area managers and ensuring consistency of decision-making across the country.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 8 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the issuing of reduced benefit directions (RBDs).

This work was transferred to Field offices from the Child Support Agency Centres because a degree of double handling had been identified. As is usual in such circumstances, and internal consultation exercise on the implication and viability of the measure took place. The final decision was taken by the Operations Management Team in the light of the Agency's business needs, resources available and relevant staff experience. The Trade Union Side in the Agency were kept fully informed of the changes and the appropriate technical training was given.

The Agency monitors decisions on RBDs in a similar way to other adjudication decisions made by child support officers (CSOs). CSO decisions are also monitored by the Chief Child Support Officer, an independent authority, who reports annually, in writing, to the Secretary of State.

I hope that this is helpful.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give figures for the number of cases taken on by the Child Support Agency that previously involved absent parents that had paid no maintenance as a proportion of all cases for each six-month period since the establishment of the agency; and if he will give figures for the actual child maintenance paid by absent fathers as a proportion of the child maintenance paid by virtue of the work of the agency for each six-month period since the agency was founded.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 8 February 1995:

I am replying to you Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security on the number of absent parents (APs) who paid no maintenance for each six-month period of the Child Support Agency's operations; and the actual proportion of child maintenance paid as a result of action by the Agency.

The estimated proportion of cases that involve APs who had paid no child maintenance, as a proportion of all cases, is given in the following table:

	Per cent
April 1993—September 1993	43
October 1993—March 1994	59
April 1994—September 1994	77

The gross child maintenance paid by APs via the Agency's collection service is given in the following table. This does not include cases where maintenance is paid direct by the AP to the PWC. These amount to around 20 per cent of cases dealt with by the Agency. There is no business need for the Agency to collect details of payments made in this way and it is assumed that, unless the PWC advises otherwise, payments are received regularly.

	£ million
April 1993–September 1993	0.73
October 1993–March 1994	11.26
April 1994–September 1994	25.70

Benefits Agency Office, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will make a decision on the plan to build a national Benefits Agency office block on a site in Wood street, Doncaster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 6 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the timing of a decision on the plan to build a Benefits Agency office on a site in Wood St, Doncaster.

I confirm that negotiations with the Developer are now at a late stage and a final decision on progressing the project to build a new office to serve the Doncaster area is expected by the end of February 1995.

I hope you find this reply helpful,

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many days in the last five years cold weather payments have been made covering postcode areas NE12 and NE23 in the north east of England; and which weather stations cover these areas.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the Cold Weather Payments Scheme is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 7 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Cold Weather Payments made in postcode areas NE12 and NE23 in the last five years.

Postcode NE12 is linked to the Leeming Weather Station and NE23 to the Tynemouth Weather Station.

Cold weather periods are forecast or recorded on a weekly basis and, if appropriate, a payment is made for the same period. I have provided a table showing the number of weeks for which Cold Weather Payments were made for each year in the areas in question.

	[1]1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
NE 12	3	3	2	2	0
NE 23	2	0	0	0	0

[1] The 1990–91 figures include Cold Weather Payments made on a national basis, irrespective of recorded temperatures, for the two week period 1 February 1991 to 14 February 1991.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of benefit clawback that will be attained by the compensation recovery unit of his Department in the present financial year.

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 24 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *285–86*.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in the past year about the work of the compensation recovery unit.

Mr. Roger Evans: A number of representations have been received, in particular from Clydeside Action on Asbestos and the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to recover benefit paid to guilty parties in motor accident cases.

Mr. Roger Evans: None.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research he has conducted into the impact of the compensation recovery unit on the level of settlements in actions for compensation for industrial injury and disease and traffic accidents.

Mr. Roger Evans: None. The level of settlement is a matter for the plaintiff and the defendant.

EU Pensions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the percentage contributions provided by employers and employees towards public pensions in the member states of the European Union for the latest year for which information is available.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information available is in the table. In some member states, the contributions for retirement pensions and survivors benefits are included in a general contribution. There are also differences between states in the measure of income/earnings to which the contribution rates apply and in the application of ceilings to contribution amounts. Reliable and detailed information on the precise calculation of contributions is not readily available.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if benefit paid to victims of motor accidents or industrial accident, illness or disease is recovered when their compensation award was not for income maintenance.

Mr. Roger Evans: Yes.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Hague: One item has been received by Ministers in this Department, during the week commencing 6 February 1995.

Unemployment Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of unemployment benefit claimed in each of the past five years in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

EU—contributions towards pensions

	Employer	*Employee*	*Ceiling*	*Benefits covered*
Austria[1]	12.55 per cent.	10.25 per cent.	Yes	Old age, survivors
Belgium	8.86 per cent.	7.5 per cent.	No	Old age, survivors
Denmark	National pension: nil (tax financed) Supplementary pension: fixed rate contribution (½)	National pension: nil (tax financed) Supplementary pension: fixed rate contribution (½)	Not applicable	Old age, survivors
Finland[1]	Basic pension: private sector: 2.4 per cent. of payroll public sector: 3.95 per cent. of payroll Employment pension: 15.2 per cent. (average)	Basic pension 1.8 per cent. Employment pension: 3.0 per cent. (average)	Yes	Old age, survivors, invalidity
France	8.2 per cent. (plus additional contribution for the old age solidarity scheme)	6.55 per cent. (plus additional contribution for the old age solidarity scheme)	Yes	Old age
Germany	9.6 per cent.	9.6 per cent.	Yes	Old age, survivors, invalidity
Greece	13.33 per cent.	6.67 per cent.	Only for those insured before 31.12.92	Old age, survivors, invalidity
Ireland	9.0 per cent. up to IR£173 per week 12.2 per cent. on all earnings where annual income is in excess of IR£9,000	5.5 per cent.	Yes	Old age, survivors, invalidity, sickness, maternity, employment injuries, occupational diseases, unemployment
Italy	18.93 per cent.	8.34 per cent.	No	Old age, survivors, invalidity
Luxembourg	8.0 per cent.	8.0 per cent.	Yes	Old age, survivors, invalidity
Netherlands	Nil	15.85 per cent.	Yes	Old age, survivors

EU—contributions towards pensions

	Employer	*Employee*	*Ceiling*	*Benefits covered*
Portugal	24 per cent.	11 per cent.	No	Old age, survivors, sickness, maternity, invalidity, unemployment, family
Spain	24.4 per cent.	4.9 per cent.	Yes	Old age, survivors, sickness, invalidity, family benefits
Sweden[1]	Basic pension: 7.45 per cent. Supplementary pension: 13 per cent.	Nil	No	Old age, survivors, invalidity
UK	No contributions for weekly earnings below £57; otherwise: 3.6 per cent., 5.6 per cent., 7.6 per cent. or 10.2 per cent., depending on level of earnings.	Rates are reduced by 3 per cent. if employee is contracted out of state earnings-related pension No contributions for weekly earnings below £57; otherwise: 2 per cent. of £57 plus 10 per cent. Rates are reduced by 1.8 per cent. if employee is contracted out of state earnings-related pension	Employees only	Old age, survivors, sickness, maternity, invalidity, unemployment

Sources:
Social Protection in the Member States of the Union—MISSOC 1994
[1] Comparative tables of social security schemes—Council of Europe 1992

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food when he expects to make a decision on the National Rivers Authority's proposed byelaw changes to the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975.

Mr. Jack: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the new National Rivers Authority byelaws intended to rationalise the rules on the close season for fishing for coarse fish. I hope to be able to announce a decision on these in the near future.

Milk Marque

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will conduct an investigation into the sales overseas by Milk Marque during December at discount prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: No. Milk Marque's pricing policy is a commercial matter for the company itself. It is for the competition authorities to investigate any complaints.

Mink and Arctic Fox

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions in the past three years his inspectors have supervised, examined or monitored the slaughter of factory farm mink and Arctic fox; and by what method killings were carried out.

Mrs. Browning: In the last three years officers of the State Veterinary Service have monitored the slaughter of Arctic fox on one occasion and of farmed mink on 11 occasions. The method of slaughter used for the Arctic fox was by lethal injection. The methods used for the farmed mink were exposure to CO and CO_2 and by lethal injection.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if mink or Arctic fox are still present at premises at Brooksbank avenue, Scholemoor, Bradford.

Mrs. Browning: When last visited by the State Veterinary Service in November 1994 no mink or Arctic fox were found on these premises.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken to improve the welfare of mink and Arctic fox kept at factory farms since the Farm Animal Welfare Council report of April 1989.

Mrs. Browning: The welfare of animals farmed for their fur is protected by the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968, which makes it an offence to cause them unnecessary pain or distress. Fur farms are subject to annual visits from officers of the State Veterinary Service, who will check that this legislation is being complied with. We are currently consulting interested organisations on additional advice received from the Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1994.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences were issued for mink factory farms for each county of England and Wales in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Browning: No licences have been issued in Wales in the last five years. The numbers of licences issued in England are as follows:

Number of Licences issued in England during the last five years[1]

County	1 April 1990–31 March 1991	1 April 1991–31 March 1992	1 April 1992–31 March 1993	1 April 1993–31 March 1994	1 April 1994–31 January 1995
Cheshire	2	2	1	—	—
Cornwall	1	1	2	1	1
Dorset	1	1	1	1	1
Hampshire	—	—	—	—	1
Humberside	2	—	1	—	—
Isle of Wight	1	1	1	1	1
Lancashire	9	9	9	4	4
Norfolk	1	1	—	—	—
Northumberland	1	1	1	1	1
South Yorkshire	1	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	1	1
Suffolk	3	3	2	2	1
West Yorkshire	4	—	2	1	1
Total	26	19	20	12	12

[1] The date of issue of a licence does not necessarily correspond with the date on which the licence comes into effect.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

Agri-Environment Regulations

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to meet the EEC Agri-Environment Regulations; and what funds have been made available for their implementation.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* Over the last year we have launched in England six new environmentally sensitive areas, new payments to promote public access in ESA, a habitat scheme, 22 new nitrate sensitive areas, an organic aid scheme and a countryside access scheme. We plan to launch a moorland scheme shortly. These are additional to the 16 existing ESA, the 10 pilot NSAs and the countryside stewardship scheme, which also form part of the agri-environmental programme for England. Expenditure on all these schemes is planned to rise to £75 million in England by 1996–97. In addition, there are separate agri-environment programmes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Pesticides

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has of the connection between pesticide exposure and neurological and other diseases.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* The use of pesticides is closely regulated and monitored. There are no proven links between the use of pesticides, in accordance with their statutory conditions of approval, and neurological and other diseases. However, were any evidence of such links to emerge, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides would be consulted and Ministers would take any necessary action as a matter of urgency.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 6 February 1995, *Official Report*, column 69.

EDUCATION

School Meals

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received about the call to restore nutritional standards for school meals; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: In the last two years, the Department has received 12 written representations on the matter. The Government will be drawing up voluntary nutritional guidance for school meals providers as part of the programme to achieve the targets set in "The Health of the Nation" strategy. I hope that this guidance will be published in the summer.

School Suspensions and Exclusions

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children were *(a)* suspended temporarily and *(b)* excluded permanently from secondary schools in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: Information on permanent exclusions from maintained schools in England was collected by the Department over a two-year period, starting with the summer term 1990, under the national exclusions reporting system. In England, 2,910 permanent exclusions were reported in year one and 3,833 in year two. Figures for temporary exclusions were not collected.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many items she has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received no items from Ian Greer Associates in the last month. Her three ministerial colleagues have received invitations to a social event, which have been declined.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gas (Standing Charges)

1. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trace if he will discuss with the Gas Consumer Council the benefits of abolishing standing charges to customers on low incomes.

Mr. Ian Taylor: British Gas's standing charges are a matter for the company and Ofgas. The tariff formula, agreed by Ofgas, limits the prices which British Gas can charge to tariff customers.

Gas Care Services

5. **Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will meet the Gas Consumer Council to discuss the future of services to gas customers who have disabilities.

Mr. Charles Wardle: British Gas has made it clear that it will not cut the services it offers to the elderly or disabled or introduce charges for such services. The forthcoming Gas Bill will provide that all suppliers make special services available to these groups of customers.

21. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will meet the chairman of British Gas to discuss the future of services to gas customers who have disabilities.

32. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will meet the Gas Regulator to discuss the future of services to gas customers who have disabilities.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Members to the oral answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown).

Council of Ministers

8. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he is next due to meet his EU counterparts at the Council of Ministers; and what will be on the agenda.

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. and noble Friend Earl Ferrers, Minister for Small Firms and Consumer Affairs, will attend the Consumer Council on 30 March. The agenda has not yet been fixed.

Engineering

11. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to promote United Kingdom engineering.

Mr. Needham: Under the title "Action for Engineering" my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has set up an industry—led steering group and five task forces with the remit to increase substantially the influence, involvement and achievements of professional engineers and technicians for the benefit of British industry. This Department also continues to promote innovation, industrially relevant research and development and world-class engineering education and training.

Inward Investment

15. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many inward investment projects were announced during 1994.

Mr. Heseltine: According to figures notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau for the financial year 1993–94, there were 427 decisions by foreign companies to invest in the United Kingdom.

Figures for the financial year 1994–95 will be available in June.

Deregulation

24. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to propose further measures for deregulation.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Deregulation measures are announced as and when the opportunity arises. For example, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently announced that we intend to liberalise the legislation on Sunday licensing. We have now brought into force the great majority of deregulation measures in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. A range of further measures are currently the subject of consultation and consideration and will be announced over the next few months.

30. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what annual target he has set for his Department with regard to the deregulation of existing rules and regulations; and if he will make a statement as to what progress he has made to reach his target in the current year.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Deregulation targets for the year to 31 March 1995 were published as part of MINIS 94 last July. Progress against these targets will be published in May following completion of MINIS 95.

Business Link

25. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to publicise Business Link.

Mr. Heseltine: A major national campaign to develop awareness of business link and to support Business Links local activity is being developed. This will begin when the majority of Business Links are in place.

The campaign will have three phases: first, an editorial and advertising campaign beginning this April; secondly, a national launch of the Business Link network this autumn, by which time almost 200 Business Links should be open; and, thirdly, highly targeted promotion activity from the end of this year, aimed at small firms.

Manufacturing Exports

26. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the latest information he has on the level of manufacturing exports; and what was the corresponding figure for the previous year.

Mr. Needham: Manufacturing exports over the three months to October 1994 amounted to £29 billion, 12 per cent. higher than in the same period of 1993.

British Coal Property

27. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the head of British Coal Property to discuss its future activity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Ministerial colleagues and I have had no meetings with the head of British Coal Property. However we meet senior British Coal staff regularly to discuss a wide range of issues.

28. **Mrs. Adams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will meet the gas regulator to discuss the future of services to gas customers who are blind.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown).

Car Industry

29. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new measures his Department is considering to help the car industry in 1995; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Last May's White Paper "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win" identified a wide range of factors critical to the United Kingdom's international competitiveness. We are reviewing with the car industry the importance of each of these to its own performance and aim to agree, during 1995, a joint programme for accelerating the recovery that is already under way in this key sector.

Postal Services, Rochdale

31. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent meetings he has held with Post Office representatives relating to postal services in Rochdale.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None. The provision of postal services in a specific locality is the operational responsibility of Post Office management.

Oil Industry

33. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on prospects for the United Kingdom oil fabrication sector.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Most of the oil and gas discoveries now being developed need small platforms, floating production systems or sub-sea facilities. Demand for large-scale fabrication work has fallen and we do not expect it to increase significantly in the near future.

Gas Supply

34. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress he is making with his plans to introduce competition in the supply of gas.

Mr. Heseltine: I expect shortly to bring forward a Bill to introduce further competition in the supply of gas. On 24 January I issued a consultation document with the Director General of Gas Supply, inviting views on the choice of areas for the initial phase of competition which would be introduced from 1996–98, subject to parliamentary approval of the Bill. A copy of this consultation document has been sent to all right hon. and hon. Members.

British Rail Engineering

35. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what level of assistance his Department has given British Rail Engineering Ltd. since 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The company, now ABB Vehicles Ltd, has received Government assistance towards its export and research and development efforts.

Small Firms

36. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet representatives of the small firms sector to discuss the abolition of the audit requirements.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have no such plans at present. My Department is in touch with a wide range of interested parties to see how the changes we introduced last August are beginning to operate. We will review the position with those concerned once the efforts of those changes are clear and will, of course, consult widely on any further proposals.

Electricity Interconnector

37. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the current agreement for green ticket payments to Electricté de France for electricity supply via the cross-channel interconnector concludes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government are considering the future of the fossil fuel levy and the associated arrangements, including non-leviable status, in respect of nuclear generation as part of the nuclear review, and I cannot prejudge the outcome.

British Companies

38. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the relative size of the largest British companies, by market capitalisation, compared with the largest companies in other EU countries.

Mr. Charles Wardle: According to the *Financial Times* FT500 which appeared in the FT of 20 January, 40 of the top 100 EU companies ranked by market capitalisation were United Kingdom-registered, including three that are Anglo-Dutch.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many civil servants since 4 May 1979 have left the Export Credits Guarantee Department and within two years joined companies engaged in contracts with the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Needham: Such information is not held by ECGD and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list in order of pound sterling value the 10 principal product imports to the United Kingdom from Indonesia;

(2) if he will list in order of pound sterling volumes the 10 principal United Kingdom product exports to Indonesia.

Mr. Needham: The available information is published in Central Statistical Office business monitor MM20 "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom with countries outside the European Community", available in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each year since 1979 the extent of Export Credits Guarantee Department cover, and the extent of claims paid relating to trade with Indonesia.

Mr. Needham: The figures for business and claims paid in respect of export credits for capital goods and projects to Indonesia are set out in the table:

Year	*Business £ million*	*Claims paid £ million*
1980–81	9	0.5
1981–82	150	0.8
1982–83	566	1.5
1983–84	301	2.1
1984–85	249	2.3
1985–86	140	17.1
1986–87	73	7.1
1987–88	48	6.3
1988–89	67	4.8
1989–90	52	4.3
1990–91	150	3.4
1991–92	124	1.6
1992–93	450	0
1993–94	100	0

Reliable comparable data are not available prior to 1980–81.

Sulphur Quotas

Mr. Beggs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will seek a reallocation over the next two years of unused sulphur quotas from England and Wales to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The allocation of sulphur quotas between England and Wales and Northern Ireland under the United Kingdom's national plan for the implementation of the large combustion plants directive is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In common with other elements of the plan, this is kept under regular review.

Chemical Exports

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how long the group of chemicals and related products now classified as ML7 has required export licences.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Heading ML7 covering toxicological agents, noxious chemicals, tear gas and related equipment, specially designed components and software was introduced into the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1985. Subsequent orders have extended and clarified the items subject to export control under this heading. Prior to 1985 a number of specified noxious chemicals were subject to control.

Export Credits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) of 25 January, *Official Report*, columns *127-8*, regarding export credits if he will provide similar information for *(a)* Brazil, *(b)* Sudan, *(c)* Libya, *(d)* Tunisia, *(e)* the Yemen, *(f)* Malta and *(g)* Chile.

Mr. Needham: The figures requested are shown in the tables:

ECGD total capital goods and project business experience—(£ million) for specific markets requested.

	1980–81	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Brazil	37	49	459	162	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	45
Chile	3	0	1	13	1	0	0	2	0	0	13	0	10	0
Libya	0	70	40	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malta	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sudan	0	0	15	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tunisia	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	13	0
Yemen	0	11	1	0	11	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

ECGD defence business (£ million) for specific markets requested.

	1980–81	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Brazil	0	0	36	111	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45
Chile	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0
Libya	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malta	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sudan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tunisia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yemen	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Fire Safety

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding the review of fire safety legislation and enforcement matters arising from the deregulation proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Since the review was announced on 17 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *381*, colleagues and I have received some 3,500 representations

from various organisations and individuals about the review of fire safety legislation and enforcement. Following the publication of the review team's report for full consultation, over 460 organisations and individuals have provided detailed written comments on the recommendations in the report.

All these comments are now being fully analysed. No decisions will be taken on making changes to the current fire safety legislation and enforcement regime until we have carefully considered all the views that have been expressed.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the latest estimate of the loss of trade with Libya as a result of United Nations sanctions.

Mr. Needham: The British Government neither promote nor discourage trade with Libya. We are not able to estimate the loss of trade as a result of United Nations sanctions. However, provisional figures for 1994 showed that our visible exports decreased 28.1 per cent. to £197 million compared with £274.1 million in 1993.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Heseltine: No items were received from Ian Greer last month.

ICL Technical Plastics

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assistance was given to ICL Technical Plastics, in Glasgow in sponsoring sales trips abroad; and what sum was involved.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* It is not normally the practice to disclose such details, but in view of the public interest in recent allegations about this company I am prepared to disclose that support was given in the context of an overseas trade mission to Singapore in 1978. The case papers have since been routinely destroyed, but the amount of travel grant available for Singapore at that time was £505 to help defray air travel costs.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions were held between his Department and ICL Technical Plastics in order to promote its products in the foreign market place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* There is no record of such discussions with, or support for, ICL Technical Plastics Ltd. for the sale of electro-shock equipment. Establishing whether any other discussions have taken place could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost and would in any case be a matter of commercial confidentiality. I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of today in respect of financial assistance to the company towards participation in an overseas trade mission to Singapore in 1978.

Electro-shock Weapons

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the manufacture and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture by United Kingdom companies to countries with an established record of using torture.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The manufacture of electro-shock weapons is prohibited under the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1992 and requires the specific authority of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. My Department gives careful consideration to applications for the export of weapons. In considering such proposals special care is taken over the political and military implications of allowing consignments to go overseas. Particular attention is paid to countries with poor human rights records, where equipment might be used for internal repression. The Government deeply deprecate the export of any equipment knowingly to be used as an instrument of torture. The difficultly in this area lies in the fact that many perfectly innocuous goods may be misused for such purposes overseas and it is not practical to control the export of such items. However, if any such cases are brought to the Government's attention we shall make the strongest possible representations to those involved. If they are ignored, we will examine what steps could be taken to prevent export from taking place. When realistic, enforceable controls are possible we can act urgently to impose them.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assistance has been given by his Department to United Kingdom companies actively involved in the manufacture, marketing and supply of electro-shock weapons, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* I am not aware of any such companies.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received on the manufacture, marketing and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* A number of people, including right hon. and hon. Members, have written to me about the allegations in the Channel 4 television programme "Dispatches" on 11 January 1995. The companies involved have made public denials of the allegations.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the manufacture and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture by United Kingdom-based companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* None.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the policy of his Department in providing financial assistance to firms involved in the manufacture, marketing or supply of electro-shock weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* I know of no such companies.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assurances are sought from United Kingdom companies active in the manufacture, marketing and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture that such assistance as is given to them will not

be used to facilitate trade in and support the marketing of electro-shock weapons.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* I know of no such companies.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 8 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *301,* what percentage of export credits to Indonesia in each year since 1979 have been related to defence exports.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The percentages requested are set out in the following table:

Year	*Percentage*
1980–81	0
1981–82	36
1982–83	4
1983–84	0
1984–85	44
1985–86	59
1986–87	70
1987–88	13
1988–89	4
1989–90	0
1990–91	2
1991–92	2
1992–93	98
1993–94	6

Reliable comparable data are not available prior to 1980–81.

Contractors

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will identify those contracts dated since January 1990 valued at more than £1 million that have been supported by export credit guarantees, together with the country concerned and the leading United Kingdom contractor.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose details of individual contracts unless the relevant parties have agreed to this.

DEFENCE

Royal Military Police

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances the Royal Military police central criminal records index office computers store information on the sexual orientation of civilians.

Mr. Soames: The Royal Military police central and criminal records intelligence office stores on its computer database information about sexual orientation in individual cases where this has given grounds for an investigation into a suspected offence. The database includes information about investigations of former service personnel suspected of committing an offence while serving in the armed forces and of UK-based civilians and dependants suspected of committing an offence who, while serving overseas, were subject to the Army Act 1955.

Porton Down

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of running the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down in each of the last five years; what is the planned expenditure for each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment Porton Down, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 6 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what has been the total cost of running the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down in each of the last five years; what is the planned expenditure for each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. In providing the gross cash budgets for CBDE Porton Down over the past five years, it is important to recognise that there have been significant changes in accounting and financial practices.

a. From 1990/91 onwards, the figures include works and property management costs as MOD untied from PSA on 1 April 1990.

b. From 1 April 1991, CBDE became a Defence Agency under the Next Steps programme and our annual accounts are in accruals format to a Treasury Accounts Direction.

c. From 1 April 1991 some expenditure previously controlled centrally was desegregated to CBDE causing the gross cash budget to increase.

Consequently the figures provided for 1989/90 and 1990/91 are not directly comparable with those in the published Annual Reports because of the changes in the accounting and financial procedures.

3. The gross cash budgets for CBDE in each of the last five years at 1994/95 price levels was as follows:

Year	*Gross cash budgets £ million*
1989–90	23.4
1990–91	26.7
1991–92	33.4
1992–93	35.0
1993–94	34.2

The apparent increase in cash budget is primarily due to the changes in accounting and financial procedures resulting in the inclusion of the works and property management costs which vary from year to year depending on the works programme. In addition since becoming an Agency CBDE has successfully won contracts from outside the MOD thereby increasing the gross cash budget.

4. The intention is that from 1 April 1995 CBDE Porton Down will become part of the proposed new Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and operate on a trading fund. From this date, CBDE will no longer receive direct vote funding. Its level of expenditure will therefore be determined by the income which it attracts from a number of MOD budget holders. It is consequently not possible to make a definitive statement about the expenditure for the next three years, although it is not expected on current plans to change significantly.

Land Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the research conducted by his Department on the current need for anti-personnel mines by United Kingdom forces.

Mr. Freeman: The need for, and role of, anti-personnel land mines is not assessed separately from our overall military strategy, and can be considered only in that broader context. It is therefore not possible to release information on the military utility of a particular weapon system without revealing details of wider operational capability and tactics. Such information is classified.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will commission a report on the military utility of anti-personnel mines for United Kingdom armed forces within the context of the United Kingdom's military strategy.

Mr. Freeman: Anti-personnel land mines continue to have an important defensive role. Our requirement for such equipment will continue to be kept under review.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the United Kingdom's policy on anti-personnel mines is based on contemporary analysis of the need of these weapons by United Kingdom forces.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom's policy on anti-personnel land mines is based on a number of factors, including not only an analysis of military requirements but a desire to avoid the indiscriminate and irresponsible use of these weapons.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conclusions for United Kingdom policy he has drawn from the report published by the United States Department of Defence in June 1994 entitled "The Military Utility of Landmines: Implications for Arms Control"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have not made an assessment of this report, which I understand was prepared by the Institute for Defence Studies.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give an estimate of the number of land mines on and around the former confrontation lines between the Bosnian Croats and Muslims; what progress has been made in clearing those mines; and if British personnel are involved in this task.

Mr. Soames: Estimates have placed the figure for mines on and around the former confrontation lines as high as 800,000. The mine clearance programme continues and, although this has been successful in clearing many roads and areas in central Bosnia, a significant proportion of mines remain to be dealt with. BRITFOR explosive ordnance disposal personnel continue to make an important contribution to the programme, liaising with Bosnian Muslim and Croatian troops and monitoring clearance operations to ensure that all the mines are lifted and destroyed.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the number of anti-personnel mines still active in the Falkland Islands; and what plans exist for their removal.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 7 February 1995:]:* A total of some 30,000 Argentine mines are believed to remain in the Falkland Islands. We do not have precise details of the numbers of individual types of mine, nor their current condition. Work is progressing on the offer by Argentina to pay a third party to clear the minefields in the Falklands.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* people and *(b)* animals have been injured by anti-personnel land mines in the Falkland Islands and other territories formerly occupied by Argentinian forces.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* Four British service men were seriously wounded in the course of operations to clear minefields in the Falklands Islands immediately after the conflict. No personnel have been injured by mines in other United Kingdom territory in the South Atlantic formerly occupied by Argentine forces. No records are kept of animals injured by mines in the Falkland Islands.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of armed forces personnel sent to Indonesia to support Rapier missile sales.

Mr. Freeman: Details of any training assistance to other countries, including costs, are not normally disclosed as they are regarded as confidential between Governments.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the involvement of armed forces personnel in training members of the Indonesian armed forces or security forces in counter-insurgency techniques since 4 May 1979.

Mr. Soames: Details of any training assistance to other countries are not normally disclosed as they are regarded as confidential between Governments.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department in each year since 1990 of supporting work with the Indonesian national police force.

Mr. Soames: My Department has not been involved in work of this nature.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Ministers or officials in his Department have at any time since 1979 been informed of British-supplied defence equipment being used in East Timor or in its territorial waters or airspace.

Mr. Freeman: My Department has no evidence that British-supplied defence equipment has been used in East Timor.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the rank of defence attachés to the British mission in Indonesia in each year since 1979.

Mr. Soames: Since 1979, the defence attaché to the British embassy in Indonesia has been at the rank of colonel. In addition, an assistant defence attaché with the rank of squadron leader was attached to the embassy from 1981 to 1983. The assistant defence attaché from October 1983 until February 1987 was at the rank of lieutenant colonel. He was replaced by a naval/air attaché at the rank of wing commander from July 1988 until February 1991 and at the rank of commander RN from February 1991 until February 1993, when the post lapsed.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the costs of training consultancy visits to Indonesia by British specialists working with the Indonesian police force in each year since 1990; and in each year how many consultants visited Indonesia.

Mr. Soames: My Department has not engaged in consultancy visits of this kind.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the involvement of United Kingdom armed forces personnel in counter-insurgency activities in Indonesia or East Timor since 4 May 1979.

Mr. Soames: None.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom armed forces personnel have served in Indonesia in each year since 1990.

Mr. Soames: A defence attaché with the rank of colonel is attached to the British embassy in Jakarta with a warrant officer in support. Until 1993, a joint naval air attaché was also attached to the embassy. Details of training assistance given by the UK, including the numbers involved, are not normally disclosed as they are regarded as confidential between the Governments.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the level of military aid to Indonesia for each year since 1979.

Mr. Soames: It is not our practice to disclose information of this nature.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates memoranda of understanding have been signed with the Government of Indonesia since 1 January 1980.

Mr. Freeman: Memoranda of understanding concerning defence contracts with the Government of Indonesia were signed in September 1983, March 1984, April 1986 and November 1991.

Bosnia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what accommodation and facilities are available for British UNPROFOR personnel in Gorazde.

Mr. Soames: British UNPROFOR troops in Gorazde are accommodated in 123 portacabins which are equipped with bunk beds and camp beds and fitted with electric heaters. Troops have access to purpose built shower, toilet and washbasin facilities and the camp has its own tented kitchen facilities which are currently in the process of being replaced by a prefabricated kitchen and dining area. There are also two welfare telephones to enable troops to make calls home.

USA Global Positioning System

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United Kingdom has direct access to the USA global positioning system; and what agreements or treaties govern such access.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom armed forces make extensive use of the United States global positioning system. They do so under conditions set out in a memorandum of understanding first negotiated with the US Department of Defence in 1978. MOU IV signed in October 1993 provides for an extension of these arrangements into the next century.

School and Related Fees

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which armed service officers are entitled to school and related fees for their children to be met from the armed forces vote; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Boarding school allowance is designed to assist with the payment of school fees, and is available to all ranks of the armed forces who are serving either in the United Kingdom or overseas, providing that they meet the eligibility criteria. Service career and manpower structures and terms and conditions of service, including boarding school allowance, are however the subject of an independent review which the then Minister for the Armed Forces my right hon. Friend the Minister for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), announced on 30 March 1994, *Official Report*, columns *752-53*.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what purpose school and related fees are paid from the armed forces vote in respect of the education of children of officers in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Boarding school allowance is provided to assist eligible service parents of all ranks in providing a stable education for their children in the face of the domestic turbulence frequently encountered in service life.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost over the past 10 years of school and related fees for the children of officers in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The total cost of school and related fees is not held by my Department. Boarding school allowance is paid up to a maximum annual limit, and service parents are expected to make a contribution of 10 per cent. to the fees. Additionally, for schools whose fees are higher than this maximum rate of BSA, parents are expected to make up any shortfall themselves. The total amounts of BSA paid for all ranks for the years in question is as follows:

	£ million
1985–86	85.00
1986–87	93.60
1987–88	106.58
1988–89	107.10
1989–90	104.51
1990–91	105.61
1991–92	115.35
1992–93	116.72
1993–94	113.61

The total estimated expenditure for financial year 1994–1995 is £104 million.

Armed Forces (Work and Activities)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records are kept of the work and activities undertaken by members of the armed forces during the hours in which they are on duty.

Mr. Soames: The chain of command in each of the three services exists to ensure that its personnel are working effectively. Against this background, records of work carried out by service personnel are kept only in certain circumstances. These include reports of aircraft or vehicle maintenance completed; stores records of receipts and issues; and log books of various types, including aircrew log books of flying hours. In addition to this, certain records are maintained of individuals' on-the-job training.

Horses (Insurance)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average cost per year of insuring a horse owned by his Department which is involved in *(a)* hunting, *(b)* ceremonial duties and *(c)* neither *(a)* nor *(b)*.

Mr. Soames: Horses owned by my Department are not insured for hunting, ceremonial duty or any other official use.

Hunting

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel from Britannia Naval college in Devon took part in hunts with the Britannia Beagles during duty hours in each of the last three years.

Mr. Soames: No service personnel from the Britannia Royal Naval college have taken part in hunts during duty hours in the last three years.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many horses are owned by his Department; and how many have participated in hunts in each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames: My Department has an establishment of 474 horses with an average strength of around 470. Records do not separately identify hunting from other forms of recognised training, but it is estimated that some 70 horses have participated in hunts in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received relating to damage caused to property under the control of his Department by the Bicester with Whaddon Chase hunt.

Mr. Soames: My Department has no record of any representations relating to damage caused by the Bicester with Whaddon Chase hunt.

Royal Navy Ships

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those Royal Navy ships which are in a state of *(a)* refit, *(b)* repair and *(c)* rest, giving the date when he expects each will return to full service.

Mr. Freeman: All Royal Navy vessels undergo essential repairs and maintenance as required while remaining part of the operational fleet. The following Royal Navy surface ships are, however, undergoing refit and are consequently non-operational: HM Ships Birmingham, York, Edinburgh, London, Bulldog and Orkney. We expect all of these vessels to be returned to operational service within the next year.

We do not hold Royal Navy vessels in a state of rest. Some vessels are held in extended readiness, thus enabling significant running cost savings to be achieved whilst maintaining assets against the eventuality of adverse changes in the international situation. At present, HMS Ark Royal and HMS Intrepid are in extended readiness. For operational reasons, it is not our policy to discuss when these vessels will be returned to operational service.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place an order for the next batch of type 23 frigates.

Mr. Freeman: Invitations to tender for a further batch of up to three type 23 frigates were issued in November 1994. Subject to a successful outcome of the current competition, we hope to be in a position to place an order around the end of the year.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications from members of his Department to join defence or defence-related companies have been approved *(a)* subject to a waiting period and *(b)* with a ban on the involvement of the applicant in a specific project or area of work on behalf of the employer in the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: Over the last 10 years, 4,422 business appointment applications have been approved. Of these, 328 were subject to a waiting period and 242 were subject to a ban on the involvement of the applicant in a specific project or area of work. Many staff submitted multiple applications of a speculative nature, and it is not known how many appointments were taken up.

Departmental Houses (Sales)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number and location of his Department's houses sold off on the last two years; if he will give *(a)* the name of the company which bought the houses, *(b)* the amount received by his Department for the sale of each house; and *(c)* what monitoring is carried on of the price at which the houses were subsequently sold on by estate agents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: In the last two years from 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1994 my Department sold the following dwellings:

Number	*Location*	*Purchaser*
67	Aberdeen	Aberdeen University
19	Abingdon	Individual Purchasers
3	Abingdon	Individual Purchasers
24	Alderton	Individual Purchasers
30	Andover	Individual Purchasers
19	Armagh	Individual Purchasers
1	Aultbea	Individual Purchaser
30	Barton Stacey	Individual Purchasers
6	Barton Stacey	Griffin and Tabb Ltd.
18	Basingstoke	Individual Purchaser
1	Bath	Individual Purchasers
48	Baughurst	Individual Purchasers
3	Bedford	Individual Purchasers
7	Beith	Individual Purchasers
3	Benbecula	Individual Purchasers
1	Benbecula	Western Isles Island Council
1	Benbecula	Highlands and Islands Fire Board
3	Benbecula	Northern Joint Police Committee
1	Benbecula	Property Holdings, Scotland
73	Biggin Hill	Artesian Group of Companies
1	Boscombe Down	Individual Purchaser
4	Bournemouth	Mr. Richards
2	Bovington	Individual Purchasers
68	Bramley	Individual Purchasers
12	Bristol	Haig Homes
5	Broughton Moor	Individual Purchasers
20	Burghfield	Individual Purchasers
5	Caerwent	Individual Purchasers
10	Calcot	Individual Purchasers
1	Cambridge	Individual Purchaser

Number	*Location*	*Purchaser*
32	Campsie	Individual Purchasers
7	Cardington	Individual Purchasers
2	Carlisle	Individual Purchasers
66	Chatham	London and Quadrant Housing Trust
7	Chatham	Individual Purchasers
1	Chattenden	Individual Purchaser
2	Cheadle	Individual Purchasers
4	Chester	Individual Purchasers
7	Chester	Northern Counties Housing Association
1	Cobham	Berkeley Homes
2	Cold Meece	Individual Purchasers
15	Colerne	Individual Purchasers
19	Colerne	O'Kane Properties
16	Colerne	Tyning Properties Ltd
3	Colerne	Sanctuary Spiral Housing Association
3	Colerne/Durrington/ Hullavington	Brecks Property Co Ltd
3	Corsham	Individual Purchasers
2	Crombie	Individual Purchasers
3	Dinton/Tisbury	Hetton Properties Ltd
1	Dumfries	Individual Purchaser
1	Dunfermline	Individual Purchaser
1	Durrington	Individual Purchaser
17	Edinburgh	Individual Purchasers
3	Edinburgh	Cairn Housing Association
2	Ely	Individual Purchasers
3	Enfield Lock	Individual Purchasers
4	Enford/Compton	Individual Purchasers
3	Enniskillen	Individual Purchasers
6	Eskmeals	Individual Purchasers
2	Ewell	Individual Purchasers
10	Exmouth	Individual Purchasers
105	Farnborough	Individual Purchasers
70	Felixstowe	Orwell Housing Association
47	Felixstowe	Individual Purchasers
119	Finningley	South Yorkshire Housing Association
2	Formby	Individual Purchasers
28	Garelochhead	Individual Purchasers
24	Gosport	Individual Purchasers
196	Gosport	Barratt London Ltd
75	Gosport	Ideal Homes
18	Gosport	Portsmouth Housing Association
7	Great Broughton	Individual Purchasers
1	Halton Heath	Individual Purchaser
1	Hampton Magna	Orbit Housing Association
2	Hampton Magna	Individual Purchasers
4	Helensburgh	Individual Purchaser
3	Helston	Individual Purchasers
1	Hendon	Tambarella Properties Ltd
1	Hereford	Individual Purchaser
11	Houndstone	Individual Purchasers
7	Inverness	Individual Purchasers
34	Ipswich	Individual Purchasers
1	Kings Lynn	Individual Purchaser
6	Kirkcudbright	Individual Purchasers
1	Lee on Solent	Individual Purchaser
16	Liverpool	Individual Purchasers
16	Liverpool	Liverpool Housing Trust
6	Lovedean	Arundel Estates
11	Lovedean	Individual Purchasers
37	Lovedean	Portsmouth Housing Association
10	Lower Quinton	Individual Purchasers
1	Lower Quinton	Orbit Housing Association
2	Lyneham	Individual Purchasers
4	Maidstone	Individual Purchasers
11	Malvern	Individual Purchasers
41	Martlesham Heath	Haymills (Contractors) Ltd
17	Newark	C S H Finance Ltd
2	Newark	Individual Purchasers
12	Newbury	Individual Purchasers
1	Northfleet	Individual Purchaser
12	Nythe	Individual Purchasers
21	Padstow	C S H Finance Ltd
19	Plymouth	Individual Purchasers
170	Plymouth	Wallsend Estates
26	Plymouth	Devon and Cornwall Housing Association
54	Plymouth	Plymouth Development Corporation
29	Poole	Individual Purchasers
29	Portadown	Individual Purchasers
36	Portland	Individual Purchasers
66	Portsmouth	Portsmouth Housing Association
3	Portsmouth	Individual Purchasers
228	Portsmouth	Messrs Pantheon
84	Portsmouth	Swaythling Housing Association
12	Portsmouth	Messrs Rendle and Pringle
1	Quedgely	Individual Purchaser
6	Reading	Individual Purchaser
2	Rochdale	Individual Purchaser
56	Rosyth	Individual Purchasers
16	Saxa Vord	Shetland Islands Council
1	Sevenoaks	Individual Purchaser
24	Shawbury	Bromford Corinthian Housing Association
8	Shawbury	Beth Johnson Housing Association
22	Shawbury	Individual Purchasers
14	Shoeburyness	Individual Purchasers
42	Shotley Gate	Hodge and Co
24	Shotley Gate	Haymills (Contractors) Ltd
52	Shotley Gate	Individual Purchasers
3	Small Dole	Individual Purchasers
1	Southwater	Individual Purchaser
24	Stafford	Individual Purchasers
5	Stockton Heath	Individual Purchasers
1	Stornoway	Individual Purchaser
3	Strood	Individual Purchasers
2	Strood	V Perry
33	Tadley	Individual Purchasers
13	Tandragee	Individual Purchasers
1	Tangmere	Individual Purchaser
1	Thetford	Individual Purchaser
26	Thurso	Caithness District Council
38	Thurso	Individual Purchasers
4	Tidworth	Individual Purchasers
1	Tisbury	Individual Purchaser
1	Waltham Abbey	Individual Purchaser
1	Warton	Individual Purchaser
1	Welford	Individual Purchaser
5	Whitby	Individual Purchasers
1	Woodford Green	Individual Purchaser
30	Woolwich	Giftboat Properties
8	Woolwich	N H P Homes Ltd
80	Woolwich	Brickstern Ltd
2	Wythenshaw	Individual Purchasers

Bulk sales are carried out by tender or at the district valuer's valuation to ensure that we receive a full market price. Individual purchasers include service personnel who have bought through the services' discount scheme,

tenants of MOD civilian houses who have bought at a discount and individuals who have bought on the open market through the estate agents. The amount received from sales is commercial in confidence and there are no measures in hand to monitor the price at which houses are subsequently sold on by estate agents.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel houses have been sold by his Department in each of the last five years; and how much money was received for the sales in each of these years.

Mr. Soames: The number of service married quarters sold and the capital receipts from these sales in each of the past five financial years was as follows:

Financial year	*Total sold*	*Receipts £ million*
1989–90	1,380	46
1990–91	2,121	44
1991–92	1,306	51
1992–93	857	33
1993–94	1,254	24

Receipts do not always relate directly to the number of houses sold in a particular year because of stage payments and accounting procedures.

Type 42 Destroyers

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's current policy towards the Horizon class replacement for type 42 destroyers.

Mr. Freeman: We remain committed to Project Horizon. A memorandum of understanding for the joint development of this project was signed by the three partner nations, Britain, France and Italy, in July of last year. We continue to plan to replace the Royal Navy's type 42 destroyers with the common new generation frigate early in the next century.

Competing for Quality Programme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision for continuity of supply is made in the contracts awarded to private contractors as part of his Department's competing for quality programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Continuity of supply, or service, is ensured by the arrangements under which our contracts are placed. These arrangements include the use of appropriate conditions of contract, and proper planning of tendering programmes.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what days he attended the House during the parliamentary week beginning 30 January.

Mr. Soames: Mr right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence attended the House on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of the parliamentary week beginning 30 January.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Freeman: My ministerial colleagues and I keep no records of the unsolicited mail or other items that we receive.

I have received one social invitation from Ian Greer Associates which I have declined.

Procurement Projects

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the 10 most expensive procurement projects currently being undertaken by his Department; what was the original estimated cost of each of these projects and their current estimated cost at today's prices; and what was the original planned in-service dates of each project together and the latest estimate of the in-service date.

Mr. Freeman: The 10 most expensive procurement projects currently being undertaken by the Ministry of Defence are set out below. Where data are classified or of a commercially sensitive nature this had been omitted.

Procurement project	*Original estimated cost £*	*Current estimated cost £*	*Original planned in-service date*	*Current in-service date*
Trident	15.1 billion	11.6 billion	December 1994	[2]December 1994
EF 2000[1]	12.7 billion	14.9 billion	December 1998	December 2000
Common New Generation Frigate (project horizon)	4.5 –5 billion	4.5 –5 billion	December 2002	[3]n/a
EH101 Merlin[1]	3.8 billion	3.9 billion	December 1993	December 1998
Bowman[1]	2.1 billion	1.9 billion	December 1995	January 2000
Challenger 2[4]	1.1 billion	2.02 billion	December 1995	December 1995
Spearfish	885 million	[5]1.1 billion	December 1987	March 1994
Asraam	871 million	795 million	December 1994	December 1998
Tornado MLU	[6]829 million	837 million	June 1993	September 1998
High Velocity Missile (HVM)[7]	397 million	411 million	December 1990	Mid 1995

Notes:
[1] Previously reports in *Hansard* on 1 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *744*.
[2] For first of class. ISD data for the remaining boats is classified.
[3] Date classified.
[4] Costs include Challenger Armament (CHARM) 1 and 3 Programme.
[5] Excludes cost of main production order as commercially sensitive.
[6] At November 1993 reapproval of 'reduced scope' programme.
[7] Tranche 1 only.

Ministry of Defence Police Federation

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions he visited the Ministry of Defence Police Federation's exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall during the week beginning 30 January; which police or federation officers he met; what topics he discussed with these officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend did not make an official visit to the exhibition, but had the opportunity to see it when he was in the Upper Waiting Hall on Wednesday 1 February 1995. At the time, there were no MOD police or Defence Police Federation representatives present.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what independent medical audit is carried out on the assessments made of Gulf war veterans claiming to be suffering from Gulf war syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department is obviously concerned that any serving or former members of the armed forces should be worried about their health following service in the Gulf. It was for this reason that numerous appeals have been made for individuals to come forward for a thorough medical examination under our Gulf medical assessment programme. Under this programme, which has been the main focus of our investigations into the alleged Gulf War syndrome, United Kingdom Gulf veterans receive a full medical evaluation by military medical specialists. Approximately one third of the 233 veterans who have so far come forward under this programme have now been assessed and diagnosed, enabling some provisional conclusions to be drawn.

Although there remains no scientific or medical evidence of a syndrome, the substantial statistical assurance which these investigations provide now make it appropriate for these preliminary findings to be subject to independent verification and to be publicised. consequently, the Royal College of Physicians has been approached to carry out an independent clinical audit of our assessment programme and its results to date, and it has kindly agreed to do so. It has been our intention to make public the detailed preliminary findings of the assessment programme at an appropriate stage when sufficient Gulf veterans have been examined under the MOD medical assessment programme, and I have agreed with the Surgeon General that he should do this in a letter to the *British Medical Journal* after 100 such assessments have been made.

I again urge all current and former armed forces personnel with concerns about their health as a result of service in the Gulf conflict to come forward, through their normal doctors, for assessment under the programme. For those still serving I repeat my assurance that their careers will not be jeopardised as a result.

Defence Industrial Base

Sir John Cope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will set out the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the United Kingdom's strategic defence industrial base and its relationship to defence procurement decisions.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* Although we see our relationship with industry as principally one of customer to supplier, we fully recognise that it is an advantage to us and to the economy more generally to have a healthy, technologically capable and broad-based defence industry.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 6 February, by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, *Official Report*, column *69*.

SCOTLAND

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1055*, which posts were filled as a result of the employment of executive search agencies, which executive search companies were involved in this exercise; and what were the values of the individual contracts involved.

Mr. Lang: Between 2 December 1993 and 30 November 1994, my Department made use of executive search agencies Goddard Kay Rogers and Associates Ltd. and Korn Ferry International. These were for appointments to Director of Human Resources and Director of Finance respectively, both within the NHS-Management Executive in Scotland. The total cost was £69,912 including VAT, as stated on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1055*.

In addition, although none of my agencies has used executive search agencies for search purposes, the Scottish Prison Service has used recruitment services provided by the following companies:

Companies	
Melville Craig	Marketing and sales manager
NB Selection	Five human resource managers; one senior procurement officer
Rileys	Ongoing campaign to recruit band C
Search	Prison officers. Partial cost only paid so far. Remaining costs to be paid at the successful conclusion of the campaign.
Search	Procurement buyer

The cost of this work, which involves advertising and dealing with resulting applications was £64,358.84.

The value of individual contracts is a matter for the companies themselves and is regarded as commercial in confidence.

Agricultural Census

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the rate of response in each of the past five years in respect of the June agricultural census forms; and when was the last prosecution for failure to return the agricultural census forms.

Sir Hector Monro: The response rate for the main June census was as follows:

1990 per cent.	1991 per cent.	1992 per cent.	1993 per cent.	1994 per cent.
93	93	90	92	92

The last year in which non-respondents were prosecuted for failure to return a June agricultural census form was 1992.

Gourock Ropeworks

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last discussed the present circumstances surrounding the Gourock ropeworks in Port Glasgow with Historic Scotland and the Inverclyde district council; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Historic Scotland is an executive agency within the Scottish Office and reports to my right hon. Friend on built heritage matters.

My right hon. Friend has recently received a letter from Inverclyde district council conveying the council's view that the Gourock ropeworks should not be converted for residential accommodation but should be demolished. He has noted that view.

The building is a category A listed building. Its demolition would require the granting of listed building consent, for which no application has yet been received.

Historic Buildings

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those historic buildings, listed for their architectural merit in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole which have subsequently been de-listed and demolished in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The subjects of the question relate to matters undertaken by Historic Scotland. I have asked its Director and Chief Executive, Mr. Graeme Munro to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from F. J. Lawrie to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 8 February 1995:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Scotland for written answer on 8 February seeking statistics on de-listing and demolition of listed buildings. As your Question relates to operational matters undertaken by Historic Scotland, Mr. Graeme Munro, Historic Scotland's Director and Chief Executive, has been asked to provide the information you seek. In Mr. Munro's absence, I am responding.

I regret that we cannot answer the Question precisely as posed, since we do not keep a separate record of demolitions of listed buildings. Listed buildings may be demolished after the granting of listed building consent, but listed buildings are also lost from time to time by accident, such as through fire damage or structural failure.

The removal of demolished buildings from the statutory list would occur either through routine list maintenance or as a result of the rolling programme of national re-survey. Information on the annual number of deletions from the statutory list is only readily available from 1989; this information is as follows:

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Strathclyde	26	6	7	8	17	16
Scotland	704	374	123	23	81	44

Although we do not keep separate statistics to show why listed buildings have been deleted from the statutory lists, the majority of the deletions arise following re-assessment of merit under the re-survey programme.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mink Farming

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many licences were issued for mink factory farms for each county of Scotland in each of the last five years.

Sir Hector Monro: The numbers of licensed mink farms over the past five years are as follows:

Region	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Central	1	—	—	—	—
Grampian	1	1	1	1	—
Strathclyde	3	1	1	—	—
Tayside	1	—	—	—	—
Total	6	2	2	1	—

Lochgreen Hospital

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will instruct Forth Valley health board to extend beyond 8 February the period for consultation on the board's proposal to close Lochgreen hospital;

(2) if he will instruct Fort Valley health board to hold a public meeting as part of the consultation process on the board's proposal to close Lochgreen hospital.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The three-month public consultation on the closure of Lochgreen hospital was originally due to finish on 11 January. Forth Valley health board extended the period to finish on 8 February in response to a request from Central regional council and has no plans to extend the period further.

The Scottish Office guidance on closure and change of use of health service premises published in June 1975 sets out the procedure which health boards must follow when proposing to close a hospital. It is a matter for the health board concerned to decide whether to hold public meetings.

Housing

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the names of the housing associations in *(a)* Greenock and *(b)* Port Glasgow which will be allowed by Scottish Homes to bid for houses which Scottish Homes seeks to release;

(2) what constraints have been placed upon Rankin housing association by Scottish Homes; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if the ballot papers issued to Scottish Homes tenants in Greenock and Port Glasgow will have an option for the tenants to vote *(a)* to remain with Scottish Homes, *(b)* to be transferred to (i) the Rankin housing association, (ii) the Clock housing association (iii) the James Watt housing association, (iv) the Victoria housing association (v) some other community-based housing association or (vi) the Inverclyde district council; and if he will make a statement;

(4) which housing schemes in *(a)* Greenock and *(b)* Port Glasgow Scottish Homes is attempting to transfer to housing associations or other landlords;

(5) what is the current value of the houses in *(a)* Greenock and *(b)* Port Glasgow that the Rankin housing association is seeking to acquire from Scottish Homes; and how much will be charged by Scottish Homes for these acquisitions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

NHS Trusts

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which hospital and related trusts have introduced elements of performance-related salaries for their employees.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* All NHS trusts in Scotland have introduced elements of performance-related salaries for some of their staff.

Agri-environmental Regulations

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to meet the EEC agri-environmental regulations; and what funds have been made available for their implementation.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* The Scottish agri-environment programme introduced under Council regulation EEC 2078/92 includes the extension of the environmentally sensitive area scheme and new schemes to encourage the conservation of heather moorland, the creation of wildlife habitats, organic farming, and informal recreation in ESAs and on set-aside land. The only scheme not yet introduced is the heather moorland scheme and this is scheduled for the spring. Expenditure on all these schemes is planned to rise to £12 million by 1996–97.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* In 1994, the Scottish Office and its executive agencies recruited 158 staff at a total cost of £416,000. This excludes the recruitment of casual, temporary and seasonal staff. It also excludes the cost of executive search agencies which was the subject of a separate answer on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1055*.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specifically designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specifically designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* These are matters which are delegated to agency chief executives and I have asked them to reply. Copies of their letters will be placed in the House Library.

Registers of Scotland was a separate Government Department in its own right and the Scottish Record Office was an associated department of the Scottish Office and as such neither was part of the Scottish Office before they became executive agencies.

When functions were transferred from the core of the Scottish Office to the agencies, so was the necessary funding; staffing levels in the Scottish Office and its agencies have decreased over the four years since the establishment of the first Executive Agency in my Department.

The record of agencies in improving effectiveness and efficiency in government is summarised in the "Next Steps Review 1994," Cm 2750.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 9 February 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information is not available for the full period covered by the question. According to the best information available, our total expenditure on external consultants in 1992–93 was £3.531 million at 1993–94 prices.

Consultants are used in a variety of activities designed to produce different benefits. Much of their work is linked to the requirements of Government programmes such as training and designing IT systems, rather than simply cost-cutting exercises. In addition, consultants are often only one of a number of contributory elements in projects that may produce savings. In these circumstances, it is not possible to quantify the annual savings which have resulted from the use of consultants.

The Lord Chancellor is responsible for three agencies: Her Majesty's Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office. As the question concerns specific operational matters on which the chief executives of the three agencies are best placed to provide answers, I have accordingly asked the chief executives to reply direct.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 7 February 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary, of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your parliamentary question listed on 6 February 1995, regarding expenditure on external consultants.

The Public Trust Office's (PTO) expenditure since 1987 is as follows:

Year	*Consultants*	*Actual spend*	*Spend in 1994 prices*
1992–93	Ernst and Young	26,508.00	27,865.49
	P-E International	6,110.00	6,422.90
	Total	32,618.00	34,288.39
1993–94	Ernst and Young	1,917.60	1,955.95
	P-E International	8,460.00	8,629.20
	Total	10,377.60	10,585.15
1994–95	Price Waterhouse	65,742.55	65,742.55
	Total	65,742.55	65,742.55

The Price Waterhouse report is still under discussion and decision are expected in the next month. The P-E International work resulted in savings of £91 kpa. The Ernst Young project did not lead to quantifiable reduction in cost. However it enabled the PTO to establish a corporate planning process which has helped us to plan for and achieve Executive Agency status without any additional cost in overall terms.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 February 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION—EXPENDITURE ON CONSULTANTS IN HM LAND REGISTRY

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, since 1987. I can provide the following information:

Year	*Actual Cost £*	*Cost at 1994 prices £*
1987–88	17,956	25,719
1988–89	37,149	49,872
1989–90	42,900	53,833
1990–91	48,062	55,836
1991–92	98,539	107,710
1992–93	54,224	57,001
1993–94	157,022	160,162

HM Land Registry has not used consultancy services extensively (the actual cost in 1993–94, for instance, represented only 0.08% of its total expenditure) and its main engagements are for specialist tuition and information Systems business services—the latter being provided throughout the period by the Government Centre for Information Systems (CCTA), particularly providing advice and services on procurement. Consequently, it has not been possible to quantify annual cost savings. Consultants' services have made a contribution to the overall cost savings achieved by the Registry which, for example, in 1993–94, amounted to a 2.97% reduction in unit costs in real terms over the previous year, equivalent to an overall saving of £5.9 million.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 February 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: EXPENDITURE ON EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about expenditure on external consultants since 1987, and the quantified annual cost savings which have resulted from this expenditure.

1. The Public Record Office's annual expenditure on consultants (in 1994 prices) was:

1986–87: nil

1987–88: nil

1988–89: £80,276

1989–90: £46,745

1990–91: £243,000

1991–92: £349,111

1992–93: £971,568

1993–94: £674,305

2. The above includes £87,954 spent over 1992–93 and 1993–94 on consultancy to support the market testing programme, which has resulted in an annualised net saving of £291,000 per annum.

3. Other consultancies have been to carry out necessary specialised work beyond this department's normal scope, rather than to realise direct cost savings. They have related primarily to the construction of a new building, also to the installation of computer systems and training.

Government Legal Departments

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the actual annual expenditure on Government legal departments in each year since 1979, in 1994 prices; and if he will provide the breakdown of such expenditures between *(a)* courts services, *(b)* legal aid, *(c)* magistrates courts and *(d)* salaries of the judiciary; and if he will provide similarly tabulated data showing expenditures on the Public Record Office.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The readily available figures for the Lord Chancellor's Department are those published in the Government's expenditure plans. They are set out in table 1. Column *(a)* is net of receipts and includes court building. To allow comparisons between years, the figures have been adjusted to include superannuation contributions, inter-departmental transfers and the transfer of responsibility for magistrates courts from the Home Office in 1992.

Figures for the Northern Ireland court service are set out in table 2. The Northern Ireland court service took over responsibility for legal aid in April 1982 and before that figures are not available. Column *(a)* includes the magistrates courts, which in Northern Ireland are an integral part of the court service and separate figures are not available.

Figures for the Public Record Office are shown in table 3.

Table 1—Lord Chancellor's Department

£ million

Year	*(a)* *Court services*	*(b)* *Legal aid*	*(c)* *Magistrates courts*	*(d)* *Salaries of the judiciary*	*(e)* *Total expenditure*
1979–80	132	295	192	22	631
1980–81	141	351	212	29	733
1981–82	131	388	214	30	763
1982–83	118	380	208	32	738
1983–84	159	400	216	32	807
1984–85	167	447	219	34	867
1985–86	166	486	224	40	916
1986–87	169	537	237	46	989
1987–88	204	598	246	48	1,096
1988–89	250	630	200	49	1,129
1989–90	283	700	204	47	1,234
1990–91	322	780	285	48	1,435
1991–92	382	971	297	51	1,701
1992–93	415	1,123	293	53	1,884
1993–94	391	1,212	290	55	1,948

Source:
Government's expenditure plans.

Table 2—Northern Ireland Court Service

£ million

Year	*(a)* *Court services*	*(b)* *Legal aid*	*(d)* *Salaries of the judiciary*	*(e)* *Total expenditure*
1979–80	9	—	2	11
1980–81	13	—	2	15
1981–82	14	—	2	16
1982–83	14	7	2	23
1983–84	14	11	2	27
1984–85	13	9	2	24
1985–86	12	12	2	26
1986–87	15	12	3	30
1987–88	17	13	3	33
1988–89	19	17	3	39
1989–90	20	15	3	38
1990–91	22	16	3	41
1991–92	20	17	3	40
1992–93	21	22	3	46
1993–94	23	18	3	44

Source:
Appropriation accounts and Government's expenditure plans.

Table 3 Public Record Office

£ million

Year	*Total expenditure*
1979–80	5
1980–81	6
1981–82	6
1982–83	6
1983–84	14
1984–85	15
1985–86	15
1986–87	15
1987–88	15
1988–89	13
1989–90	20
1990–91	22
1991–92	23
1992–93	27
1993–94	36

Source:
Supply estimates.
Notes:
1. 1993–94 prices—adjusted by the GDP deflator published 29 November 1994.

ENVIRONMENT

Care in the Community

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the housing implications for local authorities of the care in the community programme.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The impact of care in the community on local housing policies was raised with my Department by a number of local authorities during meetings to discuss the 1995–95 housing investment programme.

Housing Grants, Sandwell

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses in Sandwell are in a condition qualifying them for repairs or renovation grants; and what is the average cost per household and grants.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The only data on condition available are Sandwell's estimates of the number of private sector unfit dwellings which, subject to the household test of resources, would be eligible for a mandatory renovation grant. The authority estimated that there were 13,600 dwellings in this category at 1 April 1994. The average mandatory renovation grant payment in England is £8,600; this relates to grants where final payment was made during the financial year 1993–94.

Dog Licensing

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further consideration he has given to introducing a system of dog licensing in England and Wales similar to the scheme operating in Northern Ireland.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government have no plans to introduce dog licensing in England and Wales.

Nirex

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters his Department has received calling for a wide public inquiry into the Nirex rock characterisation facility.

Sir Paul Beresford: About 340 letters have been received by the planning inspectorate requesting a wide-ranging inquiry into UK Nirex's planning appeal against Cumbria county council's refusal of permission for the rock characterisation facility.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses his Department has received to its consultation on the radioactive waste management review.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) on Tuesday 29 November, *Official Report*, column *647*.

Uranium

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet discovered the source of the depleted uranium tailings found at Poplar farm, Chelveston.

Mr. Atkins: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is investigating the origins of the depleted uranium swarf found in a field at Poplar farm, Chelveston, Northamptonshire. It has uncovered evidence which may point to the likely source of at least some of the material. However, the investigation is continuing and at this stage it would be premature to release information until all the evidence has been fully substantiated and future action decided.

Clinical Waste

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will issue directives to enforcing agencies to ensure that the deadline of 1 October set out in guidance note PG5/1 relating to clinical waste incinerators is enforced in a rigorous and timely manner;

(2) if he will make it his policy to remove any disparities of environmental standards imposed on clinical waste incinerators of differing sizes by guidance note PG5/1 and regulations IPR5/2.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) by the Under Secretary of State for the Environment on 19 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *659*.

Local Planning Authorities

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if local planning authorities have an obligation to protect the local community from the effects arising from opencast mining sites and other large land obligations.

Sir Paul Beresford: Mineral planning guidance note 3 advises mineral planning authorities to take into account the effect of opencast coal mining on local communities, together with any steps that the operator proposes to take to minimise these effects, before deciding whether

planning permission should be granted for opencast coal proposals. Where permission is granted, appropriate planning conditions should be attached to the permission to protect the interests of local communities. In addition, the Coal Industry Act 1994 imposes an environmental duty on the coal industry, and mineral planning authorities are required to have regard to the extent to which the operator has complied with the duty.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy in respect of the obligation of bonds imposed by local planning authority on the owners of opencast mining sites and other large land obligations for the restoration of such sites.

Sir Paul Beresford: It is Government policy that sites used for opencast mining should be properly restored to a beneficial use when extraction has ceased. This policy objective should normally be achieved through implementation by the mineral operators of appropriate planning conditions attached to the permissions. Therefore local authorities should not usually have to require a bond to secure site restoration, in addition, through a planning agreement or obligation.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987 in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held centrally by my Department and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Credit Liabilities

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the purposes to which the provision for credit liabilities may be applied.

Mr. Gummer: Amounts set aside by local authorities as provision for credit liabilities under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 may be applied to meet liabilities in respect of borrowing and credit arrangements. Such amounts may also be applied to meet capital expenditure, subject to the use of a credit approval. However, authorities with no long-term debt and negative credit ceiling may spend or transfer their provision for credit liabilities in accordance with regulations under the 1989 Act.

Valuation Tribunals

Mr Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response was received to the consultation paper on the appointment of members of valuation tribunals in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The list of responses received has been placed in the Library of the House; copies of individual responses may be obtained from my Department's Library. In addition, one response was submitted by an individual on a confidential basis. Amendments to regulations will be introduced shortly to give effect to the following measures: the limit on billing authority members to one third of the total membership is to be extended to include county councillors; to extend the period of membership of a chairman at the end of his or her appointment until a replacement has been re-elected; the president, on election, is to fill the post of one of the chairmen; tribunals may elect a deputy president from one of the chairmen; employees may not be appointed as members; and the president may apply to the Secretary of State for a case to be heard by a different tribunal if it involves a former member or employee.

Scrap Metal

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide exemptions from waste management licensing for the recovery of scrap metal and the dismantling of waste motor vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: On 8 November 1994, I published a consultation paper setting out our proposals for exemptions from waste management licensing under part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 for the recovery of scrap metal and the dismantling of waste motor vehicles. We have considered the responses to that consultation exercise and have now laid before Parliament the Waste Management Licensing (Amendment etc.) Regulations 1995, S.I 1995 No. 288.

The Government's policy is that the controls applied to waste should be proportionate to the risks involved and the benefits to be obtained and should not impose unjustifiable or disproportionate burdens on those subject to control, especially small businesses. The scrap metal and waste motor vehicle dismantling industry plays an important role in the recovery of waste.

The aim of the exemptions from licensing provided in the regulations is to encourage the recovery of scrap metal where the industry's activities do not pose a threat to the environment or human health. To ensure that this aim is fulfilled, the exemptions we have provided specify the types and quantities of waste and the conditions under which the industry's activities will be exempt. Any scrap metal or waste motor vehicle dismantling yards which do not meet these conditions will be subject to waste management licensing.

Our consultation paper invited comments on whether the fragmentisation of scrap metal and waste motor vehicles should be the subject of an exemption. We have considered the comments made on this issue. Our conclusion is that it would not be appropriate to provide an exemption for fragmentisation and that this activity should remain subject to licensing.

The main purpose of the regulations is to provide exemptions for scrap metal recovery, but they make certain other provisions. These provisions include an extension of the transitional arrangements which exempt certain people from the requirement to demonstrate technical competence when applying for a waste management licence. The new exemptions will apply to people who have managed waste facilities authorised under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and managers of facilities which did not need a licence under the Control of Pollution Act 1974. The regulations also extend the list of equipment prescribed as mobile plant for the treatment or disposal of waste.

We will publish as soon as possible a circular providing guidance on the regulations and waste management paper No. 4A, which will provide guidance on those scrap metal recovery activities remaining subject to licensing.

PRIME MINISTER

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

The Prime Minister: There has been no expenditure by my Office on external consultants, including management consultants, since 1987.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 February.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 9 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Permanent Secretaries

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the pay of permanent secretaries.

The Prime Minister: The Government announced in Cm. 2748 presented to Parliament on 26 January that they intended to introduce new arrangements for the pay of Permanent Secretaries from 1 April, and that they would make a further announcement in conjunction with its response to the report of the senior salaries review body. The Government have now considered the recommendations of the review body.

As foreshadowed in the Command Paper, a remuneration committee will be established to advise Ministers on where individual permanent secretaries should be placed within the pay range. The full terms of reference are given.

The final decisions on the pay of individual permanent secretaries will be for the Government, who expect normally to accept the recommendations of the committee.

There will be five members of the committee—three members of the review body, the head of the civil service and the head of the Treasury. The chairman of the review body will normally chair the committee.

The three external members will, sitting alone, make recommendations to the Government on the salaries of the Heads of the civil service, the Treasury and the diplomatic service.

Sir Michael Perry, who will succeed Lord Nickson as chairman of the review body in April, has agreed to chair the committee. Mr. Gordon Hourston and Ms Yve Newbold, both members of the review body, have agreed to serve on it. I am grateful to all of them for undertaking this important additional task.

The review body proposed a pay range of £90,000-£150,000. The Government accept this recommendation. The salaries of individual posts will be published in £5,000 bands once each year in the following annual report of the review body. Parallel arrangements will be made for the most senior ambassadors.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

Membership

1. There shall be a committee on the pay of Permanent Secretaries of whom the members will be:

3 members of the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB);

the Heads of the Home Civil Service and Treasury.

2. The chairman of the committee will be one of the members, normally the Chairman, of the SSRB.

Remit: Permanent Secretaries other than the Heads of the Home Civil Service, the Diplomatic Service and the Treasury

3. The purpose of the committee is for the three SSRB members to make proposals to Ministers on the pay of individual Permanent Secretaries save insofar as their pay is determined by the terms of an individual appointment.

4. The pay of Permanent Secretaries will be accommodated within the pay range to be determined from time to time by the Government. The committee may not propose other forms of remuneration or benefit than pay falling within this range.

5. In making proposals the committee shall take the following factors into account in relation to individuals:

the relative level of responsibility of the post occupied;

the performance of the Department in executing the policy of Ministers and the personal contribution the individual has made in terms of policy advice and efficient management, including where appropriate meeting the measured objectives of the Department;

the experience of the individual in the present post or in others occupied at Permanent Secretary/Head of Department Level;

in the case of those newly promoted, the level of pay in their previous post;

any views which the Minister, to whom the Permanent Secretary is principally responsible, may wish to offer to the committee;

the individual's own assessment of his/her achievements and the main requirements of the job.

6. The committee should also take into account these wider factors:

the pay levels of other staff in the Senior Civil Service, and in particular those immediately below Permanent Secretary;

the increases recently given to, or likely to be given, in the period ahead, to civil servants generally, and the pay progression available to them;

the extent of the change for any individual as well as the absolute level of pay, and the presentation of both;

any movement in the pay range as a whole;

the nature and terms of the Civil Service pension scheme;

any statements made by the Government on public sector pay;

the maintenance of the confidence of the individual, that recommendations have been properly and fairly determined;

the need to ensure recommendations are consistent with the Government's equal opportunities policy.

Remit: Pay of Civil Service members of the Remuneration Committee and Head of the Diplomatic Service

7. The SSRB members of the committee will, sitting alone, make proposals to Ministers on the pay of the Heads of the Home Civil

Service, of the Diplomatic Service and of the Treasury. For this purpose they will take account of all the factors noted in paragraphs 4–6 above as relevant to the pay of Permanent Secretaries.

Review Bodies

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the review body reports.

The Prime Minister: The 1995 reports of the review bodies on the pay of schoolteachers, senior civil servants, the senior military, the judiciary, the armed forces, doctors and dentists, nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and the professions allied to medicine have now been published. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. The Government are grateful to the members of the review bodies for the time and care which they have put into the preparation of the reports.

The Government's policy is that increases in pay must be fully met from existing budgets. Pay increases for public sector staff therefore have to be paid for by greater efficiency or by other economies. This position was reaffirmed in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement on public sector pay on 14 September 1994, and in the Government's evidence to the review bodies. It is fundamental to the Government's response to their recommendations.

The review bodies have made the following recommendations:

The Armed Forces Pay Review Body has recommended a range of increases in daily rates of between 2.5 and 2.9 per cent., averaging 2.6 per cent. for the various ranks in its remit group.

The Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine has recommended a 1.0 per cent. increase in national salary rates to be supplemented by local negotiations on pay and, where appropriate, leads and allowances and/or conditions. The Review Body has said it expects that, in the majority of cases, the outcome of local negotiations would provide improvements for the staff concerned totalling between 1.5 and 3 per cent., including 1 per cent. increase in national rates.

The Doctors and Dentists Review Body has recommended pay increases of 2.5 per cent. generally for members of its remit group, and 3 per cent. in the intended average net remuneration of general medical practitioners. It has recommended that Trusts able to conclude local agreements with the profession should proceed accordingly. It also recommends an alternative system of transitional local pay for hospital consultants accepting a divergence from the nationally determined scale subject to a maximum increase of 5 per cent. in consultants' average salary in each Trust.

The School Teachers' Review Body has recommended a 2.7 per cent. increase in teachers' pay.

The Senior Salaries Review Body has recommended:

(i) an increase of 2.5 per cent. in the budget for performance related pay for civil servants in Grades 2 and 3 and increases in the relevant pay ranges;

(ii) a new pay range for Permanent Secretaries to replace the existing system of spot rates with pay decisions to be made on the basis of advice from a new remuneration committee.

(iii) a range of increases between 2.5 and 3.8 per cent., averaging 3.2 per cent., in the pay of senior armed forces officers.

(iv) a 2.5 per cent. increase in the pay of the judiciary.

The Government have taken their decisions on these recommendations on the basis of our approach to public sector pay. We accept the recommendations and propose to implement them from the due date of 1 April. The costs will be met from the public expenditure totals published at Budget time. There will be no new money to finance these pay increases, and for the third year running there will be no call on the reserve.

The Government in particular welcome and support the recommendations of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine for the development of local pay determination for members of its remit groups. Negotiations with the staff sides at national level need to be concluded quickly to facilitate additional local payments. The Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body has reaffirmed its support for moves towards local pay determination and negotiations are being held with the professions on changes to the distinction awards scheme for consultants which should lead to much greater local involvement. The review body had advocated brisk progress and both sides expect these negotiations to be concluded in the next few months.

I am making a separate announcement on the arrangements for determining the pay of individual permanent secretaries.

Summary of Main Pay Recommendations

	Main pay increases per cent.	*Paybill cost [1] £ million*	*Per cent.*
DDRB *(Doctors and Dentists)*	[2]2.5–3.0	144	2.9
NPRB *(Nurses and Allied Professions)*			
Nurses and Midwives	1.5–[3]3.0	117–234	1.5–3.0
PAMs	1.5–[3]3.0	15–31	1.5–3.0
All NAPRB groups	1.5–[3]3.0	132–265	1.5–3.0
SSRB *(Senior Civil Service, Military and Judiciary)*			
CS Grades 2–3	[4]–	1.2	2.5
Senior Military	2.5–3.8	0.4	3.2
Judiciary	2.5	3.9	2.8
All SSRB groups		5.5	2.7
AFPRB *(Armed Forces[5])*	2.5–2.9	140	2.6
STRB *(School Teachers)*	2.7	294	2.7

Notes:

(1) Pay bill costings include employers' national insurance and superannuation payments.

(2) Plus up to 2.5 per cent. on average salaries for consultants under trasitional local pay arrangements

(3) Comprising 1 per cent. on national pay scales and the NPRB estimate of additional amounts likely to result from local pay negotiations.

(4) No across-the board increases 2.5 per cent. to be paid through the performance pay budget.

(5) Increase on daily rates.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Saharawi Refugees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Algeria concerning their policy on the needs of the Saharawi refugees resident in that country.

Mr. Baldry: We have held no discussions with the Government of Algeria on this subject.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid has been provided *(a)* directly by the United Kingdom and *(b)* through bilateral procedures to the Saharawi people who are victims of floods at their refugee camps.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has provided no aid directly or through bilateral procedures to the Saharawi people. However, we provide support for refugees through UNHCR on a regular basis and in response to special appeals from them and other interactional agencies. UK contributions to UNHCR in 1994–95 so far amount to over £20 million. In 1994, UNHCR earmarked £4 million for assistance to Saharawi refugees in Algeria and have earmarked a further £4 million this year.

EU Overseas Development Programmes

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements exist in the United Kingdom for monitoring and evaluating overseas development programmes of the European Union.

Mr. Baldry: The primary responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation of European Community development assistance rests with the Commission. Monitoring is undertaken by in-country delegations and staff in Brussels administering the various programmes, supported as required by consultants. The evaluation unit in directorate general VIII of the Commission has a wide-ranging work programme covering EC assistance to Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific, Asia, Latin America and the Mediterranean. Evaluation systems have been established to cover the more recent Poland and Hungary assistance for economic restructuring and Tacis programmes in eastern and central Europe and humanitarian aid—ECHO.

The United Kingdom has pressed successfully for the findings of mid-term reviews to be discussed by member states in management committees. We participate in the regular meetings of heads of evaluations services from the Commission and member state aid administrations. We play an active role in joint evaluations of EC and member state assistance.

Reproductive Health Programmes

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reproductive health programmes are currently being funded by the European Union for developing countries.

Mr. Baldry: The European Community is currently supporting at least 50 population and reproductive health programmes in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. These seek to improve maternal and child health, access to family planning services and contraceptive supplies. In some programmes, these activities are undertaken as elements of broader health care initiatives.

We continue to encourage the Commission to develop strategies for increasing support to population and reproductive health activities following the 1994 Cairo conference on population and development.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to fund reproductive health activities in Botswana.

Mr. Baldry: At present, there are no plans to support reproductive health programmes in Botswana. The Government of Botswana have agreed that British aid should focus on education, natural resources and public sector financial management. Support for health services is provided by other aid donors and from Botswana's own resources.

Education Projects

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the breakdown of spending on education projects within the Overseas Development Administration in the year 1993–94; how much of the total is allocated to *(a)* basic education for children, *(b)* literacy for adults, *(c)* secondary and tertiary education, *(d)* buildings, for educational purposes, and *(e)* other services to education beyond a basic level.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* Total ODA spending on education projects during 1993–94 amounted to just over £117 million. The figures include all project aid and technical co-operation as well as the ODA's grant to the British Council.

The categories given correspond as closely to those in the question as the ODA economic sector codes covered by education allow.

ODA expenditure on education in 1993–94

Category	*Expenditure (£000)*
Primary education	8,532
Adult education and literacy	660
Secondary and tertiary education	17,806
Buildings for educational purposes	1,735
Other education services (including ODA's grant to the British Council)	88,665
Total Education	117,398

Note:

"Other education services" includes:

1. ODA grant to the British Council (£31m).
2. Education expenditure allocated to the ODA's general education economic sector code and not broken down to a lower level. This will include expenditure in all categories of education including those specifically covered in the question.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies House (Sickness)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the President of the board of Tradie what assessment he has made of the reasons for the relative rates of sickness of staff *(a)* at Companies House and *(b)* the Laboratory of the Government Chemist.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department's agencies are assessed against a range of measures and have good records of meeting targets and improving their performance from year to year. I am, however, looking into the issues raised by my hon. Friend's question.

Shipbuilding Intervention Funding

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy on the level of shipbuilding intervention funding during 1995.

Mr. Eggar: I have decided that the United Kingdom's maximum level of support for large ships from 1 January 1995 shall continue to be 9 per cent., including shipbuilders' tax relief of 2 per cent. This follows a decision of the European Commission, notified to member states on 27 January 1995.

I have similarly decided that the maximum level of support for small ships from 1 January 1995 shall continue to be 4.5 per cent., including shipbuilders' tax relief at 2 per cent.

Those levels are at the maximum permitted by the EC shipbuilding regime.

This is the last year in which shipbuilding intervention will be available for new contracts. The OECD agreement respecting normal competitive conditions in the commercial shipbuilding and repair industry prohibits direct subsidies from 1 January 1996.

Biological Warfare

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, in his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) of 28 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *541*, in respect of exports to Iraq, what licences were *(a)* required for the exports referred to and *(b)* issued for such exports in the 10 years prior to 1986.

Mr. Heseltine: The agents referred to were not subject to export control before July 1985.

From 1985 to 1992, the toxicological agents were licensable only if adapted for use in war. The agents became licensable in their own right by virtue of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992.

Records prior to 1986 are not available except at disproportionate cost, and even then are unlikely to be complete.

Coal Industry

Mr. Hood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he consulted local government planning authorities when preparing the restructuring scheme in the Coal Industry Act 1994;

(2) what considerations he gave to the interests of local planning authorities when including schedule 2 in the Coal Industry Act 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: When the Bill was introduced, the Department made widely available to interested parties, including to all those mineral planning authorities which expressed an interest, general guidance on its privatisation proposals.

The restructuring powers under the Coal Industry Act 1994 provide for the transfer of existing property, rights and liabilities of British Coal to successor companies to enable privatisation to take place. The powers are general in nature to deal with many different forms of property, rights and liabilities which had to be transferred.

Mr. Hood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if Clydesdale district council made representations to Her Majesty's Government before the Coal Industry Act 1994 in respect of the dangers of transferring personal planning consent to the new coal owners without first referring it to the local planning authority.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Her Majesty's Government received no such representation before or during the passage of the Act. Representations on the matter were made to my officials by the district council in October 1994.

Mr. Hood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations led Her Majesty's Government to allow full discretion of schedule 2 to the Coal Industry Act 1994 to treat the transferee as the same person in law as the British Coal Corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ensure that the ongoing operations of British Coal could continue without disruption on transfer to a successor company, it was necessary for the transferee to be treated as the same person in law as the British Coal Corporation.

Mr. Hood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Trade and Industry Minister in the House of Lords, Lord Strathclyde, was explaining Government policy when he said on 3 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *1056*, that if a coal owner became bankrupt the Coal Authority would be responsible for any costs of restoring the site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My noble Friend made two salient points on a number of occasions: he drew attention to the important duty of the Coal Authority to secure so far as practicable, that operators are able to finance their operations and the discharge of associated liabilities, and he noted that where the Coal Authority is the owner of land, underground workings or coal reserves the associated responsibilities fall on its lessees or, where there is no lessee, on it.

Opencast Mining Sites

Mr. Hood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who will be responsible for the cost of restoration to opencast mining sites in the event of the new owners going into liquidation.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The obligation to restore a site of opencast coal extraction generally falls on the owner of the surface. Its enforceability during and following an insolvency would depend on the relevant facts.

Rom Data, Falmouth

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will begin an investigation into the running of the Rom Data computer firm in Falmouth.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The company is in liquidation. The Department will consider any information regarding the affairs of Rom Data Ltd. forwarded in the usual manner.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from hon. Members in connection with the Rom Data computer firm in Cornwall.

Mr. Charles Wardle: One. I had a meeting with the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) on 23 January 1995.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total amount in grants given to the Rom Data computer firm by his Department and if he

will make a statement about his Department's funding of Rom Data.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The total grant paid to Rom Data Ltd. was £825,000. This grant was made under the criteria for regional selective assistance, which is a grant available to projects which create or safeguard employment in the assisted areas.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Soley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is his intention, when contracting out the functions of the Official Receiver's Insolvency Service, to include the local office information system; and if contractors will have to bid for this.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In the absence of any decision to contract out the functions of official receivers, the question of whether the local office information system, LOIS, will be included in any contract specification has not yet been considered.

Consultants have been engaged by the Insolvency Service to work up a specification, bid documentation and evaluation criteria and will consider matters such as this as part of their work.

Additional Export Licensing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which countries or destinations were subjected to additional export licensing procedures from April 1991 for dual-use or other technologies.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The following countries are currently subject to special licensing procedures:

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Brazil
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Burma (Myanmar)
China
Croatia
Cuba
Egypt
Estonia
Georgia
India
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Latvia
Libya
Lithuania
Macedonia
Moldova
Mongolia
North Korea
Pakistan
Romania
Russia
Slovenia
Somalia
South Africa
Syria
Taiwan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Ukraine
Uzbekistan
Vietnam

Changes since April 1991 have included the removal of central European countries, and the addition of the CIS republics and those countries which were formerly part of Yugoslavia, except Serbia and Montenegro, which are subject to UN sanctions.

Amoco Fabrics

Mr. McAllion: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent offers of regional selective assistance have been made to Amoco Fabrics in relation to jobs created at Consett, County Durham.

Mr. Ian Taylor: None.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years, indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury on 6 February 1995, *Official Report,* column *69.*

Domestic Gas Appliances

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report* column *396,* if he will list the qualification of those engineers engaged in the servicing of domestic gas appliances; and what assessment he has made of the consequences for safety standards if no other engineers were employed in gas maintenance.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994 require anyone who works with a gas fitting, including servicing of a domestic gas appliance, or a gas storage vessel to be competent. The Health and Safety Commission's approved code of practice, "Standards of Training in Safe Gas Installation", published in 1988, provides practical guidance on the scope of training necessary for those engaged in gas installation work.

No assessment has been made of the consequences for safety of a shortfall in the availability of competent gas fitters to undertake gas maintenance work, because I cannot foresee circumstances in which such a shortfall would arise.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fisheries Guidance Grants

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when application forms for financial instrument for fisheries guidance grants will be made available for the period 1994 to 1999; and for what reasons application forms are not available in January.

Mr. Ancram: The United Kingdom fisheries sectoral plan under Council regulation No. 3699/93 was not

approved by the European Commission until 29 December. It will be necessary to introduce secondary legislation to provide the UK national or regional aid required to trigger EU aid and advise interested parties when the scheme is open for application. We are proceeding with the implementation as quickly as possible, including the preparation of application forms.

Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why he has not yet provided the information about next steps agencies requested by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton in his question of 20 January.

Sir John Wheeler: Because of the number of next steps agencies involved, the information took some time to compile. It was, however, provided to the right hon. Member on 7 February.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans are presently under consideration at the Department of the Environment for the creation of agencies to carry out its functions; and if he will list *(a)* the areas identified, *(b)* the expected work force within each agency, *(c)* the stage which each agency proposal has reached and *(d)* what consultation has taken place with elected Northern Ireland members.

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* There are already four next steps agencies in the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) covering rate collection, driver and vehicle testing, Ordnance Survey and driver and vehicle licensing.

On 19 July 1994, my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) announced that the Public Record Office would become a next steps agency from 1 April 1995 and that the Water Executive would become an agency from 1 April 1996—*Official Report,* 19 July 1994, column *193.* The Public Record Office will have a work force of 94, including three part-time staff, but decisions have not been taken about the workforce for the Water Executive.

On 18 January 1994, my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) announced that the functions of the planning, roads and environment services and the Land Registry were potential candidates for next steps agencies and that the possible "prior options" of abolition, privatisation or contracting out would be considered in each case, *Official Report* column *521.* On 21 July, my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield announced that a prior options study of Works Service would also be undertaken, *Official Report,* column *443.* These studies are undertaken in pursuance of the Government's policy that, where the prior options of abolition, privatisation, market testing and contracting out do not apply, executive functions within Departments are best carried out in next steps agencies. A report on the DOE studies was completed in December and is currently under consideration. When conclusions have been reached, an announcement will be made regarding any further agencies to be created.

I should be glad to discuss with Northern Ireland Members of Parliament the action being taken to create next steps agencies and other initiatives directed at improving efficiency and value for money in the Department of the Environment. I will write to them shortly on this matter.

Mink Farming

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many licences were issued for mink factory farms for each county of Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 8 February 1995]:* There has only ever been one licensed mink farm in Northern Ireland. It was situated in County Down and was issued with an annual licence in 1990 and 1991. No licences were issued in 1992, 1993 or 1994.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the extent to which appropriation in aid was taken into account in his answer of 28 October 1994, *Official Report,* columns *895–96,* in relation to the Crown Prosecution Service's cash and running cost limits for 1994–95.

The Attorney-General: The revised running costs limit of £224,392,000 reported in my earlier answer took account of appropriations in aid of £91,000. Gross expenditure without such deduction determines the gross running costs limit. Following the transfer of £80,000 to the Department of Social Security, the Crown Prosecution Service's running costs limit will therefore now be £224,483,000.

Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Attorney-General what was the actual annual expenditure on *(a)* the Treasury Solicitor's Department, *(b)* the Crown Prosecution Service, *(c)* the Serious Fraud Office and *(d)* the legal secretariat to the Law Officers, in each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

The Attorney-General: The gross expenditure is given in the table in 1994 prices. Superannuation contributions have been included from 1987–88 although until 1992–93 these were borne centrally.

Year	*Expenditure £000*
(a) Treasury Solicitor's Department	
1979–80	13,467
1980–81	14,969
1981–82	14,205
1982–83	14,524
1983–84	17,328
1984–85	18,106
1985–86	20,380
1986–87	19,881
1987–88	23,966
1988–89	26,023
1989–90	29,265
1990–91	30,179

Year	Expenditure £000
1991–92[1]	37,601
1992–93	39,056
1993–94	43,126
(b) Crown Prosecution Service	
1986–87[2]	112,800
1987–88	205,200
1988–89	226,000
1989–90	244,600
1990–91	263,200
1991–92	282,400
1992–93	306,900
1993–94	307,300
(c) Serious Fraud Office	
1987–88[3]	1,288
1988–89	9,528
1989–90	11,896
1990–91	15,724
1991–92	19,867
1992–93	22,666
1993–94	19,609
(d) Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	
1979–80	675
1980–81	809
1981–82	776
1982–83	827
1983–84	1,085
1984–85	1,045
1985–86	1,124
1986–87	1,161
1987–88	1,253
1988–89	1,220
1989–90	1,268
1990–91	2,006
1991–92	2,071
1992–93	1,815
1993–94	2,052

[1] The figures from 1991–92 onwards include VAT on bills raised under a repayment regime which was introduced on 1 April 1991. Since that date administration and operational costs discharged on behalf of client departments or bodies have been recovered from those clients through repayment.

[2] The figures are for part year only, the CPS being established during the course of 1986.

[3] The figures are for part year only, the SFO being established in June 1987.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Attorney-General what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

The Attorney-General: The expenditure is given in the table in 1994 prices. Such consultants were engaged primarily to advise on matters of management or to develop new systems and, while their advice is considered to have contributed very significantly to efficiency, it is not possible to quantify the annual cost savings attributable to this expenditure.

	Expenditure in £000			
Year	Treasury Solicitor's Department[1]	Crown Prosecution Service	Serious Fraud Office	Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers
1987–88	Not known	182	Not known	—
1988–89	Not known	378	Not known	—
1989–90	[2]6.2	632	339	—
1990–91	Not known	487	199	—
1991–92	57.9	480	96	—
1992–93	345.3	678	118	—
1993–94	428.0	697	155	—

[1] Including expenditure by the Government Property Lawyers agency, established on 1 April 1993.

[2] Approximate figure.

SCOTLAND

Housing Associations

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effects on existing council tenants of the wholesale transfer of council housing stocks to housing associations; and what further assessment he has made of the effects of such transfers following local authority reorganisation and of the influence such activity will have on the ability of new authorities to provide housing services to all districts within their jurisdiction.

Mr. Lang: There has, as yet, been no wholesale transfer of council housing stock to a housing association in Scotland. However, there has been a steady flow of smaller scale transfers with over 15,000 council houses having transferred to the private sector, mainly to locally based housing associations.

While transferring tenants change from secure to assured tenancy agreements, they generally continue to enjoy at least the same rights as before on a contractual basis, including the right to buy their home. Furthermore, tenants are also usually offered a rent guarantee for at least the first few years after transfer. As investment in the transferred stock no longer counts as public expenditure, tenants can also expect to benefit from accelerated investment in improving the stock. Tenants also often have the opportunity to become directly involved in the management of their housing through participation in the activities of the housing association and representation on its management committee.

The wholesale transfer of housing stock will enable local authorities to concentrate on their strategic and enabling role in meeting housing needs in their area, free from the day-to-day burdens of acting as a landlord. Part of any receipt arising from the stock disposal can, with the consent of the Secretary of State, be used to support new housing investment and the establishment of nomination rights with the acquiring landlords will enable authorities, and their successors after reorganisation, to perform their statutory duties in ensuring that the housing needs of the area are met.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many responses he has received on his

consultation on the boundaries of the Strathclyde passenger transport authority and executive following local government reorganisation in Scotland; how many supported *(a)* map 1 in his consultative document, *(b)* map 2 in his consultative document and *(c)* the whole of the present Strathclyde region; if he will list the organisations which supported each of the three options; and if he will make a statement on how he now proposes to proceed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Although the consultation period ended on 31 January 1995, responses are still being received from organisations which had difficulty in responding within the deadline. The responses have come from a wide variety of sources including local authorities, community councils, voluntary and representative bodies, Members of Parliament, councillors and individuals, and have covered a range of issues including the options contained in the consultation document. The responses will be carefully assessed before any decision is taken.

Negative Equity

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many homes in Scotland were in negative equity for each of the past three years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We do not hold this information centrally. Recent studies have shown that the problem of negative equity is less pronounced in Scotland than in any other region of the United Kingdom.

Repossessions

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the number of house repossessions for mortgage default in Scotland in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We do not currently hold this information centrally. Figures supplied by the Council of Mortgage Lenders suggest that, in 1993, 2,330 properties were taken into possession in Scotland. This represents 0.29 per cent. of the total number of properties with mortgages outstanding, which is around half the proportion for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Warrant Sales

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many warrant sales have been conducted in Scotland in each year since 1987 in each sheriffdom; and if he will list for each sheriffdom, the numbers instigated by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* Government Departments, *(c)* private firms and *(d)* private individuals.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Figures for the number of warrant sales reported to the Sheriff courts from 1987 to 1994 are set out by sheriffdom in the table. The figures for 1994 are provisional only. A breakdown of the numbers by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* Government Departments, *(c)* private firms and *(d)* private individuals is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sheriffdom	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Glasgow and Strathkelvin	63	69	43	44	41	64	42	36
Lothian and Borders	82	135	37	49	38	67	54	48
North Strathclyde	77	123	19	27	59	38	29	83
South Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway	110	116	68	26	62	47	54	66
Tayside, Central and Fife	142	115	31	45	48	48	151	48
Grampian, Highland and Islands	227	156	81	42	75	70	43	65
Total	701	714	279	233	323	334	373	346

Health Education

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been spent on health education programmes in schools designed specifically to dissuade children from smoking cigarettes in each of the past five years in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In Scottish schools the management and content of the curriculum in matters relating to health education, including the effects of smoking policy, are the responsibility of education authorities and headteachers. The information sought is not held centrally by the Scottish Office. In Strathclyde, the life skills approach to drug, alcohol and smoking education will continue to be the core of education programmes rather than a focus on individual substances like tobacco. No separate allocation of money is therefore spent to dissuade children from smoking cigarettes.

Scottish Agricultural Science Agency

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the performance of the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency against its targets for 1994–95 and the setting of targets of 1995–96.

Mr. Lang: The agency is on course to meet the key performance targets for 1994–95 which I set out in my answer of 2 March 1994, columns *777–78*.

For 1995–96 I have set the agency the following key performance targets:

- fulfilment of the service level agreement with the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department within the running costs voted to the agency for 1995–96;
- recovery of full economic costs on average for charged services;
- formal consultation with all major customers on the quality of the work done by the agency in 1995–96;
- completion of 90 per cent. of all scientific tests and analyses within the timescales set by customers;
- increase by 1 per cent. in the proportion of the agency's full cost attributable to scientific activities rather than support services.

Radioactive Waste

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what records, maps and other data are

maintained showing *(a)* the radioactive inventory, *(b)* the nature and *(c)* the precise location of low-level radioactive wastes disposed of on authorised landfill sites; and to what extent this information is available to members of the public.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Details of low-level radioactive wastes disposed of by controlled burial in landfill sites are held by the operator of the landfill site, usually the local authority. Operators are not required to publish this information. However, a request for such information to the operator would be considered within the framework of the Environmental Information Regulations 1992.

Mink and Fox Farming

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in the last three years his inspectors have supervised, examined or monitored the slaughter of factory farm mink and Arctic fox; and by what method killings were carried out.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 8 February 1995]:* During the period in question, a veterinary officer was present at the killing of Arctic foxes at one farm. The method used was injection of pentobarbitone. There are currently no fur farms in operation in Scotland.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Gianfranco Fini

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what arrangements have been made for the visit of Mr. Gianfranco Fini to the House; which hon. Member was responsible for inviting him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I am unaware of any such invitation to Mr. Fini.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases the Child Support Agency has applied for a liability order; how many cases have been heard to date; and what has been the outcome of these hearings.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 9 February 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of liability orders for which the Child Support Agency has applied.

From April 1993 to the end of November 1994, the Agency has referred a total of 1,010 cases to court for liability orders. Figures are not available for the number of cases heard and the outcome of those cases, but a new system for collecting this information has been introduced from this month.

Sir John Cope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions section 2 of the Child Support Act 1991 has been applied to reduce the amount of child maintenance paid by an absent parent.

Mr. Burt: I have recently written to my right hon. Friend in reply to his letter to me on this matter. The information that the right hon. Member requires is not available. The law used in making decisions should be recorded on individual files, and notified to the client, but there is no requirement to keep or collate records centrally.

Disabled People

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for replacing provision for the care and mobility needs of disabled people, currently made through disability living allowance, with private insurance against long-term disability.

Mr. Hague: We have no plans to do so.

Family Credit

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total sum paid as family credit for each year since 1989.

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) on 12 December, *Official Report*, column *534*.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will break down the amounts recovered by the compensation recovery unit in cases of industrial disease and illness by the disease or illness suffered, for each of the last five years.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 8 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for the amounts recovered by the Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU) in cases of industrial disease and illness, by the disease or illness suffered for each of the last five years.

Information is not available in the exact format requested. This is because data prior to April 1994 is no longer held on the computer system and to obtain such information would be at a disproportionate cost. The information that is collated covering the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995 is provided at Annex A.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A

	£
Noise induced hearing loss	73,499.03
Asbestosis	893,937.82
Cancer	461,308.45
Asthma	7,507.74
Vibration white finger	68,465.46
Dermatitis	305,970.03
Paralysis	21,741.44
Repetitive strain injury	236,582.19
Others	973,122.62
Total	3,042,134.48

Habitual Residence Rule

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many British *(a)* women and *(b)* men aged (i) 24 to 35 years, (ii) 35 to 55 years and (iii) 55 years and over have been denied benefits under the habitual residence rule;

(2) how many British citizens with children *(a)* under five years, *(b)* over five years and *(c)* under 16 years have been denied benefits under the habitual residence rule;

(3) how many *(a)* Canadian, *(b)* Australian and *(c)* New Zealand citizens have been denied benefits under the habitual residence rule.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

Expenditure on external consultancy since 1987 at current and constant 1994–95 prices

£ million

	Current prices	*1994–95 prices*
1987–88	23.2	33.2
1988–89	49.5	66.5
1989–90	43.3	54.3
1990–91	83.2	96.7
1991–92	69.7	76.2
1992–93	[1]36.4	[1]38.3
1993–94	[1]38.0	[1]38.8

[1] Figures for 1992–93 onwards now refer solely to expenditure on consultancy services following work undertaken for the efficiency scrutiny into the Government's use of external consultants.

Figures for earlier years include the costs of contracted services.

The additional information requested in respect of quantified annual cost savings is not available.

Unemployment Benefit

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the value of unemployment benefit, in actual and 1994 terms, for each of the years 1964, 1974, 1984 and 1994.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in tables 5.3a and 5.3b of the "Abstract of Statistics for Social Security Benefits and Contributions, and the Indices of Retail Prices and Average Earnings—October 1994", a copy of which is in the Library.

TRANSPORT

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants. for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Norris: In each of the financial years from 1990–91 to 1993–94 the expenditure on external consultants, at 1993–94 prices, was as follows:

Year	*Expenditure £ million*
1990–91	185
1991–92	196
1992–93	229
1993–94	198

Figures from 1987–88—1989–90 are not available except at disproportionate costs.

It is not possible to quantify the annual cost savings resulting from this expenditure, the vast majority of which was for specific deliverables such as road schemes. Most of the expenditure was incurred on highways-related work.

Underground Trains (Speed Restrictions)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will call for a report from the chairman of London Transport indicating which sections of the underground network have train speed limits of 20 mph or less; what are their locations; what are the reasons for this restrictions; and what plans there are to take remedial action.

Mr. Norris: No, these are operational matters for London Transport.

Driving Test Examiners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of employees conducting tests to award driving licences in the Greater London area who are from an ethnic minority background.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Driving Standards Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from L. M. Manley to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 9 February 1995:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about the number of Driving Examiners conducting driving tests in the Greater London area who are from an ethnic minority background.

There are 219 Driving Examiners conducting driving tests in the Greater London Area. Six (2.7%) of these Examiners are from an ethnic minority background.

Sickness Absence

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *881*, how many staff suggestions have led to initiatives to reduce stress levels and sick absences among employees of his Department.

Mr. Norris: In the last three years, the Secretary of State for Transport has received no staff suggestions which have led to such initiatives.

Risk Assessments

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *881*, if he will list *(a)* for each agency and *(b)* for his Department, the number of risk assessments conducted.

Mr. Norris: The details are as follows:

		Number
(a)	Coastguard Agency	232
	Driving Standards Agency	820
	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	2,191
	Highways Agency	232
	Marine Safety Agency	2[1]
	Transport Research Laboratory	672
	Vehicle Certification Agency	1
	Vehicle Inspectorate	n/a
(b)	Department (CTG)	55

[1] Not included those in the process of being conducted. n/a Not available.

Hesketh Report

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the conclusions and recommendations of the Hesketh report on the state of the signalling infrastructure on Britain's railways; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library.

Mr. Watts: The Hesketh report was an internal British Rail document and not an official report for external release. Responsibility for signalling infrastructure passed to Railtrack on 1 April 1994. We expect Railtrack to publish its first investment plan later this year.

HEALTH

Antibiotics

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual cost to the NHS of general practitioners prescribing antibiotics.

Mr. Malone: The annual cost to the national health service for antibacterials prescribed by general practitioners for the last available year—1993–94—in England is:

Prescriptions (millions)	*Net ingredient cost (millions)*
43.3	£171.3

Notes:
1. The term antibiotics is taken to mean antibacterial drugs as defined in the British national formulary, section 5.1.
2. The figures cover prescriptions written by general practitioners and dispensed by community pharmacists and dispensing doctors.
3. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of the drugs before discount and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

National Register for Carers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to recognise the work carried out by the national register for carers, assessors and verifiers in combating the employment of dangerous carers; and what assessment she has made of the work carried out by the national register for carers.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle under Lyme (Mrs. Golding) on 25 January, column *254*.

Anthrax Vaccines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the annual cost of *(a)* hospital-prescribed anthrax vaccine and *(b)* GP-prescribed anthrax vaccines in the years 1990 to 1993; to what extent such vaccine was obtained (i) commercially and (ii) directly from government sources of supply; if these vaccines were suitable for use against penicillin resistant anthrax strains; and if he will place in the Library guidance on the use of such vaccines.

Mr. Sackville: Anthrax vaccine, whether prescribed in hospital or by a general practitioner, is obtained from a common Government source and is not commercially available in the United Kingdom. The annual costs of supply were as follows: 1990, £34,000; 1991–92, £52,000; and 1993, £58,000. The breakdown of this cost between hospital and GP-prescribed vaccine is not readily available.

Anthrax vaccine creates protective immunity to the toxin produced by the anthrax bacillus. The vaccine is, therefore, effective against all strains of anthrax, irrespective of their antibiotic sensitivity.

Guidance on the use of anthrax vaccine is contained in the memorandum "Immunisation against infectious disease", copies of which are available in the Library.

Blood

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* chief executives and senior managers have left the national blood transfusion service since June 1994 and *(b)* zonal managers have been appointed in advance of the conclusion of the consultation process by the National Blood Authority;

(2) if she will list the joint ventures entered into, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, by the National Blood Authority.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the National Blood Authority.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list *(a)* the total number of units of blood collected by the blood transfusion service in 1994 and *(b)*

her future projections of the demand for blood for the years for which projections have been made.

Mr. Sackville: We are informed by the National Blood Authority that in 1994 the number of donations collected increased by 5 per cent. to 2.4 million. The NBA's current demand projections estimate an annual increase of around 4 per cent.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to introduce screening of blood products and blood for Anti-HTLVI and II and Anti-HBc.

Mr. Sackville: None.

The last advice which we received from the expert committee in September 1992 in the case of anti-HTLV and in November 1993 in the case of anti-HBc was that routine screening of blood donations for these antibodies should not be introduced. The expert committee is keeping its advice under review.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when she expects to receive analysis of responses to the consultation document of the National Blood Authority together with its final proposals and publish the final proposals for reorganisation of the National Blood Authority;

(2) if she will publish *(a)* all the responses to the National Blood Authority consultation document and *(b)* a list of all the organisations and individuals who have opposed the reorganisation proposals of the National Blood Authority;

Mr. Sackville: The National Blood Authority is currently considering the comments received during its thorough and widespread consultation. The authority will in due course produce and publish its final proposals, having taken account of the comments received, but cannot yet provide a firm date for this. The format of the publication is a matter for the NBA. The authority has announced the appointment of an independent panel who will ensure that the comments made on the original proposals receive due and objective consideration.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria were used in the selection of the independent committee members appointed to consider responses to the National Blood Authority's consultation process.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the National Blood Authority.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each regional blood transfusion centre *(a)* the date it received a Medicines Control Agency licence, *(b)* the date it acquired accreditation under BS5750 and *(c)* the date it made any unsuccessful application for either *(a)* or *(b)*.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on 1 November 1994, columns *1078–79*. The manufacturers licence held by the National Blood Authority covering all centres was first issued on 8 August 1994 and was last updated on 7 December 1994. The wholesale dealers licence, No. WL/13733/1, held by the authority was issued on 27 July 1994 and was last updated on 15 November 1994. No unsuccessful applications for licensing of blood transfusion centres has occurred. Accreditation under BS5750 is not a statutory requirement for the NBA. The pursuit of accreditation by individual transfusion centres is a matter for the NBA.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will identify and list the immunoglobins currently exported by the National Blood Authority.

Mr. Sackville: The Bio Products Laboratory, a part of the National Blood Authority, occasionally exports human normal intramuscular immunoglobulin when it has supplies available which are surplus to requirements in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the joint ventures entered into, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, by the National Blood Authority.

Mr. Sackville: Apart from those entered into in the course of research or normal commercial contracting activity, the National Blood Authority is not involved in any joint ventures either in the United Kingdom or abroad.

NHS Trusts

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to implement full public disclosure by trusts of *(a)* ambulance waiting times and *(b)* hospital bed shortages.

Mr. Sackville: Information on ambulance response times is published centrally by the Department in "Patient Transport Services—Summary information for KA 34: England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Information on bed availability is published in "Bed Availability for England", copies of which are also available in the Library. There are no plans to extend this information. Trusts must aim to meet current needs, while demand for beds is unpredictable.

The new patients charter for England introduced a fresh standard that from 1 April 1995 patients who need to be admitted to hospital through accident and emergency departments will be given a bed within three hours to four hours, improving to two hours from 1 April 1996. All health authorities will be required to monitor the performance of their provider hospitals in meeting the new standard and publish local information about their achievements in their annual reports.

GP Fundholders

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the amount of money saved from general practitioner fundholding budgets which is being used to increase the value of the premises owned by fundholding general practitioners.

Mr. Malone: None. Paragraph 24 of the National Health Service (Fund-holding Practices) Regulations 1993 states that general practitioner fundholder audited savings may be used to supplement future budgets, to purchase material or equipment and to improve practice premises for the benefit of patients.

Family health services authorities are responsible for monitoring fundholders' expenditure, including savings, to ensure that they are used, in accordance with regulations, for the benefit of patients.

Many fundholders have used efficiency savings to purchase additional services, or improve their premises, for example, to build extra treatment rooms for community nurses or visiting consultants or to bring more services into the practice. This investment in primary care

improves convenience for patients and the cost-effectiveness of the service.

Diabetes

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the NHS budget is currently allocated to *(a)* research into diabetes and *(b)* the treatment and continuing care for diabetes sufferers.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service funds a range of research and development work into diabetes. Detailed information on the amount and proportion spent is not available centrally.

Treatment and continuing care for diabetes sufferers is provided throughout the country by general practitioners and diabetic centres. Information on cost is not collected centrally.

Intervention Butter

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to offer NHS trusts advice on the sale of EEC intervention butter in out-patients' and visitors' buffets and coffee shops.

Mr. Sackville: None. Advice on the European Community regulations relating to supply of subsidised butter to hospitals and other organisations through the EEC Intervention Board is set out in the board's leaflet, LP18.

GP Administration Costs

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hours have been spent per general practitioner on administration *(a)* in each year since 1979 and *(b)* in each of those years when surveys have been undertaken.

Mr. Malone: The full-year results of the 1992–93 survey of general practitioner's work load will be made available shortly. It will contain the most recent information on time spent on practice administration.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which countries have set up compensation programmes for people developing Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease caused by human growth hormone.

Mr. Sackville: I understand that the French Government have offered to compensate families of children treated with growth hormone between January 1984 and May 1985 who contracted Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease provided they agree not to proceed with the litigation over the treatment programme. The extent to which this offer was taken up is not known. In the United Kingdom, the treatment was provided in good faith and conformed with the best known scientific and medical advice available at that time. In the circumstances, compensation is not appropriate without proof of negligence.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with whom junior hospital doctors will make their contracts following the reform of the health authorities; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The Government intend that the training programmes of registrars and senior registrars and, in future, those of doctors in the proposed new unified training grade, will be managed at regional level by postgraduate medical deans. Discussions continue with postgraduate deans and with the medical profession more widely on the appropriate locus for employment contracts.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are her latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for her Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health has spent the following amounts, in 1994 prices, from running costs on consultancy since its establishment as a separate Department.

1990–91: £20,974,000
1991–92: £26,007,000
1992–93: £18,977,000
1993–94: £15,933,037

The Department is unable to separately identify those savings that were made as a direct result of consultancy expenditure.

Physical Punishment (Children)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to respond to the report of the United Nations committee on implementation of the UN convention on the rights of the child regarding her policies with regard to the physical punishment of children; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: None.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Rwanda

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of *(a)* France and *(b)* other EU countries in respect of (i) the establishment of normal political and commercial relations with the Government of Rwanda and (ii) granting permission to the new Government of Rwanda to draw on loan facilities offered by the Bretton Woods institutions.

Mr. Baldry: It is not for the British Government to explain the policies of other European countries.

Zaire

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about current EU relations with Zaire; and if Governments of the United States, Belgium and France still agree on how to take forward the troika negotiations with Zaire which they have been conducting on behalf of the OECD countries.

Mr. Baldry: The European Union continues to attach great importance to progress in Zaire towards democracy,

greater respect for human rights and economic reconstruction. I understand that the informal co-ordination of policy towards Zaire between the United States, Belgium and France continues.

Russia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed human rights in Russia with the Russian Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We and our partners in the European Union have made clear to the Russian Government our concerns about violations of human rights following their military intervention in Chechnya. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed this with Foreign Minister Kozyrev most recently by telephone on 19 January, and will have another opportunity when he meets him in Stockholm on 14 February. We have encouraged the Russians to accept assistance of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe in finding a solution in Chechnya, and one of the focuses of its attention will be human rights issues.

Social Development Summit

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria will govern his decision on who will represent his Department at the world summit for social development in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Baldry: A final decision on attendance at the summit will be taken nearer the date.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the inclusion of a new commitment on health and education in the programme of action for the world summit on social development as proposed by the G7 at the final PrepCom in New York in January.

Mr. Baldry: We welcome the proposal for a new commitment on education, which may include health issues. The final text of this commitment will be negotiated during the summit.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to strengthen the commitment relating to debt relief in the programme of action for the world summit on social development, with particular reference to multilateral debt relief.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom sees debt relief as an important factor in alleviating poverty and will continue to work for improved references in the documentation in line with UK policy initiatives.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Goodlad: A full list of public bodies for which the FCO retains responsibility is published in the index to "Public Bodies 1994".

It was announced in the Queen's Speech on 16 November 1994 that the Government plan to introduce legislation in the current Session of Parliament to transfer the Crown Agents to the private sector. It is expected that the transfer will be completed within a few months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

In addition, the Natural Resources Institute, currently an agency of the Overseas Development Administration, has been identified as a candidate for transfer of ownership to the private sector.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if United Kingdom sales of arms to Indonesia meet the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe principles on arms sales; and if those principles were agreed by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Goodlad: Yes. The principles governing arms transfers agreed by the forum for security co-operation of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe in November 1993 are among the criteria we consider in examining applications for licences to export defence equipment.

Mr. Sergei Kovalev

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consult the Russian Government in respect of its policy towards Mr. Sergei Kovalev, Russia's human rights ombudsman.

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will have the opportunity to discuss a wide range of issues, including human rights questions, when he meets Foreign Minister Kozyrev in Stockholm on 14 February.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's ambassador to Russia last met Mr. Sergei Kovalev, Russia's human rights ombudsman, to discuss human rights.

Mr. David Davis: Her Majesty's ambassador to Russia last met Mr. Sergei Kovalev on 31 January 1995.

Gibraltar

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice has been given by Gibraltar's customs, port and police authorities to ship's masters whose transhipments within Gibraltar's waters were illegal under the imports and export ordinance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: Ship's masters are informed that it is an offence to trans-ship goods without the prior permission of the Customs Department, and that offences are liable to heavy penalties and imprisonment.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking with the Spanish authorities on their advice to ship's masters to ignore the attempts by the customs, port and police authorities endeavours to enforce the imports and exports ordinance within Gibraltar's waters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: In the wake of two recent incidents, we believe that the Spanish authorities are fully aware of

the requirements of the imports and exports ordinance, and of Gibraltar's determination that it shall be enforced.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Goodlad: The table shows the relevant information for expenditure on external consultants by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic and aid wings in 1992–93 and 1993–94 and estimated expenditure in 1994–95 as at 31 December 1994.[1]

Similar information on expenditure from 1987 to 1991, and quantified annual cost savings resulting from expenditure on external consultants since 1987, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

[1]Most of the expenditure by the aid wing has been incurred on the engagement of consultants under the overseas aid programme.

£ million

	Diplomatic wing	*Aid wing*
1992–93	13.2	107
1993–94	14.2	252
1994–95 (to 31 December 1994)	9.7	257

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Quotas

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the balance of Hague preference losses and gains in terms of fish quota accruing to the United Kingdom for each of the years 1995, 1994 and 1993.

Mr. Jack: The overall balance was a net United Kingdom loss of 525 tonnes in 1993 and a loss of 1,285 tonnes in 1994. Figures for 1995 will depend on the agreement to be reached with Norway on total allowance catches for jointly managed stocks in the North sea. This agreement is due before the end of March 1995. The application of Hague preference before 1993 resulted in significant net gains for the United Kingdom.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the losses of quota from the United Kingdom due to application of the Hague preference on fish stocks in the sector VII(a) of the Irish sea in 1995.

Mr. Jack: As a result of the application of Hague preference in the Irish sea—area VII(a)—the United Kingdom's 1995 share of the quota allocation for cod, whiting and plaice was reduced by 2,210 tonnes.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department is undertaking into the spread of sheep scab in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: Official records on the number of sheep scab outbreaks are not available following the deregulation of sheep scab controls in April 1992. Unofficial reports indicate it has been found in every county in Britain.

A surveillance exercise at markets carried out in March 1994 by the state veterinary service found 177 batches of sheep in which sheep scab was suspected at 869 market days surveyed; this exercise will be repeated this spring.

Official veterinary presence at sheep markets was significantly increased on 1 September 1994. Since that, date, 2,086 market visits have resulted in 326 cases of suspected sheep scab being detected.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations his Department has received on the subject of *(a)* sheep scab and *(b)* organophosphate sheep dips in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The Department has continued to receive a number of representations on both subjects in the past 12 months.

In response to representations on the increasing incidence of sheep scab early last year, a surveillance exercise was carried out by the state veterinary service at markets and sales in March 1994. While the results were not conclusive, they indicated that a minority of farmers were failing to keep their flocks free from scab and that the number of infested sheep had increased. A substantial publicity campaign was therefore carried out last autumn to encourage farmers to treat their sheep for scab. In addition, the official vet presence at markets was significantly increased; animals suspected of scab infestation are being withdrawn from sale and treated and the owner risks prosecution. A further surveillance exercise in markets and sales by the state veterinary service is planned for the spring of 1995 to measure the impact of the stricter market enforcement measures and of the publicity campaign.

Representations have also included concerns about the possible human health effects arising from the use of organophosphorous sheep dips. The safety of these products was reviewed by the independent veterinary product committee 1993. It concluded that there was no scientific justification for banning OP sheep dips, but they must be used correctly, and that includes the wearing of appropriate protective clothing. The Government accepted the VPC's recommendations, one element of which was the introduction of a certificate of competence scheme for those wishing to continue to purchase OP sheep dips, aimed at improving awareness of the safety precautions to be taken when using these products. From 1 April 1995 therefore, sale and supply of OP sheep dips will be restricted to those holding certificates or their representatives.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *643*, what plans he has to make those responsible for exporting consignments of livestock obliged to provide information about deaths of animals in transit.

Mrs. Browning: We do not consider that such an obligation would produce worthwhile information.

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what requirements he has placed upon the merchant bankers that he has appointed to advise on the privatisation of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service in respect of the assessment of the forecast made available to them by the Agricultural Development Advisory Service board.

Mr. Waldegrave: Charterhouse Bank Ltd. has been asked to advise on a range of possible options for the future of ADAS. It will, inter alia, consider and advise on any financial projections submitted by the ADAS board.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made as to *(a)* the level of staff cuts and *(b)* other measures that will be necessary to ensure the commercial feasibility of a privatised Agricultural Development Advisory Service.

Mr. Waldegrave: Since no decisions have yet been taken on privatisation, no such assessments have been made.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the report by Charterhouse Bank Ltd. on possible options for the privatisation of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service to be published; and if he will place it in the Library.

Mr. Waldegrave: Charterhouse is expected to report in February. The report will not be published.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the level of Government expenditure to date on the report by Charterhouse Bank Ltd. on possible options for the privatisation of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service.

Mr. Waldegrave: Details of individual contracts are a matter of commercial confidentiality.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information and documentation has been supplied by the Agricultural Development Advisory Service to Charterhouse Bank Ltd. to enable it to meet its remit to examine the commercial background of the agency.

Mr. Waldegrave: Charterhouse representatives have had extensive with ADAS Directors and have visited three ADAS offices. Information has been supplied as requested.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made as to which of the assets presently owned by his Department would be eligible for transferral into the private sector as a consequence of the privatisation of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service.

Mr. Waldegrave: The assets that might be transferred will depend on the future needs of the Ministry and would need to be discussed with the purchaser. The Ministry will, of course, take account of any legal restrictions on disposal.

Ante-mortem Inspections

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Ministry's policy of using only veterinary surgeons for ante-mortem inspections accords precisely with the practice followed in all the other EU member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: We have decided that the meat hygiene service, when it is launched in April, should be allowed to make use of experienced meat inspectors acting under the responsibility of the official veterinary surgeon to assist with the ante-mortem inspection of young animals. The OVS will be required personally to inspect all adult animals and casualty animals, and any other animals detained by the meat inspector for veterinary examination.

We believe that these arrangements will be consistent with the practice in several other member states. All EU member states, including the United Kingdom, accept the principle of veterinary responsibility for hygiene and inspection of fresh meat. Some member states use veterinary surgeons for all meat hygiene and inspection work.

Public Bodies

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which quangos his Department has abolished since 1979.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to his reply, 24 November 1994,* column *311]:* I regret that some of the information provided in my answer of 24 November 1994 to this question was inaccurate. A revised list showing non-departmental public bodies abolished, or reclassified, between 1979 and 1993 is as follows. This has been checked as thoroughly as possible without incurring disproportionate cost.

Public bodies abolished since 1979

1979

1. Advisory Council for Agriculture and Horticulture in England and Wales.
2. Farm Settlements Advisory Committee for Selection of Tenants.
3. Plant Variety Rights Advisory Panels (12).
4. Poultry Disease Panel.
5. Torry Research Station Advisory Committee.

1980

1. Advisory Committee on the Banana Trade (replaced by Banana Trade Advisory Committee).
2. Tate and Lyle Customer Safeguards Committee.

1981

1. White Fish Authority (abolished October 1981 and replaced by SFIA).
2. Agricultural Construction Industry Liaison Group.

1982

1. Thames Barrier Advisory Team.
2. Flood Protection Research Committee.

1983

1. Committee on Artificial Insemination of Cattle.
2. 'Food Additives and Contaminants Committee'. and 'Food Standards Committee' amalgamated to form 'Food Advisory Committee'.
3. Fisheries R and D Board.
4. Kew Scientific Advisory Panel.
5. Scientific Panel for Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs.
6. Wakehurst Place Consultative Panel.
7. Central Council for Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operation (functions taken over by 'Food from Britain', March 1983).

1984

1. Joint Consultative Organisation for R and D in Agriculture and Food (abolished May 1984—replaced by Priorities Board for R and D in Agriculture and Food).

1985

None.

1986

Eggs Authority.

1987

Agriculture Chemicals Approval Scheme Scientific Advisory Committee.

1988

1. National Seeds Development Organisation Ltd. (sold to the private sector).

2. Agricultural Economics Technical Committee (renamed Agricultural Economics Commissioned Work Advisory Committee, not classified as NDPB).

1989

Apple and Pear Development Council (replaced by Apple and Pear Research Council).

1990

Reading Cattle Breeding Centre Advisory Committee.

1991

Land Settlement Association Ltd.

1992

1. Agricultural Statistics Consultative Committee.

2. Experimental Centre Advisory Committees in England and Wales ('Husbandry Farms' and 'Horticulture Stations').

3. Area VII White Fish Industry Advisory Committee (change of status).

1993

1. Steering Group on Chemical Aspects of Food Surveillance (reclassified).

2. Banana Trade Advisory Committee.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons Officers Association

13. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the agenda for his next meeting with the Prison Officers Association.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend met the Prison Officers Association on Thursday 26 January. No further meeting has been requested.

Identity Cards

14. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his plans for the introduction of a national system of identity cards.

Mr. Howard: We plan to publish a Green Paper on identity cards in spring which will set out options for a national identity card scheme and invite views upon them. We will consider the way forward in the light of the comments we receive.

Prisons Service (Morale)

15. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the current staff morale in the Prison Service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Whenever I have visited a Prison Service establishment I have been impressed by the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff who do a difficult job well.

Pornography

16. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking against computer-generated pornography.

Mr. Maclean: New powers have been taken in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, including extending the law on child pornography to cover computer-simulated images and ensuring that computer transmissions are covered by the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

Bail (Reoffenders)

17. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in taking measures to deal with those who offend while on bail.

Mr. Maclean: We expect to bring into force within the next two months the provisions in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act which are designed to tackle the problem of offending on bail. We have also made sure that the courts have the powers they need to deal more severely with those who offend on bail.

Crime, Merseyside

18. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to visit Merseyside in the near future to discuss levels of crime.

Mr. Maclean: I have no plans to visit Merseyside in the near future but hope to do so later in the year. Levels of crime would be among the subjects for discussion, as would the measures the Government have put in place to tackle crime.

Closed Circuit Television

19. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of closed circuit television in combating crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Research, and evidence from local schemes, has shown that closed circuit television can be extremely effective both in preventing crime and in helping to convict criminals. My Department is currently carrying out a further evaluation of the effectiveness of town centre CCTV schemes with a view to identifying best practice.

Police Custody (Deaths)

20. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths in police custody are being investigated by the Police Complaints Authority; how many of them have occurred in the last six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: At the end of January this year, the Police Complaints Authority was supervising the investigation of 30 deaths in police custody. Of these, 27 had occurred in the last six months.

The term "death in police custody" includes, for these purposes, any death which occurred in the presence of the police, whether or not the deceased was under arrest or in a police station at the time, and which has been referred to the Police Complaints Authority because it may give rise to public concern.

IRA Terrorists

21. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted Irish Republican Army terrorists have been transferred to complete their sentences in Northern Ireland prisons since 31 August 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since 31 August 1994, two prisoners convicted of terrorist offences have been granted permanent transfers to Northern Ireland to complete their sentences. These transfer will be effected as soon as operational and security considerations allow. In addition, four prisoners convicted of terrorist offences were temporarily transferred to Northern Ireland on 1 September 1994 to receive visits.

Police Funding

22. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from chief constables with regard to the impact of the grants formula for policing on police numbers.

Mr. Maclean: Nineteen chief constables have made representations.

Prison Discipline

23. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to improve the disciplinary regime in prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am currently considering the prison disciplinary system and expect to reach conclusions shortly.

Prisoner Categorisation

24. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure the correct categorisation of prisoners.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The criterion and procedures to be used in decisions on categorisation are set out in circular instruction 7/1988 and the Prison Service manual on security, copies of which are available in the Library. Security category assessment is a continuous responsibility of Prison Service staff both at establishments for prisoners categorised B, C and D, and at headquarters for category A prisoners.

Sussex Police

25. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the proposed funding for Sussex police.

Mr. Maclean: For 1995–96, £145.78 million will be available to Sussex police. That is an increase of £14.2 million, or 10.8 per cent., over 1994–95. In addition, the police authority has been allocated £7.62 million for building projects and the purchase of equipment.

On top of all that, the way in which police grant has been calculated for 1995–96 means that Sussex will not have to find a further sum to pay for common police services such as the police national computer. For 1994–95, that is costing Sussex £1.14 million.

These significant increases in resources will help Sussex police to continue their excellent performance.

Electoral Register

26. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary State for the Home Department what steps he taking to increase the numbers on the electoral register.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The vast majority of eligible people are included in the register. The Government run television advertising campaigns to encourage people to register to vote, and we also give advice on best practice to electoral registration officers based on annual research.

Public Houses

27. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to public house licensing hours on week days; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am considering arguments both for and against some relaxation in the licensing hours for public houses on weekday evenings. No conclusions have yet been reached.

Safer Cities

28. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities in respect of the future of safer cities projects.

Mr. Maclean: None.

Middlesex Probation Service

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes are to be made in the Middlesex probation service following the 1994 Budget statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1994 Budget Statement will result in a specific grant cash limit for 1995–96 for the Middlesex probation service of £12.9 million plus a further £0.6 million to support probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded separately by the Home Office. It will be for the Middlesex probation committee to decide what specific changes within the service should be undertaken on the basis of the total expenditure limit implied by this level of grant support.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed and at what grade by the Middlesex probation service, on 30 June 1992, 30 June 1993 and 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information is given in the table:

Staff employed by the Middlesex probation service, in post at 30 June, whole-time equivalent[1], by grade and type.

Number of staff, whole time equivalent

	30 June 1992	*30 June 1993*	*30 June 1994*
Probation Officers			
Chief	1	1	1
Deputy Chief	2	2	2
Assistant Chef	7	8	8
Senior	42	41	41
Main grade	202	212	214
Total probation officers	254	264	266
Non-probation grade staff			
Probation Services' Officers[2]	54	53	57
Clerical/secretarial	127	138	137
Administrative	38	45	46
Other non-probation grade staff, excluding hostel staff[3]	30	24	25
Hostel staff	13	15	15
Total non-probation grade staff	262	276	279
Total probation staff	516	540	545

[1] Whole-time staff plus whole-time equivalent of part time staff. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. Components and totals are rounded independently and so components may not add precisely to totals.

[2] Formerly ancillaries.

[3] Figures include sessional supervisors on community service schemes, staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court reports were compiled by Middlesex probation service during 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Middlesex probation service completed 8,382 pre-sentence reports, social inquiry reports, family court reports and other reports for courts in 1992 and 8,607 reports in 1993.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were supervised by Middlesex probation service on 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The latest available information is for December 1993, when the number of offenders supervised by Middlesex probation service was 5,227. This is on the basis of the information published annually in probation statistics—table 12.1 of the 1993 issue—and excludes offenders on community service orders.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes were made in respect of the Middlesex probation service following the November 1993 Budget statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1993 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1994–95 for the Middlesex probation service of £13.1 million, 6.8 per cent. higher than for 1993–94. It was for the Middlesex probation committee to decide what specific changes within the service should be undertaken on the basis of this level of grant support. The committee's report covering the current financial year will be available from the secretary in due course.

Exclusion Orders

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are currently subject to exclusion orders under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts; what is the name and nationally of each such person; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: A total of 66 persons are currently subject to exclusion orders under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, of whom 14 are excluded from the United Kingdom. Fifty from Great Britain and two from Northern Ireland. It is not the practice to identify those excluded. All those subject to orders are believed to be citizens of this country or the Irish Republic, or both, but more detailed information is not available.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Howard: Information on expenditure on all external consultants let by the Home Office during the period specified is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from local authorities over the announcement of section 11 bids; what reports he has received about the timing of his announcement on local authority budget making and employment contract obligations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Various local authority representatives have made clear their concern about budgetary timetables and the contractual position of staff. That is why we are maintaining our target of announcing the results of the bidding round by the end of February, despite extending the bidding period by a month, as stated in my reply to the hon. Member of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *382*.

Metropolitan Police Committee

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the membership of the Metropolitan police committee; and what are the terms of reference of the new committee.

Mr. Howard: Following consultation with the chairman Sir John Quinton, I have today appointed the following as members of the Metropolitan police committee:

Miss M. V. Callaghan
Mr. T. Chan
Mr. M. J. Hastings
Counsellor M. Heaster
Major General M. P. J. Hunt
Counsellor Mrs. M. A. O'Neill

Mrs. S. Sadeque
Mr. M. Souhami
Mr. I. S. Uppal
Mr. R. J. Watts
Ms R. E. Whittaker

The committee will formally take up its duties on 1 April. Its task is to advise me in relation to the discharge of certain of my functions as police authority for the Metropolitan police. The functions in question are based on those which, outside London, are the responsibility of the police authorities established under the Police Act 1964, as amended by the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. In particular, the Metropolitan police committee will be required to advise me about: establishing priorities for policing, in consultation with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and local communities, particularly the consultative bodies established under section 106 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; approval and publication of an annual costed plan for policing designed to achieve both the objectives set for police forces outside London under section 28A of the Police Act 1964 and those I have approved for the Metropolitan police district; monitoring by reference to the policing plan the financial and other performance of the Metropolitan police during the year; considering proposals for expenditure which require my approval; and publication of annual performance results in a standard form to allow comparison of performance against other forces.

The Metropolitan police committee will be required to advise me on other matters relating to the Metropolitan police as necessary.

Mr. Quddus Ali

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about the investigation of the assault upon Mr. Quddus Ali, including details of admissions to taking part in the attack, what the police did with such admissions; what representations have been received about the police handling of this case; and if he will make a statement upon this.

Mr. Maclean: The Commissioner has kept my right hon. learned Friend informed of the police investigation into the assault upon Mr. Quddus Ali. My right hon. learned Friend has received a number of representations, including a petition of local residents.

Police Paperwork

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to reduce the volume of paperwork involved for the police in processing cases; and what consideration has been given to creating software for use on personal computers to ease this burden.

Mr. Maclean: The Government have set up an efficiency scrutiny, which is examining the administrative burdens faced by the police in the context of their role in the criminal justice system as a whole. The scrutiny aims to build on existing initiatives, including those arising out of a study carried out in 1993 by external consultants. The consultants' report, "Opportunities for Reducing Administrative Burdens on the Police", made 16 detailed recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Government. Good progress has been made in all areas.

As recommended by that report, standard computer systems for all forces will be developed under the terms of the national strategy for police information systems, which my right hon. and learned Friend launched last November. A standard case processing system is among the highest priorities for development under the terms of the strategy.

Electric Shock Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *152*, (1) if he will take steps to ensure that electric shock equipment will never be used against members of the public;

(2) what police forces in the United Kingdom have applied to his Department for permission to hold or use electro-shock equipment;

(3) in what circumstances electro-shock equipment would be used against the civilian population;

(4) if he will list the police forces which possess electro-shock shields and prods for use against ferocious dogs;

(5) on what occasions electro-shock equipment has been used anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: It is for chief officers of police to ensure that the electric shock equipment which their forces may possess for use against ferocious dogs is not used against members of the public. No police force has asked for the permission of my right hon. and learned Friend to hold or use such equipment: there is no requirement for them to do so, except in the case of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I am sure that no police force in this country would use such equipment against people. Information about which forces possess electric shock equipment for use against ferocious dogs is not available within the Home Office. I understand that the Association of Chief Police Officers is currently gathering information on this subject. It is for chief officers of police to decide how best to protect their officers against physical attack.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeal Panel

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeal Panel he expects to appoint;

(2) how many of the nominees for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeal Panel have been *(a)* rejected and *(b)* appointed; and if he will list the names and sources of nomination of the appointees so far;

(3) how many nominations he received for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel; and from which sources these nominations came.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answers 6 February 1995]:* We expect in due course to appoint between 40 and 50 members to the appeals panel.

We have received 212 nominations from the following sources:

Source	*Number*
Public Appointments Unit (OPSS)	40
British Medical Association	15
British Dental Association	1
Trades Union Congress	12
Chief Whip's Office	6
Victim Support	2
Department of Health	19
Welsh Office	7
Self-nomination	110

The following have so far been appointed to the panel:

Name	*Source of nomination*
Chairman	
Mr. M. Lewer QC	Existing Member of CICB
Members	
Sir Derek Bradbeer OBE	Existing Member of CICB
Mr. D. J. Brown	Public Appointments Unit
Miss D Cotton QC	Existing Member of CICB
Mr. K. Drummond QC	Existing Member of CICB
Dr. A. Fingret	Public Appointments Unit
Mr. D. J. L. Gabbitass	Public Appointments Unit
Dr. H. E. Godfrey	British Medical Association
Mr. F. J. Howard	Trades Union Congress
Mr. J. Leighton Williams QC	Existing Member of CICB
Ms G. Lindley	Public Appointments Unit
Mr. C. Lindsey QC	Existing Member of CICB
Mr. H. Lumsden	Public Appointments Unit
Lord Macaulay of Bragar QC	Existing Member of CICB
Mr. D. S. Mackay QC	Existing Member of CICB
Mr. H. J. Malins	Public Appointments Unit
Mr. J. R. Miles	Self nomination
Mr. T. A. Molloy	Trades Union Congress
Mr. M. Park CBE	Existing Member of CICB

No nominations have been formally rejected, but no further appointments will be made until the final outcome of the legal challenge to the tariff scheme is known.

EDUCATION

College Buildings

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what plans she has to provide funds for the maintenance of college buildings, in response to the report of the Further Education Funding Council;

(2) what response she has made to the finding in the Further Education Funding Council's report on the extent of hutted accommodation;

(3) what is her response to the findings of the Further Education Funding Council on the necessity for major and minor building programmes for colleges.

Mr. Boswell: Capital investment in the further education sector has more than doubled since colleges left local authority control, and we have taken steps to increase it still further. In 1992–93—the last year of their control—local authorities spent £102 million. In 1993–94, the Further Education Funding Council and colleges spent £224 million, to which the Department contributed £152 million. We contributed £157 million in 1994–95, and plan to contribute £159 million in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98. From April, colleges will be able to use their capital allocations to service loans or other finance raised from the private sector, as well as to incur direct expenditure. This will permit another substantial increase in their capital programmes.

Disabled People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has for initiatives to encourage colleges to provide learning support and specialist advice for people with physical disabilities.

Mr. Boswell: There are already comprehensive provisions in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to ensure that the Further Education Funding Council and Local Education Authorities take into account the support and advice needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Nevertheless, the Government are committed to reviewing the provisions for SLDD in further education in the light of their new policies on disability. In doing so, the Government will look at the availability of advice to people with disabilities.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to encourage colleges to monitor their equal opportunities policies.

Mr. Boswell: The charter for further education emphasises the importance of equal opportunities policies in FE sector colleges, and makes it clear that students have a right to expect colleges to explain what they are doing to foster equal opportunities. Within this framework, colleges are responsible for the day-to-day management of their affairs.

Teachers (Administration Duties)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she will take to ensure that teachers spend less time on administration.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is for teachers, under the direction of head teachers, to manage their own workload. The Government have taken steps to reduce the burden imposed by the national curriculum and assessment.

College Library Books

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make it her policy to increase the provision of college library books in line with the increases in student numbers.

Mr. Boswell: The Further Education Funding Council has developed a new funding methodology after wide consultation; its proposals gained a high degree of acceptance. The new methodology provides a direct link between funding and the numbers of students recruited and retained. Allocations to colleges are made monthly as a block grant, and colleges are free to determine how best to use the resources made available to them.

Science Subject Exams

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consideration she has given to the

introduction of a stronger vocational element in the GCSE, GCE and Business and Technician Education Council science subjects.

Mr. Boswell: We have set in place a new qualifications framework comprising general education qualifications—GCE A-levels and GCSE, general vocational qualifications—GNVQs, and occupationally specific qualifications—NVQs. GNVQs are becoming well established as a regular vocational alternative to general educational qualifications, with comparability at the appropriate level. Science GNVQs are now widely available post-16 at intermediate level and advanced level and are being piloted at foundation level. BTEC is one of the three GNVQ awarding bodies.

Staff Development

Mr. Jim Cunningham : To ask the Secretary of State for Education what priorities she attaches to staff development in colleges, and what assessment she has made of disparities of funding in this area, region by region.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend attaches great importance to staff development in colleges. The new Further Education Development Agency will have a major role in improving management training and development for college staff. It is, of course, for colleges to determine the level of resources they allocate to staff development in the light of their individual circumstances. The funding of FE colleges is a matter for the Further Education Funding council.

A preliminary review of occupations in the further education sector and closely related areas is being undertaken during the first half of 1995. The outcome of the review will help inform decisions on possible future lead body arrangements and the development of national vocational qualifications for college staff.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she will take to lessen the drop-out rate on the GNVQ courses, to ensure documentation arrives on time, and that the documentation is written in clear English to the GNVQ specifications.

Mr. Boswell: Such evidence as we have to date suggests that the rate of non-completion of GNVQ courses is not a cause for special concern. We, together with the vocational awarding bodies and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, shall continue to monitor the situation.

We have asked the NCVQ and the vocational awarding bodies to take action to improve the timeliness and clarity of the relevant documentation. We understand that they are pursuing these matters urgently.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what plans she has to inspect the NVQ training provided by private companies and employers' in-house training schemes;

(2) what steps she will take to reduce teaching discrepancies in the NVQ training around the country.

Mr. Boswell: NVQs are primarily the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. The National Council for Vocational Qualifications has overall responsibility for assuring the quality of NVQs. The Government will provide additional funding to enable the national council to employ a local field force to give added impetus to quality assurance.

The quality of NVQ provision in colleges of further education is subject to inspection by the FEFC inspectorate, along with other courses provided in colleges.

Teachers' Pay Increases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the total cost to each local education authority and nationally of the teachers' pay increases in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and of a 2.7 per cent. increase in 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table below sets out the cost of updating the 1992–93 expenditure recorded by LEAs in England for teaching staff salaries in nursery, primary, secondary, and special schools by the teachers' pay awards of 1.5 per cent in 1993, 2.9 per cent. in 1994 and 2.7 per cent. in 1995 to arrive at the notional cost of the increases in 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96. The 1992–93 expenditure figures are the latest available for LEA-maintained schools. The figures in the table take no account of changes in teaching numbers or other factors that affect the teachers' pay bill.

LEA Expenditure on Teachers' Salaries

(Nursery, primary, secondary and special schools)	*1992–93 (actual)* £000	*1993–94 increase (1.5 per cent.)* £000	*1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.)1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.)* £000	£000
Corporation of London	428	6	13	12
Camden	36,778	552	1,083	1,037
Greenwich	57,441	862	1,691	1,620
Hackney	42,157	632	1,241	1,189
Hammersmith	25,144	377	740	709
Islington	40,339	605	1,187	1,138
Kensington and Chelsea	15,969	240	470	450
Lambeth	45,081	676	1,327	1,271
Lewisham	43,850	658	1,291	1,237
Southwark	43,037	646	1,267	1,214
Tower Hamlets	57,235	859	1,685	1,614
Wandsworth	41,485	622	1,221	1,170
Westminster	29,064	436	855	820
Barking	34,134	512	1,005	963
Barnet	61,723	926	1,817	1,741
Bexley	43,229	648	1,272	1,219
Brent	48,628	729	1,431	1,371
Bromley	37,052	556	1,091	1,045
Croydon	56,379	846	1,660	1,590
Ealing	48,569	729	1,430	1,370
Enfield	57,216	858	1,684	1,613
Haringey	46,196	693	1,360	1,303
Harrow	38,397	576	1,130	1,083
Havering	49,716	746	1,463	1,402
Hillingdon	32,850	493	967	926
Hounslow	48,723	731	1,434	1,374
Kingston upon Thames	26,672	400	785	752

LEA Expenditure on Teachers' Salaries

(Nursery, primary, secondary and special schools)	1992–93 (actual) £000	1993–94 increase (1.5 per cent.) £000	1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.)1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.) £000	£000
Merton	34,380	516	1,012	970
Newham	55,156	827	1,624	1,555
Redbridge	48,178	723	1,418	1,359
Richmond upon Thames	25,951	389	764	732
Sutton	26,067	391	767	735
Waltham Forest	49,215	738	1,449	1,388
Birmingham	226,986	3,405	6,681	6,401
Coventry	68,241	1,024	2,009	1,924
Dudley	61,409	921	1,808	1,732
Sandwell	67,116	1,007	1,976	1,893
Solihull	44,663	670	1,315	1,259
Walsall	57,957	869	1,706	1,634
Wolverhampton	52,823	792	1,555	1,490
Knowsley	34,957	524	1,029	986
Liverpool	106,122	1,592	3,124	2,993
St. Helens	40,656	610	1,197	1,146
Sefton	58,695	880	1,728	1,655
Wirral	71,520	1,073	2,105	2,017
Bolton	58,731	881	1,729	1,656
Bury	33,786	507	994	953
Manchester	98,210	1,473	2,891	2,769
Oldham	57,609	864	1,696	1,625
Rochdale	44,279	664	1,303	1,249
Salford	51,731	776	1,523	1,459
Stockport	58,114	872	1,711	1,639
Tameside	46,054	691	1,356	1,299
Trafford	39,523	593	1,163	1,115
Wigan	72,263	1,084	2,127	2,038
Barnsley	40,094	601	1,180	1,131
Doncaster	61,082	916	1,798	1,722
Rotherham	59,486	892	1,751	1,677
Sheffield	95,070	1,426	2,798	2,681
Bradford	113,897	1,708	3,353	3,212
Calderdale	40,476	607	1,191	1,141
Kirklees	83,022	1,245	2,444	2,341
Leeds	144,719	2,171	4,260	4,081
Wakefield	65,138	977	1,917	1,837
Gateshead	41,420	621	1,219	1,168
Newcastle upon Tyne	54,297	814	1,598	1,531
North Tyneside	43,475	652	1,280	1,226
South Tyneside	31,785	477	936	896
Sunderland	64,315	965	1,893	1,814
Isles of Scilly	599	9	18	17
Avon	179,711	2,696	5,290	5,068
Bedfordshire	116,753	1,751	3,437	3,292
Berkshire	133,913	2,009	3,942	3,776
Buckinghamshire	116,645	1,750	3,433	3,289
Cambridgeshire	121,295	1,819	3,570	3,420
Cheshire	193,359	2,900	5,692	5,453
Cleveland	136,127	2,042	4,007	3,839
Cornwall	86,734	1,301	2,553	2,446
Cumbria	94,791	1,422	2,790	2,673
Derbyshire	187,005	2,805	5,504	5,273
Devon	179,197	2,688	5,275	5,053
Dorset	99,774	1,497	2,937	2,814
Durham	122,305	1,835	3,600	3,449
East Sussex	115,326	1,730	3,395	3,252
Essex	279,683	4,195	8,232	7,887
Gloucestershire	87,598	1,314	2,578	2,470
Hampshire	281,689	4,225	8,292	7,944
Hereford and Worcester	133,454	2,002	3,928	3,763
Hertfordshire	195,847	2,938	5,765	5,523
Humberside	184,702	2,771	5,437	5,209

LEA Expenditure on Teachers' Salaries

(Nursery, primary, secondary and special schools)	1992–93 (actual) £000	1993–94 increase (1.5 per cent.) £000	1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.)1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.) £000	£000
Isle of Wight	24,255	364	714	684
Kent	257,412	3,861	7,577	7,259
Lancashire	290,367	4,356	8,547	8,188
Leicestershire	192,009	2,880	5,652	5,415
Lincolnshire	94,889	1,423	2,793	2,676
Norfolk	129,927	1,949	3,824	3,664
North Yorkshire	137,936	2,069	4,060	3,890
Northamptonshire	117,669	1,765	3,464	3,318
Northumberland	62,703	941	1,846	1,768
Nottinghamshire	204,216	3,063	6,011	5,759
Oxfordshire	102,211	1,533	3,009	2,882
Shropshire	87,570	1,314	2,578	2,469
Somerset	83,851	1,258	2,468	2,365
Staffordshire	201,758	3,026	5,939	5,690
Suffolk	126,106	1,892	3,712	3,556
Surrey	151,970	2,280	4,473	4,286
Warwickshire	90,879	1,363	2,675	2,563
West Sussex	128,140	1,922	3,772	3,614
Wiltshire	105,215	1,578	3,097	2,967
England total	9,371,750	140,576	275,857	264,281

Private Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* secondary school age pupils and *(b)* primary school age pupils attended private schools in each local education authority for the latest year for which the information is available.

Mr. Robin Squire: The numbers of pupils aged five to 10 and 11 to 16 years of age in independent schools in each LEA area in England are shown in the table.

Pupils aged 5 to 10 and 11 to 16 years of age in independent schools in each LEA area in England

LEA	Pupils aged 5–10	Pupils aged 11–16	Total pupils aged 5–16
Corporation of London	209	1,024	1,233
Camden	2,896	1,620	4,516
Greenwich	618	700	1,318
Hackney	1,780	848	2,628
Hammersmith and Fulham	903	1,868	2,771
Islington	119	75	194
Kensington and Chelsea	5,097	2,357	7,454
Lambeth	889	325	1,214
Lewisham	569	1,139	1,708
Southwark	1,307	2,270	3,577
Tower Hamlets	79	144	223
Wandsworth	2,308	1,417	3,725
Westminster	2,087	2,083	4,170
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	0
Barnet	2,344	2,001	4,345
Bexley	473	20	493
Brent	1,429	205	1,634
Bromley	2,049	1,795	3,844
Croydon	2,488	3,303	5,791
Ealing	2,413	2,280	4,693
Enfield	800	200	1,000
Haringey	849	963	1,812
Harrow	1,290	2,319	3,609
Havering	413	115	528

Pupils aged 5 to 10 and 11 to 16 years of age in independent schools in each LEA area in England

LEA	Pupils aged 5–10	Pupils aged 11–16	Total pupils aged 5–16
Hillingdon	1,560	1,134	2,694
Hounslow	330	230	560
Kingston upon Thames	1,360	1,103	2,463
Merton	1,408	1,302	2,710
Newham	98	53	151
Redbridge	1,767	1,135	2,902
Richmond upon Thames	2,594	2,530	5,124
Sutton	804	552	1,356
Waltham Forest	357	827	1,184
Birmingham	2,413	2,359	4,772
Coventry	716	1,320	2,036
Dudley	147	100	247
Sandwell	104	0	104
Solihull	639	808	1,447
Walsall	339	107	446
Wolverhampton	464	908	1,372
Knowsley	0	0	0
Liverpool	988	1,541	2,529
St. Helens	339	215	554
Sefton	1,048	1,887	2,935
Wirral	1,506	2,117	3,623
Bolton	620	1,501	2,121
Bury	498	1,399	1,897
Manchester	1,037	3,460	4,497
Oldham	479	932	1,411
Rochdale	286	78	364
Salford	905	598	1,503
Stockport	1,726	2,086	3,812
Tameside	61	52	113
Trafford	1,333	1,636	2,969
Wigan	0	0	0
Barnsley	31	27	58
Doncaster	339	262	601
Rotherham	158	23	181
Sheffield	932	917	1,849
Bradford	1,190	1,707	2,897
Calderdale	321	650	971
Kirklees	435	1,013	1,448
Leeds	1,780	2,101	3,881
Wakefield	870	1,882	2,752
Gateshead	518	210	728
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,543	2,766	4,309
North Tyneside	336	486	822
South Tyneside	27	21	48
Sunderland	504	330	834
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0
Avon	3,782	6,847	10,629
Bedfordshire	1,824	2,901	4,725
Berkshire	4,993	7,899	12,892
Buckinghamshire	3,745	2,758	6,503
Cambridgeshire	2,035	3,337	5,372
Cheshire	2,678	3,856	6,534
Cleveland	596	871	1,467
Cornwall	746	1,349	2,095
Cumbria	747	1,788	2,535
Derbyshire	1,651	2,354	4,005
Devon	3,472	5,202	8,674
Dorset	2,673	3,802	6,475
Durham	755	1,232	1,987
East Sussex	4,098	4,962	9,060
Essex	5,976	3,373	9,349
Gloucestershire	2,658	3,142	5,800
Hampshire	7,117	8,710	15,827
Herefordshire and Worcester	3,162	5,272	8,434
Hertfordshire	5,819	8,345	14,164
Humberside	1,338	1,474	2,812
Isle of Wight	278	580	858
Kent	6,884	7,016	13,900
Lancashire	3,018	4,739	7,757
Leicestershire	2,619	4,143	6,762
Lincolnshire	1,582	1,770	3,352
Norfolk	2,228	2,907	5,135
North Yorkshire	2,621	4,241	6,862
Northamptonshire	2,307	2,250	4,557
Northumberland	365	282	647
Nottinghamshire	2,541	2,316	4,857
Oxfordshire	3,642	6,033	9,675
Shropshire	1,834	2,336	4,170
Somerset	2,072	4,901	6,973
Staffordshire	1,650	2,455	4,105
Suffolk	2,495	3,935	6,430
Surrey	13,150	13,123	26,273
Warwickshire	2,120	2,659	4,779
West Sussex	3,717	4,555	8,272
Wiltshire	1,901	2,796	4,697
England	185,208	225,947	411,155

Nursery Education

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much Government proposals on the provision of nursery education will cost *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Norfolk.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been consulting widely before drawing up detailed proposals on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's commitment to provide, over time, a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish to take it up. The cost will be determined as part of this work.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many year and four-year-olds there are in nursery schools in each local education authority in England; and what percentage this represents of the population in those age groups for the latest figures available.

Mr. Forth: Information about the number of pupils under five years of age being taught in maintained nursery schools in each local education authority area in England in January 1994 is shown in the table.

Pupils under five years of age in maintained nursery schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population
Camden	73	2
Greenwich	674	10
Hackney	168	3
Hammersmith	578	15
Islington	329	7
Kensington and Chelsea	252	7
Lambeth	452	6
Lewisham	233	3
Southwark	544	8
Tower Hamlets	711	12
Wandsworth	216	3
Westminster	189	5
Barking	0	0
Barnet	550	7
Bexley	0	0
Brent	223	3
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	462	5

Pupils under five years of age in maintained nursery schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population
Ealing	429	5
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	239	4
Harrow	0	0
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	120	2
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston upon Thames	219	6
Merton	0	0
Newham	934	12
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond upon Thames	70	2
Sutton	241	5
Waltham Forest	320	5
Birmingham	2,325	8
Coventry	205	2
Dudley	70	1
Sandwell	217	3
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	807	11
Wolverhampton	826	12
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	580	5
St. Helens	75	2
Sefton	315	4
Wirral	326	4
Bolton	522	7
Bury	161	3
Manchester	563	4
Oldham	0	0
Rochdale	914	14
Salford	973	15
Stockport	925	12
Tameside	344	5
Trafford	0	0
Wigan	193	2
Barnsley	181	3
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	401	6
Sheffield	851	6
Bradford	515	4
Calderdale	0	0
Kirklees	569	5
Leeds	92	0
Wakefield	478	5
Gateshead	64	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	623	9
North Tyneside	224	5
South Tyneside	426	10
Sunderland	1,035	13
Avon	1,830	7
Bedfordshire	1,497	9
Berkshire	2,161	10
Buckinghamshire	569	3
Cambridgeshire	732	4
Cheshire	839	3
Cleveland	134	1
Cornwall[2]	116	1
Cumbria	802	6
Derbyshire	1,569	6
Devon	303	1
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,575	16
East Sussex	299	2
Essex	296	1
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	300	1
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,762	6
Humberside	1,153	5
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	85	0
Lancashire	3,532	9
Leicestershire	50	0
Lincolnshire	242	2
Norfolk	397	2
North Yorkshire	403	2
Northamptonshire	612	4
Northumberland	128	2
Nottinghamshire	609	2
Oxfordshire	1,185	7
Shropshire	173	2
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	2,128	7
Suffolk	97	1
Surrey	418	2
Warwickshire	757	6
West Sussex	483	3
Wiltshire	0	0
England[2,3]	52,262	4

[1] Excludes pupils who became five years of age by 1 January 1994.
[2] Includes the Isles of Scilly.
[3] Includes the Corporation of London.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many three-year-olds and four-year-olds there are in nursery classes in schools, not including primary reception classes, in each local education authority in England and Wales; and what percentage this represents of the population in those age groups for the latest figures available.

Mr. Forth *[pursuant to his answer, 1 February 1995, c. 728]:* I regret that the table shown was incorrect. The corrected version, which includes revised figures for January 1994, as follows:

Pupils aged under five years of age in nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population
Camden	955	24
Greenwich	2,573	37
Hackney	2,162	35
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,059	28
Islington	1,532	32
Kensington and Chelsea	610	18
Lambeth	1,960	28
Lewisham	2,418	34
Southwark	2,524	35
Tower Hamlets	2,388	41
Wandsworth	2,144	33
Westminster	988	26
Barking and Dagenham	1,833	40
Barnet	2,039	25
Bexley	1,395	23
Brent	2,385	35
Bromley	166	2
Croydon	1,081	12
Ealing	3,119	39
Enfield	1,690	23
Haringey	2,442	42
Harrow	1,015	19
Havering	486	9
Hillingdon	3,052	45
Hounslow	2,516	43
Kingston upon Thames	961	27
Merton	2,676	55

Pupils aged under five years of age in nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population
Newham	3,618	46
Redbridge	1,198	19
Richmond upon Thames	785	18
Sutton	1,609	35
Waltham Forest	2,311	34
Birmingham	8,288	27
Coventry	2,009	23
Dudley	2,862	35
Sandwell	4,444	53
Solihull	1,837	35
Walsall	3,561	48
Wolverhampton	2,981	42
Knowsley	2,718	55
Liverpool	5,873	47
St. Helens	1,598	34
Sefton	2,181	28
Wirral	1,961	21
Bolton	2,635	34
Bury	1,395	27
Manchester	6,942	51
Oldham	2,429	37
Rochdale	1,206	19
Salford	2,550	40
Stockport	1,048	14
Tameside	2,207	34
Trafford	2,189	38
Wigan	1,982	23
Barnsley	2,777	46
Doncaster	3,497	42
Rotherham	2,853	39
Sheffield	4,913	37
Bradford	5,766	39
Calderdale	1,836	34
Kirklees	3,846	36
Leeds	8,594	44
Wakefield	4,295	48
Gateshead	1,772	35
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,331	33
North Tyneside	2,380	49
South Tyneside	1,810	44
Sunderland	2,317	29
Avon	3,523	14
Bedfordshire	4,039	25
Berkshire	4,271	20
Buckinghamshire	2,204	12
Cambridgeshire	1,500	8
Cheshire	4,697	18
Cleveland	9,117	57
Cornwall[2]	1,546	13
Cumbria	2,244	18
Derbyshire	8,126	32
Devon	2,490	10
Dorset	839	5
Durham	4,597	29
East Sussex	1,301	8
Essex	2,266	5
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	1,691	4
Hereford and Worcester	1,287	7
Hertfordshire	7,161	26
Humberside	7,991	34
Isle of Wight	176	6
Kent	1,959	5
Lancashire	4,282	11
Leicestershire	5,341	21
Lincolnshire	1,192	8
Norfolk	467	3

Pupils aged under five years of age in nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population
North Yorkshire	3,475	19
Northamptonshire	2,338	14
Northumberland	2,907	38
Nottinghamshire	12,901	47
Oxfordshire	1,778	11
Shropshire	1,808	16
Somerset	485	4
Staffordshire	4,761	17
Suffolk	2,916	16
Surrey	2,450	9
Warwickshire	1,425	11
West Sussex	596	3
Wiltshire	578	4
England[2,3]	294,331	23

[1] Excludes pupils who became five years of age by 1 January 1994.
[2] Includes the Isles of Scilly.
[3] Includes the Corporation of London.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are her latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for her Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Boswell: The figures requested, at 1994 prices, are as a follows:

Year	£
1987	502,221
1988	569,882
1989	673,650
1990	1,096,699
1991	1,597,599
1992	2,012,962
1993	1,629,000
1994	1,800,000

The information is not readily available to enable resultant cost savings to be calculated.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of state for education how many schools became grant maintained in each local education authority in England in each school year from 1989–90 and in 1994–95 to date.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is set out in the table.

LEA area	School Years 1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95 (to January 95)	Total January 1995
Avon	1	—	1	—	—	–	2
Barking	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Barnet	2	—	—	1	9	—	12
Barnsley	—	—	—	–	–	—	0
Bedfordshire	1	—	1	8	3	1	14
Berkshire	1	1	6	5	4	3	20
Bexley	—	—	—	4	4	—	8
Birmingham	2	2	—	6	13	—	23
Bolton	1	—	—	3	—	—	4
Bradford	—	—	1	4	4	4	13
Brent	1	—	1	3	8	1	14
Bromley	—	1	8	4	2	3	18
Buckinghamshire	—	2	2	7	5	2	18
Bury	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Calderdale	—	2	1	2	6	3	14
Cambridgeshire	—	—	2	16	4	—	22
Camden	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
Cheshire	1	—	1	2	2	1	7
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Cornwall	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Corporation of London	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Coventry	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Croydon	—	—	1	1	7	3	12
Cumbria	—	—	5	6	21	5	37
Derbyshire	1	1	2	8	9	4	25
Devon	1	—	—	3	3	—	7
Doncaster	–	—	—	—	—	—	0
Dorset	—	1	4	4	2	—	11
Dudley	1	—	—	2	4	—	7
Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Ealing	—	—	5	2	2	—	9
East Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Enfield	—	—	—	—	6	—	6
Essex	—	1	10	42	88	2	143
Gateshead	—	–	–	–	–	–	0
Gloucestershire	1	3	3	13	18	9	47
Greenwich	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Hackney	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Hammersmith	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Hampshire	—	1	5	9	15	1	31
Haringey	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Harrow	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Havering	—	—	—	3	1	—	4
Hereford and Worcester	—	—	—	2	3	—	5
Hertfordshire	—	3	5	8	17	6	39
Hillingdon	—	1	7	7	8	—	23
Hounslow	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
Humberside	—	—	1	—	1	1	3
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Islington	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Kensington and Chelsea	1	—	—	—	2	—	3
Kent	1	3	20	21	35	7	87
Kingston upon Thames	—	—	—	3	2	—	5
Kirklees	2	—	—	—	—	—	2
Knowsley	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Lambeth	1	—	1	4	5	4	15
Lancashire	2	1	3	1	3	1	11
Leeds	—	—	—	–	2	—	2
Leicestershire	1	—	—	4	—	—	5
Lewisham	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Lincolnshire	3	3	12	7	22	7	54
Liverpool	1	—	—	—	2	1	4
Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Merton	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Newham	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Norfolk	—	1	11	9	4	5	30
North Tyneside	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Northamptonshire	1	1	5	8	6	2	23
Northumberland	—	—	—	—	1	—	1

LEA area	School Years 1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95 (to January 95)	Total January 1995
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	3	—	—	3
Oldham	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Oxfordshire	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Redbridge	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Richmond-upon-Thames	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Rochdale	—	—	1	3	1	3	8
Rotherham	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Salford	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Sandwell	—	—	1	—	—	1	2
Sefton	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Sheffield	—	—	—	1	7	3	11
Shropshire	—	1	—	2	4	2	9
Solihull	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Somerset	—	—	1	1	1	2	5
South Tyneside	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Southwark	—	—	—	1	8	1	10
St. Helens	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Staffordshire	—	—	—	3	4	1	8
Stockport	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Sunderland	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Surrey	—	1	12	4	11	6	34
Sutton	1	—	4	3	3	—	11
Tameside	1	—	—	1	1	—	3
Tower Hamlets	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Trafford	—	—	—	3	1	—	4
Wakefield	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Walsall	—	-	—	3	5	1	9
Waltham Forest	-	—	1	—	1	1	3
Wandsworth	—	—	2	6	—	—	8
Warwickshire	-1	—	5	2	1	—	8
West Sussex	—	—	—	—	-	1	1
Westminster	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Wigan	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Wiltshire	-	—	1	3	24	4	32
Wirral	—	—	—	1	1	—	2
Wolverhampton	—	1	1	—	1	-	3
England	30	32	154	277	437	104	1034

Access Funds

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will list *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* in cash terms the allocation of access funds to each further education institution in each year since 1992–93;

(2) if she will list the total number of students in receipt of access funds of each further education institution in each year since 1992–93.

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member shortly with the information requested.

Pupil Costs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools for (i) teaching staff, (ii) books, (iii) equipment and (iv) premises refurbishment, as estimated by the Government, in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows LEA expenditure per pupil in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools on (i) teaching staff, (ii) books and equipment combined, and (iii) repairs and maintenance. Figures disaggregating expenditure on books and equipment are not collected. Equivalent information on grant-maintained schools is not available.

LEA expenditure per pupil (in 1993–94 prices)

Year	Teaching staff		Books and Equipment		Repairs and Maintenance	
	Nursery and Primary £	Secondary £	Nursery and Primary £	Secondary £	Nursery and Primary £	Secondary £
1984–85	857	1,230	38	68	73	89
1985–86	867	1,271	38	68	70	86
1986–87	935	1,403	42	85	78	96
1987–88	987	1,509	43	87	79	100
1988–89	1,021	1,587	42	92	72	99
1989–90	1,021	1,592	47	97	80	108
1990–91	1,015	1,561	47	91	76	109

LEA expenditure per pupil (in 1993–94 prices)

Year	Teaching staff		Books and Equipment		Repairs and Maintenance	
	Nursery and Primary £	Secondary £	Nursery and Primary £	Secondary £	Nursery and Primary £	Secondary £
1991–92	1,057	1,609	58	99	75	112
1992–93	1,116	1,672	61	101	73	101
1993–94[1]	1,100	1,596	61	101	71	94

[1] provisional—figures include unchecked data on 85 LEAs and estimated figures for 24 LEAs.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools for (i) teaching staff, (ii) books, (iii) equipment and (iv) premises refurbishment, estimated for each local education authority in the last two years.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have placed tables in the Library showing LEA expenditure per pupil in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools on, (i) teaching staff, (ii) books and equipment combined, and (iii) repairs and maintenance. Information is given for 1991–92 and 1992–93, the latest year for which final figures for each LEA are available. Figures disaggregating expenditure on books and equipment are not collected. Equivalent information on grant-maintained schools is not available.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average cost per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools of meeting the requirements of the national curriculum for each year since 1989.

Mr. Forth: Schools meet the requirements of the national curriculum largely from within their own unhypothecated resources. Central Government expenditure specifically on the implementation of the national curriculum in the financial years in question has been:

£ million

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*[1]
Expenditure	90	99	131	140	141	127
Expenditure per pupil	15	17	22	23	23	22

[1]Estimate

Most of this expenditure has been in the form of grants for education support and training and, to a much lesser extent, grants to the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority and its predecessors: it is not possible to separate out this expenditure as between primary and secondary education other than pro rata to pupil numbers.

Further Education Funding

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total allocation of funds from the European social fund under objective 3 to ruther education colleges in 1994; and what was the total allocation for each region designated by the Further Education Funding Council.

Mr. Boswell: The total allocation of funds from the European social fund under objective 3 to further education colleges in England in the calendar year 1994 was £43.503 million. The total allocation for each region was:

	£ millions
East Midlands	3.349
Eastern	2.725
London	6.866
Northern	4.790
North west	6.267
South east	3.165
South west	3.060
West Midlands	7.340
Yorkshire and Humberside	5.941

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many colleges of further education have been visited by the Further Education Funding Council's audit service; and how many of these were found to have unreliable internal audit systems.

Mr. Boswell: The questions raised by the hon. Member are matters for the funding council. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total allocation of funds from the European social fund under objective 3 to further education colleges in the last three years for which figures are available in *(a)* cash prices and *(b)* current prices.

Mr. Boswell: The total allocation of funds from the European social fund under objective 3 to further education colleges in England in the last three calendar years for which figures are available, in cash and current prices, is:

Year	*Cash prices £ million*	*1995–96 prices £ million*
1993	41.783	44.004
1994	43.503	44.917
1995	44.030	44.030

Assisted Places

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current average cost per pupil under the assisted places scheme for 1993–94 for each participating school in the scheme in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested, which relates to the academic year 1993–94, is given in the table:

School name	Average cost per assisted pupil £
Dame Allan's Boys	2,239
Dame Allan's Girls	2,507
Central Newcastle High	2,267
La Sagesse Convent	2,962
Newcastle upon Tyne Church High	2,194
Royal Grammar, Newcastle	2,182

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the marginal tax rate implied by the withdrawal of support against income under the assisted places scheme means test; and when the means test scheme was last revised.

Mr. Robin Squire: Parents whose incomes are above the threshold for full fee remission—currently £9,352 for academic year 1994–95—are required to pay a proportion of their income towards assisted place fees in accordance with a parental contribution scale. The scale has six successive income bands, and three percentage rates in each band according to the number of children holding assisted places in the family. For 1994–95, the lowest percentage required in respect of one assisted place holder is 9 per cent. of the income in the first tranche above the threshold. The corresponding percentages in the successively higher income bands are 12 per cent., 15 per cent., 21 per cent., 24 per cent. and 33 per cent.—the later percentage applying to that part of income exceeding £18,183.

Parental contribution scales are reviewed annually. The uprating proposed for academic year 1995–96 compared with 1994–95 is set out in the answer given to the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Mr. Spring) on 26 January, *Official Report*, columns *316-17*.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *219*, if she will make a statement indicating for the financial year 1993–94 for each school covered by the assisted places scheme which is not covered in that answer in descending order the amounts which each school received, the number of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme at each school, the proportion of the school roll covered by the assisted places scheme and the fees charged for assisted places scheme pupils at each school.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* The information requested, as collected for the academic year 1993–94, has been placed in the Library.

Inflation

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her Department's estimate of inflation for education costs in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: No such estimate is made by the Department.

National Curriculum

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many staff are employed to formulate the national curriculum and at what cost.

Mr. Forth: Formulating, and monitoring, the national curriculum in England is the responsibility of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority. The SCAA advises the Secretary of State for Education on all aspects of the school curriculum, not just the national curriculum, and of school examinations and assessment. The SCAA employs 200 staff at a staff cost of £5.8 million—1994–95 estimate. It is not possible accurately to apportion these staff between their work on the national curriculum and their other work.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils were in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in England and Wales for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The numbers of pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools in England in January for years 1985 to 1994 are shown in the table. Pupil numbers in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools in England
Position in January each year

Year	Primary (millions)	Secondary[1] (millions)
1985	3.75	3.46
1986	3.76	3.32
1987	3.79	3.18
1988	3.84	3.01
1989	3.91	2.87
1990	3.98	2.79
1991	4.05	2.77
1992	4.09	2.82
1993	4.17	2.87
1994	4.24	2.94

[1] Excludes pupils in sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools in April 1993

Further Education

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education in how many cases, and in which local education authorities the Education Assets Board has been called in to determine the ownership of land or assets following the transfer of further education institutions from local authority to Further Education Funding Council control.

Mr. Boswell: The Education Assets Board has determined, or is determining, 99 disputes involving the transfer of land or other property from 44 local education authorities to colleges in the further education sector.

Local education authorities where disputes over the transfer of property to colleges in the further education sector have been or are being determined by the Education Assets Board

Avon
Barking and Dagenham
Barnsley
Bedfordshire
Berkshire
Birmingham
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cornwall

Cumbria
Devon
East Sussex
Essex
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Harrow
Hillingdon
Kirkless
Kent
Lambeth
Leeds
Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
Manchester
Northamptonshire
North Yorkshire
Oxfordshire
Richmond upon Thames
Sefton
Sheffield
Shropshire
Somerset
Staffordshire
Sunderland
Sutton
Tameside
Tower Hamlets
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Warwickshire
West Sussex

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what grounds the Education Assets Board is required to consider when making decisions about the transfer of assets from a local authority to institutions funded by the Further Education Funding Council.

Mr. Boswell: Under schedule 5 to the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the Education Assets Board may determine disputes about the transfer of property only where it appears unlikely that agreement will be reached, or where agreement has not been reached within a prescribed period.

The board may determine whether assets were being used or held for the purposes of the institution on the transfer date, or whether they were being used or held for other purposes of the authority. In the first case, the assets will have transferred to the institution on the transfer date, in the second they will have remained the property of the authority.

If the board determines that assets were used or held partly for the purposes of the institution and partly for other purposes of the authority, the board must, where the nature of the property permits, divide or apportion the assets in such proportion as may be appropriate. Where division or apportionment is not feasible, the board must direct that the assets be either transferred to the institution or retained by the authority in accordance with the criteria laid down in paragraph 1(3) of schedule 5. In any such case, the board must direct that arrangements be made for the protection of the party who does not keep or receive the assets.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the severance payments made to special advisers in the last five years, indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury gave on 6 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *69*.

WALES

Speech Therapists

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to provide bursaries for postgraduates pursuing two-year courses to qualify as speech therapists.

Mr. Richards: It is for employers to consider whether bursaries for postgraduates are needed to recruit and retain staff.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of speech therapists per head of population in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Clwyd.

Mr. Richards: Provisional figures for 31 December 1994 show that there were 7.5 whole-time equivalent NHS speech therapists per 100,000 population in Clwyd and 6.2 per 100,000 population in Wales as a whole.

Art Collection

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) when and where the Welsh Arts Council's art collection is likely to be housed in the immediate future;

(2) what was the total purchase value of the Welsh Arts Council's art collection; and what is its present estimated value;

(3) where the Welsh Arts Council's art collection is currently held;

(4) when the Welsh Arts Council's art collection was last examined for inventory purposes.

Mr. Richards: This is a matter for the Arts Council of Wales, and I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member. A copy of his reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Chiropody

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the subject of the provision of chiropody services in *(a)* Gwynedd and *(b)* Wales during 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office received 11 representatives about the provision of chiropody services in Wales in 1994, one of which concerned services in Gwynedd.

Housing

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* residential and *(b)* non-residential properties there are currently in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each Welsh constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on residential properties, for Wales and for district council's, is published in table 1.4 "Welsh Housing Statistics", No. 14, 1994 and on non-residential properties in table 9.1 of "Welsh Local Government Financial Statistics", No. 18, 1994, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Equivalent information for Welsh constituencies is not available.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the percentage of existing residential property built before 1945 for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* each Welsh constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information for Wales and the United Kingdom is in table 6.3 of "Regional Trends 29", 1994, published by the Central Statistical Office, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Information is not available for each Welsh constituency.

Pensioners

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the population is aged 65 years or over for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* each Welsh county and *(d)* each Welsh constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The latest available information for the United Kingdom, Wales and each Welsh county is from the 1993 mid-year estimate and for each constituency from the 1991 census of population, as given in the following tables:

Percentage of residents aged 65 or over

	Per cent.
United Kingdom	15.8
Wales	17.3
Clwyd	18.0
Dyfed	19.1
Gwent	16.2
Gwynedd	20.0
Mid Glamorgan	15.6
Powys	19.1
South Glamorgan	15.7
West Glamorgan	17.8

Source:
1993 mid-year population estimate—Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Percentage of residents aged 65 or over

Constituencies	*Per cent.*
Aberavon	18.2
Alyn and Deeside	14.1
Blaenau Gwent	17.3
Brecon and Radnor	19.9
Bridgend	17.7
Caenarfon	19.6
Caerphilly	13.2
Cardiff Central	13.7
Cardiff North	20.0
Cardiff South and Penarth	16.2
Cardiff West	15.9
Camarthen	19.3
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	19.9
Clwyd North West	23.5
Clwyd South West	18.1
Conwy	22.0
Cynon Valley	17.2
Delyn	17.4
Gower	19.3
Islwyn	15.6
Llanelli	20.4
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	20.4
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	16.2
Monmouth	18.7
Montgomery	17.7
Neath	18.3
Newport East	14.1
Newport West	16.4
Ogmore	14.5
Pembroke	16.6
Pontypridd	13.8
Rhondda	18.1
Swansea East	14.8
Swansea West	19.4
Torfaen	14.8
Vale of Glamorgan	14.8
Wrexham	16.1
Ynys Mon	17.6

Source:
1991 census of population—Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *747*, on what grounds the information requested cannot be provided by the hospitals; and on what grounds the consent of GPs is necessary.

Mr. Richards: The information on waiting times requested is routinely provided by hospitals but, by agreement with the General Medical Services Committee (Wales), data identifying individual GPs or GP practices are not issued or published without their individual consent. As information on average waiting times by general practitioner practice is not regularly published, no steps have been taken to obtain the necessary consents for such publication. To provide the requested information would therefore entail disproportionate costs in obtaining individual consents.

Contagious Epididymitis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the cases of contagious epididymitis in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No cases of contagious epididymitis—B. ovis—have occurred in Wales since 1985.

Departmental Parking Spaces

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* bicycle and *(b)* car parking spaces there are for use by staff in (i) Gwydyr house office and (ii) Cathays Park office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: There are six car parking spaces at Gwydyr house. Welsh Office personnel are also able to park up to seven vehicles in the adjacent MOD car park. There are 47 spaces available for bicycles in that car park.

There are 533 car parking spaces and spaces for 72 bicycles at Cathays Park.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Redwood: Expenditure on management and other consultants engaged by the Welsh Office since 1987–88 is as follows:

£000

	Current prices	*1994–95 prices*
1987–88	345	494
1988–89	479	643
1989–90	342	429
1990–91	229	266
1991–92	1,109	1,212
1992–93	1,416	1,489
1993–94	1,454	1,483
1994–95[1]	475	475

[1] Year to date.

Information on savings resulting from consultancy work is not recorded centrally.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *423*, what further consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency pursuant to the resignation of the executive director, finance; if he will place a copy of his letter to the chairman relating to the breaches of the procurement rules in the Library; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 27 January.

The resignation of the chief finance officer is a separate matter and I understand that his decision was connected with his wish to return to the private sector.

DEFENCE

Winter Training

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what activities are included in winter training.

Mr. Soames: The British Army's winter training exercise includes cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, operating on snow shoes, survival in arctic conditions, live firing in the sub-arctic, tactical training over snow and ice up to unit and force level, logistic support in arctic conditions and maintenance and operation of vehicles, predominantly BV 206s.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's horses have been killed as a result of winter training in the last five years.

Mr. Soames: No horses have been killed as a result of winter training.

Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the collocation of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency.

Mr. Soames: Following issue of a consultative document on 18 October 1994 recommending collocation of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency on a single site, representations were made by trade unions, a number of local authorities, Members of Parliament and an action group based at Colchester. Full and careful consideration was given to all of these representations and the criteria of the original investment appraisal has also been subject to close scrutiny and recalculation where additional relevant factors have been drawn to our attention. Following this work, I am satisfied that the basis of the original recommendation was sound and I have decided to proceed with the collocation of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency on part of the former RAF Bicester site at Caversfield, Bicester. This work will be undertaken in accordance with the phased programme published in the consultative document. We will of course continue to consult staff and trade unions about the detailed implementation of this programme.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the licence number granted by the Medicines Control Agency and who are the listed manufacturers of anthrax vaccine.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

The product licence number of anthrax vaccine is PL 01511/0058. Information about manufacturers can be commercially sensitive and is not normally disclosed. However, in this case I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *995–96*.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the savings for the overall reduction in staffing at AWEs.

Mr. Freeman: Estimated savings are expected to rise to some tens of millions of pounds.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for liaising with representatives of the local community regarding the future of AWE Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Liaison with the local community is undertaken by the company managing AWE, Hunting-BRAE. The company will be discussing the consequences of rationalisation with local representatives when its Cardiff liaison committee next meets.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which functions of AWE Burghfield are to be transferred to AWE Aldermaston and which are to be discontinued.

Mr. Freeman: Some work on rubber, plastics, salts, high explosives components and detonators will be transferred from AWE Burghfield to AWE Aldermaston. No functions will be discontinued.

Mr. Mullin : To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the estimated savings from the proposed closures

of *(a)* AWE Cardiff, *(b)* Foulness and *(c)* the proposed cuts at Burghfield.

Mr. Freeman: Eventual estimated savings for the proposed closure of AWE Cardiff, for rationalisation of work from AWE Foulness, and for the proposed changes at AWE Burghfield, will be substantial. Costs of the defence nuclear programme have been regarded by successive Governments as inappropriate for public disclosure.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional activities will be carried out by AWE Aldermaston as a result of the recent review.

Mr. Freeman: Some component manufacture, including work on rubber, plastic, salts, high explosives components and detonators, as well as some laboratory work from Foulness, will move to AWE Aldermaston.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the annual operating cost of AWEs *(a)* in the year prior to contractorisation and *(b)* in the year after contractorisation.

Mr. Freeman: The costs of the defence nuclear programme have been regarded by successive Governments as inappropriate for public disclosure. With contractorisation, AWE operating costs have also become commercially sensitive.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for liaising with representatives of the local community regarding the proposed changes at AWE Burghfield and AWE Aldermaston; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Liaison with local communities is undertaken by the company managing AWE, Hunting-BRAE. I understand it is meeting local representatives today.

Polaris

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the running costs at current prices of Polaris for each year since the programme began.

Mr. Soames: The running costs of Polaris from 1991–92, at 1993–94 prices, are as follows:

1991–92: £176,000,000
1992–93: £156,000,000
1993–94: £103,000,000

This includes the costs of manpower, stores and spares, refits and the in-service support of warheads, submarines and their weapons systems. The annual running costs of Polaris since it first entered service could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tornado GRI Aircraft

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average annual running cost of a squadron of Tornado GRI aircraft.

Mr. Soames: The average cost of operating a Tornado GRI squadron, including the variable hourly flying costs and the apportionment of the station's fixed costs and overheads is £71,000,000 per annum.

RAF Running Costs

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the annual running costs of RAF Marham, RAF Honington and RAF Bruggen.

Mr. Soames: The annual running costs, including staff costs, utilities, contract services and property management of RAF Marham, RAF Honington and RAF Bruggen for the last financial year 1993–94 were:

Station	*£*
Marham	60,200,000
Honington	47,100,000
Bruggen	90,600,000

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) *Official Report*, column *448*, how chemical weapons and munitions disposed of by methods other than being sealed in sunk cargo vessels were disposed of; and at what dates and locations such other methods were used.

Mr. Soames: Surviving records of sea dumping indicate that between July and October 1945 some 14,000 tonnes of 5-in artillery rockets filled with phosgene gas were dumped in Beauforts Dyke explosive dumping ground in the north channel. The munitions, contained within ammunition crates, were jettisoned from vessels and sunk. Current scientific evidence indicates that chemical weapon dump sites present no significant risk to human health or to the marine environment and the living resources it supports. On exposure to sea water, phosgene gas rapidly decomposes to non-toxic compounds through dilution and hydrolysis.

US Reconnaissance Systems

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United Kingdom has direct access to the information produced by the United States of America satellite reconnaissance system; and what agreements or treaties govern such access.

Mr. Soames: It is not our practice to comment on such matters.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and in what circumstances United States high altitude long-range reconnaissance aircraft are based in Britain; if new types of such aircraft have been located, or are being considered for location in Britain; and what treaties or agreements authorise any such arrangements.

Mr. Soames: The basing of all United States Air Force aircraft in the United Kingdom is governed by arrangements mutually agreed between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States in accordance with the operational need pertaining at the time. No new types of high-altitude, long-range reconnaissance aircraft have been based or are being considered for basing in the UK.

Equipment Exports

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *286*, if he will list the changes in accounting conventions relating to the Defence Export Services Organisation.

Mr. Freeman: Receipts from the disposal by sale of equipment belonging to the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force have been disaggregated from the DESO budget to the relevant service principle accounting officer budgets. Receipts from the disposal for Defence Research Agency equipment have, since the establishment of the agency, also been disaggregated.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies are being undertaken with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies into the risks posed by proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; if these studies include *(a)* defences against ballistic missiles, *(b)* defences against theatre missiles and *(c)* defences against cruise missiles; and what time scale is intended for their completion.

Mr. Soames: At the NATO summit in January 1994, alliance leaders agreed that NATO should develop a policy framework to address the risks posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The first phase of this work, which assessed the risks posed to the alliance by the proliferation of these weapons, has been completed. This assessment did not examine specific defensive measures, though future work is likely to do so. We hope that significant progress will have been made by the end of this year.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of the conclusions of the NATO assessment of proliferation risks.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom has welcomed the NATO report on the risks posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means. We believe that it will form a good basis for the future work of the alliance in addressing risks posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Navy and Army Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which countries buyers have been, or will be, invited to the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition.

Mr. Freeman: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to release details of invitations issued to attend British forces equipment exhibitions. Invitations are issued on a confidential basis and it would be a breach of trust to release details.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition will be held; and on which days it will be open to *(a)* overseas customers, *(b)* the press and *(c)* the public.

Mr. Freeman: The Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition will be held at Pegasus Village, Aldershot, with daily ships visits to Portmouth, from 3 to 10 September 1995. The exhibition will be open to overseas visitors from 4 to 8 September, to the national press on 3 September only, and to the trade press for the whole week. The exhibition is not open to the public. Trade visitors are admitted on 7 and 8 September.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be opening the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition.

Mr. Freeman: As with the previous Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition, the opening ceremony is expected to be performed at ministerial level.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition.

Mr. Freeman: The cost of the exhibition will not be available until the list of participants has been finalised. There will, however, be no direct cost to the MOD since this will be covered by participating companies.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which categories of guests will be invited to the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition.

Mr. Freeman: Invitations to attend the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition are extended to appropriate overseas Government officials and industrialists, members of the United Kingdom national and technical press and British representatives from the trade.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many visitors are expected at the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition.

Mr. Freeman: Based on the attendance at the previous Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition, between 20,000 and 25,000 visitors are expected to attend.

Army Regiments

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regiments there are currently in the British Army.

Mr. Soames: There are currently 32 regular and 23 Territorial Army infantry regiments in the British Army.

Land Rovers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the tonnage of Land Rovers currently used by the Army; when they first came into operational use; and what major refurbishments have been carried out on them.

Mr. Soames: The Army currently has three basic Land Rover variants: the half-ton truck utility light, TUL, the three-quarter-ton truck utility medium, TUM, and one ton which is being replaced by the truck utility heavy, TUH, and by the TUM, heavy duty; the replacement is expected to be completed by 1996, when the final buy of TUM, heavy duty, is completed.

In service, the Army currently has the following numbers in each category:

TUL—4,584; this is made up of Land Rover Series III and Land Rover Defender 90 vehicles, all but three of which entered service after 1973.

TUM—10,824; this is made up of Land Rover Series III and Land Rover Defender 110 vehicles, all but five of which entered service after 1973.

1 Tonne—573; all these vehicles are of the one type which initially entered service in 1972.

Apart from routine maintenance, none of these vehicles has been subject to a refurbishment programme. Engines and major assemblies from the vehicles are routinely overhauled and refurbished through the Army base repair organisation.

RB44 Army Light Vehicles

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RB44 Army light vehicles have been purchased; what was the total cost; and when they became operational.

Mr. Soames: My Department purchased 846 RB44 vehicles from Reynolds Broughton Ltd. at an approximate cost of £24,000,000. First deployment was made in May 1992.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what technical and operational concerns resulted from the trials of the RB44 Army light vehicle at Larkhill; what actions were taken to remedy them; and how much it cost;

(2) what technical and operational difficulties his Department has found with the RB44 Army light vehicle during its operational service;

(3) what plans his Department has for the RB44 Army light vehicle.

Mr. Freeman: During the initial operational deployment to Larkhill a problem associated with the handling of the vehicles while braking was experienced. The manufacturer proposed and demonstrated a modification which was accepted by my Department. The modification was incorporated at the manufacturer's expense. Following acceptance into service there have been further technical problems of a similar nature which are being investigated by my Department in conjunction with the manufacturer. All vehicles have been taken out of service until the problem has been rectified.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many accidents in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Bosnia have involved the RB44; and what was the cause of these accidents.

Mr. Soames: Since its introduction into service, 25 accidents have been reported which have involved the RB44—22 in the UK, two in Bosnia and one in Germany.

Except for one in Bosnia, where a vehicle overturned on a greasy road, all the accidents were of a minor "road traffic" nature. In seven cases, the MOD driver was not at fault, the other 17 can be attributed to driver error.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current position in relation to the RB44 Army light vehicles at Larkhill.

Mr. Soames: There are 33 RB44s currently located at Larkhill. They were issued to meet the approved requirements of the two Royal Artillery units stationed there.

The vehicles are currently out of use while a steering under braking defect is investigated and are subject to appropriate maintenance to ensure they do not deteriorate.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the Army light vehicle capability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Army light vehicle fleet is currently able to meet all its tasks. As a result of "Options for Change", all units have had their vehicle requirements scrutinised to ensure that they are suitable for the units' new roles. A review of future requirements and developments in the light fleet area is currently being undertaken by my Department.

Somalia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what part United Kingdom naval forces have played in aiding the withdrawal of *(a)* Indian and *(b)* Pakistani UN troops from Somalia.

Mr. Soames: Indian UN troops completed their withdrawal from Somalia in December 1994 under their own arrangements. United Kingdom naval forces were not involved. The Royal Navy has deployed a ship to support the withdrawal of the remaining elements of the UN force, including the Pakistani contingent.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what part United Kingdom forces have played in the withdrawal of United Nations troops from Somalia.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *545*.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what logistical support the United Kingdom is providing for United Nations operations in Somalia.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom has made a ship available to support the operation to withdraw United Nations forces from Somalia. No logistic support is being provided.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice on drug abuse is available to British forces serving in the former Yugoslavia on behalf of the United Nations.

Mr. Soames: All service personnel, wherever they are serving, are aware of the armed forces' policy on the misuse of drugs. Army personnel serving in the former Yugoslavia were informed of the Army's intention to introduce compulsory random testing in January 1995.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the incidence of drug abuse among British forces serving in the former Yugoslavia on behalf of the United Nations;

(2) how many members of the British forces serving in the former Yugoslavia on behalf of the United Nations and of what rank have been the subject of *(a)* investigation and *(b)* disciplinary proceedings for drug abuse.

Mr. Soames: One corporal, two lance corporals and four private soldiers have been investigated for alleged drug offences in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. Of these, one lance corporal and three private soldiers are awaiting disciplinary proceedings. No evidence was found against the other service men investigated. At present, investigations are being conducted into alleged drug offences by two further lance corporals and one private soldier. Although we view all cases involving the misuse of drugs with concern, the total number of personnel investigated represents less than 1 per cent. of the British forces serving in the former Yugoslavia.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for

his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Soames: Individual budget holders in my Department have delegated powers to employ external consultants as they think fit within the limit of their resources and consistent with all requirements for propriety and value for money.

The information requested is, therefore, not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Diversification

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met representatives of local authorities to discuss defence diversification.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* In the course of implementing the decisions of the recent defence costs study, local authorities' representatives are consulted as and when necessary to facilitate, where possible, productive use of sites following withdrawal of my Department's activity.

The suitability of specific schemes for funding under the EC's Konver programme is a matter for the DTI.

EMPLOYMENT

Investigations

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what firms have been investigated by his Department or agencies in the last five years; and what was the reason in each case.

Miss Widdecombe: In the last five years, the Employment Service. an agency of the Employment Department, has successfully prosecuted 215 collusive employers—that is, those who actively encourage their work force to claim unemployment benefits fraudulently. The yearly breakdown is as follows:

1989–90: 6
1990–91: 9
1991–92: 40
1992–93: 55
1993–94 100

Details of individual employer investigations are not held centrally. Records are held at the Employment Service sector fraud office responsible for the investigation. There are 65 sector fraud offices throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

The Health and Safety Executive, NDPB of the Employment Department, also prosecutes those in breach of health and safety regulations. The figures for such prosecutions are given in Command Paper 2205. "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1993–94 to 1995–96: Employment Department Group and earlier papers".

It would not be possible to obtain details of individual employers and companies prosecuted in the last five years except at disportionate cost.

Contractors

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what safeguards ensure that his Department or agencies do not engage firms as contractors that have been investigated for breaches of the law.

Miss Widdecombe: Employment Department contracts require contractors to take reasonable measures to ensure that their employees are not drawing benefit and are legal residents of the United Kingdom. A revised contract will allow termination of the contract if the contractor's behaviour is prejudicial to the Department's interests of reputation.

Previous records are taken into account, as is any substantiated evidence of illegal activities.

If it were discovered after the award of a contract that a contractor had been found guilty of an offence which had a material bearing on his ability to perform the contract, appropriate action would be taken.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the contractors who have been removed from the Department's approved list of contractors in the last year.

Miss Widdecombe: Contractors leave the supplier lists for many reasons, most of which have nothing to do with issues of propriety. Three suppliers were removed from the Department's approved suppliers list in the last year. The names of our suppliers are confidential.

Burns International

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which contracts let by his Department or agencies have been awarded to Burns International in the last year.

Miss Widdecombe: None at present, though it is the intention of the Employment service to award three contracts to Burns International from 3 April 1995.

Burns International was also used three times on a casual basis by the Health and Safety Executive's estates management contractor to guard scaffolding overnight whilst renovations were carried out to the HSE area office in Edinburgh. That work finished in June 1994.

Earnings

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workers have earnings *(a)* above the national insurance contributions maximum payments ceiling and *(b)* below the lower earnings limit; and how many in each case are women.

Mr. Oppenheim: It is estimated that in April 1994 there were 3.1 million employees earning above the national insurance upper earnings limit and 3.1 million employees earning below the national insurance lower earnings limit. The corresponding numbers for women were 0.5 million and 2.3 million respectively.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the credit rating of training and enterprise councils is assessed; and how contractors on the TECs can ascertain it.

Mr. Paice: The Government do not check the credit ratings of training and enterprise councils. They keep in touch with TECs' own statements of their financial position through regular scrutiny of their management accounts, which they receive on a commercial-in-confidence basis.

The Government also examines TECs' annual statutory accounts, which they are required to lodge with this Department by 31 July and with Companies House by the end of the January following each financial year.

Until the date by which the statutory accounts have to be lodged at Companies House, they are commercial-in-confidence, but as this Department receives them, copies are placed in the Library.

Credit rating organisations in the private sector offer assessment of TECs as part of their normal business. These would be available to training providers as are the statutory annual accounts lodged with Companies House.

Coal Mining

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many men aged 55 years and over were employed in British coal mines as underground workers for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Oppenheim: Estimates of the numbers of employed persons by industry are collected by the Employment Department's "Labour Force Survey". However, no information is available for the age group requested, because the sample size is too small to provide reliable estimates.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether it is his policy that those administering the jobseeker's allowance be set financial targets for disqualifying claimants of unemployment benefit; and whether any of their pay will be related to the financial outturn for unemployment benefit under the performance-related pay policy.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no policy of setting targets for disqualifying claimants.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what special help will be provided for directing persons from minority groups who are seeking entitlement to the jobseeker's allowance.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The Employment Service currently provides help for people from minority groups through specialist inner city officers and outreach officers. Key leaflets are also produced in the main ethnic minority languages. Interviews with clients whose first language is not English and who need help with translation are arranged to take place in the client's own language or with a translator. These provisions will continue when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria will be used to specify the skills required by Employment Service officers in undertaking the role of assessor for the purposes of entering into the jobseeker's agreement.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The criteria will be based on what is needed to ensure that the jobseeker clearly understands the entitlement conditions and how these relate to the local labour market. A full programme of training is being prepared for Employment Service staff before the proposed introduction of the jobseeker's allowance.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in relation to the jobseeker's allowance, what is the composition of the business assurance committee; how often it has met; and what is its cost.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The Employment Service and Benefits Agency have both set up business assurance committees to ensure that the jobseeker's allowance is developed in accordance with the business needs of each agency. Although set up in slightly different ways, each committee is made up of representatives from the agency's field organisation and from its head office. The committees meet, as necessary, and the only costs incurred above normal staff salaries are travel costs.

South Thames TEC

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the training providers for South Thames TEC currently known to the receiver; and what assessment he has made of whether the list is comprehensive.

Mr. Paice: There are 124 youth training and training for work providers, and four South Thames enterprise programme providers contracted to South Thames TEC currently known to the receiver. To the best of the Department's knowledge, this list is comprehensive.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *539*, when the information relating to contractors to the South Thames TEC will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to her on Tuesday 7 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *183*.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the cost to *(a)* South Thames TEC and *(b)* his Department of the use of outside consultants, accountants and the receiver in investigating the financial difficulties at South Thames TEC from 28 November 1994 to date.

Mr. Paice: I am not in a position to estimate the cost to South Thames TEC of the use of outside consultants and accountants. This is a matter for the receiver. The cost to the Department of the use of outside consultants and accountants was £32,182 as of December 1994. This is the latest estimate available. As is normal commercial practice, the receiver's costs are a first charge on the assets of South Thames TEC. These have not yet been fully established.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Miss Widdecombe: Information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Wages

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average wage of workers in England in each year since 1989.

Mr. Oppenheim: The average wage of adult full-time workers in England is published in table X5 of part A of the "New Earnings Survey" reports. That of adult part-time women is published in table 180 of part F. Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

TREASURY

Paris Club

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Cuban Minister of Finance and Prices about the Paris Club; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I met Mr. Rodriguez, the Cuban Minister of Finance and Prices, on 30 January 1995. We discussed a variety of issues, including Cuba's external debt and the Paris Club.

International Bodies (Parliamentary Scrutiny)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he intends to bring forward to improve parliamentary scrutiny of activities at *(a)* the World Bank and *(b)* the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom's contribution to the World Bank group is part of the aid programme and as such is subject to scrutiny from Parliament and the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. Parliamentary approval is also required for the UK's contribution to capital increases or replenishments. The UK's quota as the IMF is financed from the national loans fund, which is audited by the National Audit Office. The accounts are laid annually before Parliament. We believe these existing arrangements provide ample scope for oversight by Parliament.

Civil Servants

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the terms under which the Treasury civil service jobs unit was established; how many civil servants work in it and for how long; and what is the annual cost of the unit's operation.

Mr. Nelson: The purpose of the unit is to help surplus Treasury staff to find jobs in other parts of the civil service. It takes up part of the time of a grade 5 and a personal secretary who both have other duties. The unit was set up in November 1994 and will remain in being, although not necessarily with the same staff, while there are staff surpluses to resolve. The annual cost is approximately £20,000.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the annual cost of the career decision seminars, the career transition or self-marketing workshops and the career centres which his Department has established for civil servants leaving the Treasury;

(2) what contract his Department has given to Focus Ltd., professional outplacement consultants; how long the contract will last; and how much it is costing the Treasury.

Mr. Nelson: Following a competition, a two-year contract was let with Focus Ltd. in September 1994 to provide a range of services, including counselling, career decision seminars, self-marketing and other job-search training on a call-off basis. As use of the contract depends on demand, it is not possible at present to give costs on an annual basis. Expenditure to date is £23,546. The career centre is staffed by a member of the Treasury at an annual cost of approximately £17,000.

World Summit on Social Development

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to seek international support for his multilateral debt initiative at the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen.

Mr. Nelson: I understand that the world summit on social development will discuss the problems of poor countries when it convenes in March, including developing countries' debt. We shall encourage participants at the summit to support the Chancellor's multilateral debt initiative.

The next step for the multilateral debt initiative will be to secure support from other members of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. We intend to pursue this at the institutions' spring meetings in April.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The areas of the Treasury which deal with public expenditure control and pay are keeping the level of Treasury delegations to Departments under regular review, but have not withdrawn any rules or regulations in the last 12 months.

The rule requiring the Treasury to certify new ordinary save-as-you-earn schemes has been removed.

The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed.

The manpower implications are taken into account in the Department's central manpower plans, which will be published in the departmental report on Her Majesty's Treasury in March.

Single European Currency

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned or intends to commission in order to ascertain the views of British business and financial concerns towards the establishment of a single European currency.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* Treasury Ministers and officials have frequent meetings with representatives of the business sector, including financial services, to hear their views on a variety of subjects.

European Investment Fund

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the establishment and operation of the European investment fund as described in the conclusions of the presidency of the Edinburgh summit.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 8 February 1995]:* The establishment of a European investment fund, or EIF, was one element of the declaration on promoting economic recovery in Europe, agreed by the European Council at Edinburgh, in December 1992. The new fund was envisaged as a joint venture, with a share capital of 2 becu, £1.55 billion, allocated between the European investment bank, 40 per cent. the EC itself, 30 per cent., and EC financial institutions and banks, 30 per cent. It was proposed that the EIF should provide guarantees for loans to trans-European networks, TENs, and to small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, throughout the Community. These guarantees would be a form of insurance to the lender, for which a premium would be charged. It was also envisaged that the EIF could, after two years of operation, take equity stakes in SMEs or TENs, subject to the agreement of its shareholders.

The creation of the fund required an amendment to the statute of the EIB, which is itself a protocol of the treaty of Rome. Therefore it could not be established until the treaty had been amended, and the amendment ratified by all EC member states. This process was concluded, and the amendment came into force, on 1 May 1994, and on the 25 May the governors of the EIB—EC finance Ministers, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer as the UK's representative—took the formal decision to establish the fund. The EC and the financial institutions were then formally invited to become members of the EIF, and its inaugural general meeting was held on 14 June 1994.

The fund began operations in July 1994. By the end of that year, 11 guarantees had been approved, with a total value of some 711 mecu or £551 million. Of these, seven operations, representing 75 per cent. of the total value of guarantees approved, were in the TENs sector, while the remaining four operations involved SMEs.

All figures converted at 1994 average annual £/ecu conversion rate £1=1.289273 ecu.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Lord President of the Council what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Newton: Expenditure of £14,500 was incurred in 1994 by the central drugs co-ordination unit in respect of research conducted on its behalf by the Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence. This work was not undertaken for cost-saving purposes.

No other relevant expenditure has occurred since 1987, nor does the Privy Council Office have any current plans to engage external consultants.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 10 February 1995

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sexual Intercourse (Age of Consent)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the age of consent for lawful sexual intercourse in each of the countries in the European Community.

Mr. Maclean: The following table sets out what I understand to be the ages at which, provided that there is mutual consent and no special provisions apply—see footnotes—persons may legally engage in heterosexual and homosexual sexual acts in each EC country.

	Male/Female	*Male/Male*	*Female/Female*
Austria	14	See [1]	14
Belgium	14	14	14
Denmark	[2]15	[2]15	[2]15
Finland	16	18	[3]18
France	15	15	15
Germany	[2]14	18	[2]14
Greece	15	17	17
Ireland	17	17	15
Italy	[2]14	[2]14	[2]14
Luxembourg	16	16	16
Netherlands	[2]16	[2]16	[2]16
Portugal	14	16	16
Sweden	[2]15	[2]15	[2]15
Spain	[2]16	[2]16	[2]16
United Kingdom	[4]16	18	[4]16

[1] Homosexual activities between males aged 14 and over are legal unless one partner is aged 14 to 18 and the other is over 18.
[2] A higher age may apply where the older person is in a position of authority, influence or trust.
[3] The Finnish parliament is giving consideration to lowering the common age of consent to 15.
[4] 17 in Northern Ireland.

Group 4

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what vetting procedures are in place on the staff of Group 4 who will be involved in the transportation of prisoners to Birkenhead Crown court; and if Group 4 will be responsible for the transportation of prisoners irrespective of their offence.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Frank Field, dated 10 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the vetting procedures and responsibilities of Group 4 staff at Birkenhead Crown Court.

All Prisoner Custody Officers (PCOs) at contracted out prisons and those working in the contracted court escort and custody service are certified by the Home Secretary. This is in accordance with Section 89 of, and Schedule 10 to, the Criminal Justice Act 1991. Before issuing such a certificate, routine enquiries are made. These investigations are similar to those made in relation to applications for Prison Service employment and include checks made by the police against criminal records held in the National Identification Bureau. Candidates applying for employment as PCOs are exempt for the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and conviction which ordinarily are regarded as "spent" are therefore taken into account.

Group 4 will be responsible for the escort of all prisoners to and from court and for their custody at court, with the exception of category A prisoners, who will continue to be escorted by the Police and Prison Service.

Coroner Service, Greater Manchester

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce his decision concerning restructuring of the coroner service for Greater Manchester.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Following local consultation, my right hon. and learned Friend has decided not to proceed with a proposal to make an order under section 4(1) of the Coroners Act 1988 to restructure the coroners district in Greater Manchester. The present four coroners districts will therefore continue unaltered.

Forensic Science Laboratory

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be able to announce his decision on the future of the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: On the basis of a review initiated by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and the Home Office, I have concluded that the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory should merge with the forensic science service to form a national organisation serving all police forces in England and Wales through seven regional operational laboratories; that direct charging for forensic science services should be extended to include services currently provided by MPFSL; and that the Metropolitan police and the City of London police should be untied from their reliance on the MPFSL as sole provider of these services. There will of course continue to be a Metropolitan laboratory.

These changes will ensure that arrangements for providing forensic science support to the criminal justice system will be the same throughout England and Wales. The merger will ensure that strong forensic science support continues to be made available to the Metropolitan police and the City of London police. Both FSS and MPFSL have traditions of excellence in the provision of forensic science support to the criminal justice system. Within an enlarged agency they will maintain and build upon already high standards of forensic science support to crime investigation in London while ensuring the continued development of effective and efficient forensic science provision throughout

England and Wales; characterised by its high quality, clear impartiality and availability equally to police, prosecution and defence.

The worldwide reputations which the MPFSL and FSS have established will be enhanced by bringing them together. International standing is especially important at a time when developments in forensic science are increasingly being brokered across national boundaries and overseas markets are opening up.

I intend that the MPFSL and FSS should merge with effect from 1 April 1996. Merger will be preceded by a transitional period, beginning on 1 April 1995, during which the director general of the FSS will manage MPFSL on behalf of the commissioner, and prepare, with MPFSL and FSS staff, and with the concurrence of the commissioner and the Home Office, detailed plans for the changes.

Prisoners

Mr. Straw : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been diagnosed as mentally ill in each year since 1979; and how many of these have been transferred to NHS facilities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 8 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 10 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners diagnosed as mentally ill in each year since 1979 and how many of them were transferred to NHS facilities.

The information sought in the first part of your Question is not available in the form requested. Since December 1991 Prison Service establishments have, however, been carrying out regular medical monitoring exercises. To monitor the assessed needs of mentally disordered prisoners information is collected and collated by the Directorate of Health Care on a periodical basis. On a given day prisoners who are considered by prison doctors to need some form of mental health care are categorised as follows:

(a) prisoners requiring removal or transfer to a psychiatric hospital under Mental Health Act provisions and who are awaiting such transfer. This figure includes remand prisoners awaiting disposal by the court.

(b) prisoners who are sufficiently ill to be occupying in-patient beds in prison health care centres; and

(c) prisoners requiring some form of mental health care but not removal/transfer to psychiatric hospital or in-patient treatment in a prison health care centre.

Tables 1 to 3 enclosed show the numbers of mentally disordered prisoners recorded in each of the above categories over the period from December 1991 to September 1994.

We do not yet know the precise reason for the fall from 802 to 331 in the number of mentally ill prisoners occupying in-patient beds in February and September 1994 but it is more than offset by the increase, from 1766 to 2598, in the number of such prisoners being cared for elsewhere within establishments.

Table 4 enclosed gives the number of transfers to hospital from 1979 onwards under sections 47 and 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983, or their equivalents under the preceding legislation, sections 72 and 73 of the Mental Health Act 1959. This shows that there has been a marked increase in the number of transfers over the last 15 years, with more than double the number of transfers in 1994 when compared with 1990.

Table 1

	The number of prisoners awaiting removal or transfer to a psychiatric hospital under Mental Health Act provisions, including remand prisoners awaiting disposal by the court.
December 1991	128
February 1992	92
April 1992	112
June 1992	101
August 1992	85
October 1992	107
December 1992	101
February 1993	123
May 1993	161
September 1993	104
February 1994	136
June 1994	174
September 1994	102

Table 2

	The number of prisoners considered by prison doctors to be sufficiently mentally ill to occupy an in-patient bed in a prison health care centre.
December 1991	845
February 1992	671
April 1992	696
June 1992	557
August 1992	553
October 1992	563
December 1992	428
February 1993	415
May 1993	571
September 1993	663
February 1994	802
June 1994	684
September 1994	331

Table 3

	The number of prisoners considered by prison doctors to require some form of mental health care but not removal/transfer to psychiatric hospital or in-patient treatment in a prison health care centre
December 1991	1,048
February 1992	1,515
April 1992	1,432
June 1992	1,696
August 1992	2,132
October 1992	1,963
December 1992	2,093
February 1993	2,343
May 1993	1,775
September 1993	1,664
February 1994	1,766
June 1994	1,921
September 1994	2,598

Table 4

Transfers of prisoners to hospital by direction of the Home Secretary under Sections 72 and 73 of the Mental Health Act 1959 and Sections 47 and 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983

	After sentence S72/S47	*Before sentence S73/S48*	*Total*
1979	70	16	86
1980	87	19	106
1981	86	22	108
1982	85	18	103
1983	91	24	115
1984	108	47	155
1985	100	41	141
1986	107	53	160
1987	127	77	204
1988	121	85	206
1989	131	100	231
1990	156	181	337
1991	193	264	457
1992	230	380	610
1993	290	486	776
1994[1]	234	512	746

[1] Provisional figures.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* Disaggregated information on the basis requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs on 13 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *173*, which showed the fees paid by the Department of Trade and Industry for general consultancies in the years 1984 to 1989, and to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs on 1 May 1991, *Official Report*, columns *219-20*, which gave the corresponding figures for 1989–90 and 1990–91. Since 1986–87, programme-related consultancy work has been funded from within programme budgets. The fees for general consultancy work for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94 are given in the following table:

Year	*£000*
1990–91	3,139
1991–92	3,490
1992–93	3,171
1993–94	4,774

High-level Waste

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much high-level waste is currently stored at Sellafield; and how much of this has been vitrified.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* This is an operational matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what unforeseen technical problems have been experienced by BNFL in the commissioning of THORP; and what are their safety implications.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* This is a management matter for BNFL. The commissioning programme for THORP is being implemented subject to the appropriate regulatory requirements.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's response to the cancellation of two German reprocessing contracts for THORP; how the cancellation of these contracts will affect the projected profits from the plant; and if he will ensure that the Touche Ross report commissioned by BNFL is made public to allow verification of the projected profits from THORP.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* These are commercial matters for the company. The two German reprocessing contracts which were cancelled related to business for the second 10 years of THORP's operation. I understand from BNFL that they do not affect the baseload operations of THORP and hence its profitability during its first 10 years of operation. The projected profits from THORP were set out in the document published by the company entitled, "The economic and commercial justification for THORP", copies of which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current operational status of THORP.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* This is an operational matter for BNFL.

Nirex Research Projects

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research projects have been commissioned by Nirex on geology since 1990; and if he will state their cost, research departments and staff and their publication dates.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* This is a matter for the management of UK Nirex Ltd. Nirex has published a wide variety of reports on its activities.

Electricity Regulator

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to extend the powers of the electricity regulator to include the examination of directors' and chairmen's pay rises, pension contributions and share options.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 7 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *139*.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Construction Contracts

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress the Government are making in their review of procurement procedures following the Latham report on the construction industry's contractual arrangements.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The multi-departmental scrutiny of Government construction procurement began on 28 November 1994, as announced in the news release of that date. Completion of the scrutiny is expected by early spring 1995. It is normal practice for efficiency scrutiny reports to be published.

WALES

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Redwood: Information on most of the public bodies for which I am responsible is given in "Public Bodies 1994", HMSO, which is available in the Library of the House.

In addition to those listed, I retain departmental responsibility for the following:

Community health councils
Mental Health Act Commission
National Rivers Authority regional flood defence committee

None of these bodies has been identified as being suitable for privatisation. Substantial property holdings of the Welsh Development Agency are being sold, and south Wales councils are currently selling Cardiff Wales airport.

Insulation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for introducing major programmes of insulation in Wales; and what assessment he has made of the impact of insulation on atmospheric pollution.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The home energy efficiency scheme runs on a United Kingdom basis and is a major programme for home insulation for those in receipt of a state retirement pension and low incomes.

I have made no assessment of the impact of insulation on atmospheric pollution. This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Cardiff Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *538*, if his consent was sought for the development agreement between Associated British Ports and the Cardiff Bay development corporation in March 1991; what assessment he has made of the contributions Associated British Ports would have made to the infrastructure costs of Cardiff Bay development corporation if the previous arrangement of 11 May 1989 had remained in place; and whether the measurement of the appropriate level of development to be undertaken by Associated British Ports related exclusively to the level of private sector development attracted.

Mr. Redwood: These questions relate to operational matters to which the chief executive will respond, as indicated in my answer of 7 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *151*.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation about its contract with N. M. Rothschilds and Son Ltd.; between which dates Rothschilds was retained as financial consultants to Cardiff Bay development corporation; and if he will list its principal duties during this period.

Mr. Redwood: I understand the contract ceased in 1990. The issues raised are operational and the chief executive will write to the hon. Member. I have had no discussions with the chairman about Rothschilds.

Urban Regeneration, Barry

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date the Welsh Development Agency signed the joint venture agreement with Associated British Ports, South Glamorgan county council and the Vale of Glamorgan district council for the urban regeneration project of Number One Dock, Barry.

Mr. Redwood: The redevelopment of land at Number One Dock, Barry is the subject of an agreement between Associated British Ports and the Welsh Development Agency signed on 31 March 1994.

Cyclist-pedestrian Crashes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many accidents occurred between cyclists and pedestrians in Wales; and how many prosecutions took place for cycling on the footway, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Redwood: The number of accidents between cyclists and pedestrians and the number of prosecutions for cycling on the footway in Wales are given in the following table:

	[1]Number of accidents between cyclists and pedestrians	*Number of persons prosecuted for riding on a footpath*
1989	14	26
1990	10	28
1991	6	8
1992	5	3
1993	8	4

Note:

[1]An offence under Highway Act 1835 Section 72 and Byelaws.

Source:

Home Office.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of United Kingdom state pension expenditure is formed by state expenditure on old-age pensions for pensioners resident in Wales in *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table.

Percentage of UK retirement pension expenditure for pensioners residing in Wales

Year	*Per cent.*
1992–93	5.27
1993–94	5.26

Notes:

1. Sources: DSS pension scheme computer system data and expenditure information.

2. For the purposes of this reply "Retirement Pension expenditure" includes payable additional pension, graduated retirement benefit, increments, age addition and increases for dependants.

3. Information for 1993–94 is provisional.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many self-employed people *(a)* failed to qualify for a retirement pension and *(b)* qualified for only a reduced pension, due to an inadequate insurance record for each of the last 30 years.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current contribution conditions for *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* sickness benefit and *(c)* the retirement pension; and if he will list how these conditions have changed in the last 30 years.

Mr. Arbuthnot:

(a) Unemployment Benefit

Prior to 1975 the contribution conditions for unemployment benefit were that—

(1) not less than 26 class 1 contributions had been paid by the claimant in respect of the period between his entry into insurance and the day for which benefit is claimed; and

(2) not less than 50 class 1 contributions had been paid by or credited to him in respect of the last complete contribution year before the beginning of the benefit year which includes the day for which benefit is claimed.

In 1975, with the changeover from flat rate to earnings-related national insurance contributions, the contribution conditions were amended to:

(1) in respect of any one tax year, the earnings factor derived from the person's payment of Class 1 contributions was at least 25 times the lower earnings limit for payment of National Insurance contributions in that year; and

(2) in the relevant past tax year which governs the claim, the earnings factor derived from class 1 contributions paid by or credited to the person was not less than 50 times the lower earnings limit for payment of national insurance contributions in that year.

The contribution conditions which have applied since 1988 are that—

(1) in respect of one of the two tax years relevant to the claim, the earnings factor derived from the person's payment of class 1 contributions is at least 25 times the lower earnings limit for payment of national insurance contributions in that year;

(2) in respect of both the tax years relevant to the claim, the earnings factor derived from class 1 contributions paid by or credited to the person is at least 50 times the lower earnings limit for payment of national insurance contributions in that year.

(b) Sickness Benefit

Prior to 1988 the contribution conditions for sickness benefit were the same as those applying to unemployment benefit except at class 2—self-employed—contributions counted for benefit purposes.

The contribution conditions which have applied since 1988 are that:

(1) in respect of any tax year, the earnings factor derived from payment of class 1 or 2 contributions is at least 25 times the lower earnings limit for payment of national insurance contributions in that year, and these contributions must be paid before the start of the claim: and

(2) in respect of both the tax years relevant to the claim, the earnings factor derived from class 1 contributions paid or credited or class 2 contributions paid is at least 50 times the lower earnings limit for payment of national insurance contributions in that year.

With the abolition of industrial injury benefit from April 1983, the contribution conditions are deemed to be satisfied if the person's incapacity for work was due to an accident at work when an employed earner, or a prescribed industrial disease due to the nature of their work as an employed earner.

Payment of benefit at reduced rates—Sickness and Unemployment Benefit

Prior to 1975 where a person did not fully satisfy the second contribution conditions, reduced rate benefit was payable if not less than 26 contributions of the appropriate class had been paid or credited in the relevant contribution year.

From 1975 where the earnings factor was 50 to 75 per cent. of the amount needed for the payment of standard rate benefit, half rate benefit was paid. Where the earnings factor was more than 75 per cent. but less than the full amount needed for the payment of standard rate benefit, three-quarter rate benefit was paid. Reduced rates of benefit ceased to apply in October 1986 but transitional provisions allowed payment of reduced rates to continue to October 1987 in certain cases.

(c) Retirement Pension

Prior to April 1975 the contribution conditions for standard rate retirement pension were that—

(1) not less than 156 flat rate contributions had been actually paid by the relevant person in respect of the period between that person's entry to insurance and the date on which he or she reached pensionable age, and

(2) the yearly average of flat rate contribution paid by or credited to that person was not less than 50. Where the yearly average was less than 50 but not less than 13 retirement pension was payable at a reduced rate.

The yearly average was calculated over the period from the beginning of the contribution year in which school leaving age was reached to the end of the last complete contribution year before that in which pensionable age was reached. This period was modified where the person concerned reached age 16 before 5 July 1948.

Since 1975 the contribution conditions for standard rate category A basic retirement pension have been—

(1) achievement of one qualifying year since 6 April 1975 derived from the actual payment of class 1, 2, or 3 national insurance contributions or payment of 50 flat rate contributions at any time before 6 April 1975

(2) achievement of qualifying years for approximately 90 per cent. of the years in the person's working life. A reduced rate of pension is payable where the number of qualifying years is less than but at least a quarter of the number required for standard rate pension.

A qualifying year is a tax year in which the earnings factor derived from national insurance contributions paid or credited is at least 52 times the lower earnings limit for that year. Between 6 April 1975 and 5 April 1978, the earnings factor needed for the year to be a qualifying year was 50 times the lower earnings limit for that year. Any national insurance contributions paid or credited before 6 April 1975 are converted into qualifying years by dividing the total number of contributions by 50 and rounding any fraction up to the next whole number.

A person's working life runs from the start of the tax year in which age 16 is reached until the tax year before the one in which pensionable age is reached. The working life can be modified where a person had reached age 16 before 5 July 1948.

Note:

The earnings factor is the amount of earnings on which class 1 national insurance contributions have been paid: class 2 and 3 national insurance contributions and class 1 and 3 contribution credits are treated as earnings at the weekly lower earnings limit for the relevant year.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current contribution conditions of the state earnings-related scheme; and if he will list the changes in these conditions since the inception of the scheme.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Entitlement to state earnings-related pension arises where the earnings factor[1] derived from national insurance contributions paid in respect of 1978–79 or any later tax year exceeds 52 times the lower earnings limit for payment of national insurance contributions in the final relevant year[2].

Note 1—the earnings factor is the amount of earnings on which class 1 national insurance contributions have been paid in a given tax year. Class 2 and 3 national insurance contributions are treated as earnings at the weekly lower earnings limit. Where the year in question is earlier than the final relevant year, the earnings factor is revalued in line with subsequent growth in national average earnings.

Note 2—the final relevant year is the last complete tax year before that in which state pension age is reached or, if earlier, death occurs.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many divorced or separated women received *(a)* a full and *(b)* a partial retirement pension on the record of their previous partners for each of the last 30 years.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been the savings in public expenditure resulting from changes to the state earnings-related pension scheme since 1979.

Mr. Arbuthnot: None.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish figures similar to those in table 2 of Cm 2714 on the Pensions Bill showing the estimated financial effect on the national insurance fund assuming a common retirement age of 63 years;

(2) if he will publish figures similar to those in table 1 of Cm 2714 on the Pensions Bill 1994 giving an estimate of the costs of national insurance benefits assuming a common retirement age of 63 years.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The tables published in the Government Actuary's report, Cm 2714, have been produced to support the financial effects of the proposals in the Pensions Bill. Several options for the equalisation of state pension age have been examined and estimates of their financial effects published in the consultation documents, "Options for Equality in State Pension Age", Cm 1723, and the White Paper, "Equality in State Pension Age", Cm 2420, copies of which are held in the Library. These are the most recent figures available.

Employers Panel

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the members of the DSS employers panel and the organisations they represent, indicating which members of the panel are representatives of small businesses.

Mr. Hague: The current members of the Department of Social Security's employers panel are:

Name	*Organisation*
Sandy Anson	Institute of Directors
Howard Birkbeck	British Coal
Ruth Common	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Melanie Ellis	Hoare Govett Ltd
Nick Goulding	*The Forum of Private Business
Claude Greaves	*Greaves and Associates Ltd
Ken Gurr	Payroll Alliance
Ian Handford	Federation of Small Businesses*
Stephanie James	Association of British Chambers of Commerce
Dominic Johnson	Confederation of British Industry
Trevor Lakin	Institute of British Payroll Management
Michael Ridge	Independent member previously Cyborg Systems Ltd
Jack Scougall	United Distillers
David Silver	Data Management Services*
Indiri Soni	Masons
George Swallow	J. Sainsbury PLC
Roddy Symes	Metal Colours Ltd
Debbie Williams	William Haley Engineering Ltd*

Members marked with a star are from small businesses or small business representative organisations.

Habitual Residence Appeals

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many successful appeals have been made regarding habitual residence.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people by standard English region, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are currently in

receipt of housing benefit as a consequence of being in receipt of income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information for Great Britain is set out in the table. I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for figures covering Northern Ireland.

Standard statistical region	*Housing benefit recipients with income support as at August 1994*
North (including Cumbria)	200,100
Yorkshire and Humberside	275,500
East Midlands	178,300
East Anglia	83,700
South East	394,300
London	544,000
South West	198,800
West Midlands	280,300
North West	396,100
Wales	154,000
Scotland	337,800
Great Britain	3,042,900

Source:
The housing benefit management information system quarterly caseload count at the end of August 1994.

EDUCATION

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children were statemented in each year from 1992 to the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: In England, the number of pupils reported as receiving statements of special educational need for the first time in calendar years 1992 and 1993 was 34,037 and 38,292, respectively. Information for the calendar year 1994 is not yet available.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children were statemented in England as requiring special educational treatment in each year from 1965 to 1976 inclusive.

Mr. Forth: The number of pupils in England and Wales newly assessed during the calendar years 1965 to 1976 inclusive as needing special educational treatment was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1965	19,886
1966	20,981
1967	21,417
1968	20,833
1969	21,844
1970	21,771
1971	24,118
1972	24,254
1973	22,771
1974	21,624
1975	21,393
1976	22,985

It is not possible to disaggregate the data for England.

Pupils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the expected increase in the school population in September 1995 *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by individual local education authority.

Mr. Forth: Projections of the school population related to January of the academic year. The total school population in England is projected to increase by 116,000 full-time equivalents between January 1995 and January 1996. Projections at local education authority level are not available.

Mathematics

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what she is doing to improve the teaching of mathematics in primary schools.

Mr. Forth: The Government are committed to higher standards and higher quality teaching in mathematics. The most important force for improvement is the national curriculum, which has established demanding expectations for both teachers and pupils. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools has confirmed that the national curriculum is rapidly helping to improve the standard of mathematics teaching in primary schools. The revised national curriculum for mathematics has increased emphasis on arithmetic skills, particularly in the primary years. For the first time, pupils' progress in relation to the national standards is being rigorously monitored through national assessments and tests. The schools inspectorate confirms that these assessments and tests are contributing to higher standards.

The Government have also been instrumental in establishing a number of 20-day training courses designed to improve primary school teachers' mathematical knowledge. The cost of sending teachers on these courses is supported by the Government with specific grant.

School Closures

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which local education authorities have school reorganisation or closure proposals under consideration by her Department; and how many places will be removed by each authority as a result of their proposals.

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows the local education authorities which have school reorganisation proposals published under sections 12 and 13 of the Education Act 1980 currently with the Department. Not all such proposals involve the removal of school places. Where they do, the aggregate number of places that would be removed if the proposals were approved is shown in the table. Where there are no statutory objections, and the proposals are not called in by the Secretary of State, proposals in respect of county schools fall to be decided by the local education authority.

LEA	*Number of places to be removed*
Avon	1,300
Barnet	0
Bedfordshire	426
Berkshire	0

LEA	Number of places to be removed
Birmingham	0
Bradford	0
Buckinghamshire	97
Bury	130
Cambridgeshire	180
Camden	0
Cheshire	331
Cleveland	0
Croydon	0
Cumbria	0
Devon	0
Doncaster	3,804
Durham	0
Ealing	0
East Sussex	0
Essex	217
Gateshead	1,076
Greenwich	30
Hackney	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	846
Hampshire	150
Haringey	0
Harrow	0
Hertfordshire	0
Hillingdon	0
Humberside	0
Islington	0
Kensington and Chelsea	0
Kent	0
Kingston upon Thames	0
Knowsley	0
Lambeth	0
Lancashire	0
Leeds	1,028
Leicestershire	30
Lewisham	0
Lincolnshire	0
Liverpool	0
Manchester	27
Norfolk	152
Northamptonshire	0
North Tyneside	95
North Yorkshire	0
Northumberland	361
Nottinghamshire	2,832
Oldham	0
Oxfordshire	0
Richmond upon Thames	0
Sandwell	120
Sefton	0
Shropshire	99
Somerset	9
St. Helens	0
Stockport	0
Suffolk	0
Sunderland	0
Sutton	0
Tameside	0
Tower Hamlets	0
Trafford	0
Wakefield	0
Walsall	0
Waltham Forest	0
Warwickshire	5,658
West Sussex	0
Wiltshire	207
Wirral	141
Wolverhampton	0

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what response he is giving to the report on famine in Iraq sent to him by Mr. Riad-el-Taher about his recent visit to Baghdad.

The Prime Minister: The recent communication has been noted by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that an ad hoc tribunal should be set up by the United Nations Security Council to try those accused of the Lockerbie bombing; and what representations he has had in this regard.

The Prime Minister: No. It is clear from resolution 883 that the United Nations Security Council envisages trial only before the appropriate United Kingdom or United States court.

HEALTH

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she was informed of the West Midlands regional health authority's wish to divest itself of its management services division; what reasons were given; what was her response; what time scales for the privatisation were discussed or agreed between the authority and herself for the privatisation of the management services division; and what safeguards for staff affected by the privatisation of the management services division were discussed with her.

Mr. Sackville: The decision to proceed with the management buyout of the management services division, the time scale and the detailed provisions for the buy-out were matters for the West Midlands regional health authority. The proposal was in line with Government policy for streamlining regional structures as set out in the White Paper, "Working for Patients" and later reinforced by executive letter EL(MB)(89)59 issued in March 1989.

Antibiotics

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the measures being taken to reduce or control prescription of antibiotics by general practitioners.

Mr. Malone: General practitioners are encouraged to prescribe effectively including the most appropriate use of antibiotics. Doctors regularly receive information on prescribing matters through a wide range of medical publications funded by the Department and are further supported in rational prescribing by professional prescribing advisers.

Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current position of the private finance initiative proposal submitted by the Princess Margaret hospital in Swindon; and when a decision on this matter is expected.

Mr. Sackville: In November 1994, six shortlisted companies were issued with an information

memorandum. Initial responses were received on 23 January 1995 from five companies and are currently being evaluated. Detailed proposals will be developed in the spring. A decision is expected in July 1995.

Asthma and Bronchial Complaints

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has undertaken into the connection between car exhaust fumes and the incidence of asthma among *(a)* adults and *(b)* children in the last three years.

Mr. Malone: Relevant research studies undertaken on correlations between atmospheric pollution and the incidence of asthma and respiratory illnesses, with funding through the Department of Health centrally commissioned programme, are:

Health Effects of the Nitrogen Dioxide Episode in London, December 1991—St. George's Hospital Medical School;

Modified National Study of Health and Growth, which includes the prevalence of asthma in children—United Medical and Dental Schools of Guy's and St. Thomas's;

Middlesbrough Childhood Asthma study—University of Teeside.

Two further studies are now being commissioned:

Impact of Air Pollution and Temperature on GP Consultations—University College Medical School;

Personal Exposure to Air Pollutants and Severity of Hay Fever Symptoms in London Traffic Wardens—Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. In 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, the MRC spent £919,000 on research into asthma and a further £1,000,000 on research which may be relevant to the condition.

The Departments of Health and of the Environment are collaborating with the MRC to commission by competitive tender a programme of interrelated research projects covering 10 key areas identified in the Institute for Environment and Health report "Air Pollution and Respiratory Disease: UK Research Priorities". The IEH reviewed the knowledge gaps and priority research issues in the area of air pollution and respiratory disease with a special emphasis on asthma. A total of £5 million has been made available for research in this area from the three funders.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were treated for *(a)* asthma and *(b)* bronchial complaints in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: From "Morbidity Statistics from General Practice" it is estimated that during the year 1991–92 there were 2,049,000 patients treated for asthma, and 3,905,000 treated for bronchitis[1]. Figures are not available for the other years requested. For in-patients the number of finished consultant episodes, ordinary admissions and day cases, are shown in the table:

	Asthma	*Bronchitis*[1]
1992–93	96,659	33,131
1991–92	99,717	37,209
1990–91	93,277	30,334
1989–90	100,188	33,847
1988–89	113,928	34,364

Source:
Hospital Episodes Statistics.
Notes:
[1] Diagnostic codes ICD9 466, 490 and 491.

Information on numbers of out-patients treated for asthma and bronchitis is not available centrally.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Children's Homes

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish the results of her inquiry into small children's homes; and if she will consider extending the provisions of the Children Act 1989 to such homes.

Mr. Bowis: I expect the report of the social services inspectorate study of small children's homes to be submitted to me within the next few months.

Provisions in the Children Act 1989, and in regulations made under that Act, already apply to such homes.

Radioactive Polonium 210

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in each family health services authority area were suffering from higher than expected levels of radioactive polonium 210 in their teeth in the latest available year; and what were the figures for *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available. However, preliminary findings from a recent study funded by the Department reported elevated levels of polonium-210—a naturally occurring radionuclide—in the teeth of children living within 10 km of some motorways in the United Kingdom as reported in *The Lancet* on 4 February 1995. The study did not provide evidence that these levels are in any way sufficient to imply a risk to health. The Government are currently considering the options for further research in this area.

Complaints

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for health how many complaints were *(a)* made and *(b)* sustained against (i) fundholding general practitioners and (ii) other general practitioners by family health services authority for each year since 1991.

Mr. Malone: The available information is published annually in "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library.

Pharmacists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances non-qualified pharmacists are

permitted to dispense prescriptions in *(a)* chemists' shops and *(b)* general practitioner practices.

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Act 1968 allows prescription-only medicines and medicines not on the general sales list—pharmacy only—dispensed in retail pharmacies to be supplied only by or under the supervision of a qualified pharmacist. General practitioner practice staff may dispense prescriptions where

(a) the practice is authorised to provide pharmaceutical services; and

(b) the doctor is satisfied that they are competent to do so.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner practices had *(a)* a dispensing pharmacy in each of the last five years and *(b)* a dispensing pharmacy on site.

Mr. Malone: The number of general practitioner practices authorised to provide pharmaceutical services in England in each of the last five years is:

	Number
1990	Not available
1991	1,192
1992	1,197
1993	1,202
1994[1]	1,215

[1] Provisional.

No information is available centrally about whether pharmacies are sited within the practice premises or elsewhere.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fundholding practices had a dispensing pharmacy on site in each of the last four years.

Mr. Malone: At April 1994, 352 general practitioner fundholding practices were authorised to provide pharmaceutical services. Information is not available centrally on whether the dispensing facilities are sited on practice premises or elsewhere.

Correspondence

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to answer the question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield of 26 January, relating to the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Sackville: I have replied to the hon. Member today.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Houses, Bolton

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council homes in the Bolton district council area are currently empty and available to meet housing needs; and what percentage this is of total stock.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest information held by my Department relates to dwellings vacant on 1 April 1994 when Bolton metropolitan district council reported a total of 120 council dwellings which were either vacant and available for letting immediately or after minor repairs; this represents 0.52 per cent. of its total stock. The data comes from its 1994 housing investment programme—HIP1—return, a copy of which is in the Library.

Abandoned Mines

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken to monitor *(a)* mine water pollution and *(b)* methane emissions from abandoned mine workings in County Durham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The National Rivers Authority monitors the quality of water discharged both from pumping stations operated by the Coal Authority at recently abandoned mines, and from mines in parts of the Durham coalfield where mining ceased many years ago. I am not aware of any monitoring of methane emissions from abandoned mines.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all test bore holes sunk in *(a)* County Durham and *(b)* Northumberland for each year from 1990 to monitor mine water flows.

Mr. Atkins: Details of boreholes constructed by the National Rivers Authority in County Durham are listed in the table. No boreholes have been drilled in Northumberland.

Date constructed	*Borehole Name*
1993	Burnigill Jubilee Bridge
	Ox Close Brancepeth Hill
	Top Houghall
1994	Burningill deepened Washington
	Birtley Broom Park Red Barns
	Wellspring Farm Warden Law
	Plawsworth

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total cost of sinking the test bore hole at Warden Law, County Durham.

Mr. Atkins: The Warden Law borehole, drilled by the National Rivers Authority, cost £28,358.62.

Parks and Gardens

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of revenue support grant which is allowed for the upkeep of parks and gardens in the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Standard spending assessments are the Government's view of what local authorities need to spend to provide a standard level of service and form the basis of paying revenue support grant. Revenue support grant is not earmarked for any specific purpose. It is for local authorities themselves to chose how much of their resources to spend on the upkeep of parks and gardens.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer on 2 February, *Official Report*, column *762–63*, how much was paid to each of the firms of consultants listed for work done for his Department in *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94; and if

he will specify the nature of the work undertaken for each payment.

Sir Paul Beresford: The total amount paid to the consultants listed is shown in the table. To separate the amounts paid to each, including separation into financial years, would reveal the cost of some individual contracts and thus breach commercial confidentiality.

The nature of the work undertaken by each of the consultants employed in 1992–94 specifically in connection with the Department's market testing programme is as follows:

Consultant	*Work undertaken*
Amtec Consulting	Financial adviser
Andersen Consulting	Internal feasibility study
Capital Management Consultancy Ltd.	Project management support
Castle Management Consultants	Financial adviser
Civil Service College	Provision of intelligent customer advice
Coopers and Lybrand	Tender evaluation training; contract management seminar; in-house bid support
CSL Group	In-house bid support
Dun and Bradstreet	Financial advice reports
Mr. P. Dworkin	Specialist adviser
Hoskyns Group plc	Project management training
PA Consulting Group	Project management support
Prime Strategy Consultants	Preparation of project plans; project management support
Ray Tilly Associates	Intelligent customer support
Shreeveport Ltd.	In-house bid support
Smith and Williamson	In-house bid support
SPT (Simon Thorpe)	Preparation of specifications
Symonds Facilities Management plc	Project management support
Mr. J. Wormald	Consultancy support to internal review
Total payments: 1992–94 (as at end-December 1994)	£1.2 million

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent by each urban development corporation on acquiring land and buildings since their inception; how much has been received by each for the sale of land and buildings; and what is the latest valuation of their land holdings.

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 8 February 1995]:* Expenditure and receipts in respect of the acquisition and sale of land and buildings for each urban development corporation from inception until 31 March 1994, are given in the table. The value of development assets, which comprise both land and buildings at the lower of cost or net realisable value, are given as at 31 March 1994. The expenditure figures include purchase of land for use on infrastructure projects, for open space and for environmental improvements. Such expenditure is part of the regeneration remit of UDSs, but is unlikely of itself to produce receipts. It is therefore misleading to make a comparison between expenditure and receipts.

£ million

	Expenditure	*Receipts*	*Development assets*
Bristol[1]	43.900	18.779	18.894
Black Country[2]	92.358	6.606	50.452
Birmingham Heartlands	11.076	0	4.937
Central Manchester	19.095	1.043	7.465
Leeds	25.628	10.997	3.880
London Docklands	174.070	335.000	37.402
Merseyside	41.716	11.756	27.681
Plymouth	4.836	0	3.212
Sheffield	35.873	2.348	14.336
Teesside	65.844	42.273	25.195
Trafford Park	54.854	12.955	15.556
Tyne and Wear	41.934	10.041	36.737

[1] Includes £10.7 million expenditure for the Bristol Spine Road.
[2] Includes £26.69 million expenditure on highway schemes.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Heavy Fuel Oil Duty

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to compensate for the extra cost of electricity generation arising from increased heavy fuel oil excise duty.

Mr. Ancram: The most effective ways of keeping energy costs down is through the promotion of competition and the pursuit of efficiency in the production, transmission and use of electricity. The Government will continue to encourage both efficiency and competition.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his assessment of the effect on future electricity prices in Northern Ireland of a 50 per cent. increase in heavy fuel oil duty.

Mr. Ancram: I am informed by Northern Ireland Electricity plc that a 50 per cent. increase in excise duty on heavy fuel oil would increase electricity prices in Northern Ireland by about 1 per cent.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make representations to have the extra heavy fuel oil excise duty set aside or if he will make available some additional transitional relief until such time as over dependence on heavy fuel oil is replaced by natural gas.

Mr. Ancram: No. The decision to increase the level of excise duty on heavy fuel oil which was announced in the Chancellor's Budget statement in November is in line with the Government's commitment to deliver healthy public finances as quickly as possible and to keep electricity prices in check through the encouragement of competition and the pursuit of efficiency.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider increasing transitional relief to compensate for compliance with United Kingdom and EU policy on power station emissions and additional costs

incurred through meeting alternative energy targets contained within the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Ancram: No. The transitional relief scheme was introduced to give industry time to adjust to the application of cost-reflective pricing following privatisation and it will have served that purpose by the time it ends on 31 March 1996.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the importance to the Northern Ireland economy of keeping electricity prices in Northern Ireland at levels attractive to incoming industry and commerce and competitive for existing industry with electricity prices in Great Britain.

Mr. Ancram: The price of electricity is one of a number of factors which is taken into account by incoming industry when considering Northern Ireland as a potential investment location. There is no evidence that potential inward investors choose between Northern Ireland and Great Britain solely on the basis of comparative electricity prices.

Contagious Epididymitis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the cases of contagious epididymitis in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: There have been no cases of contagious epididymitis in Northern Ireland.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people currently earn *(a)* less than £1.50 an hour, *(b)* between £1.50 and £2.00 an hour, *(c)* between £2.00 and £2.50 an hour, *(d)* between £2.50 and £3.00 an hour, *(e)* between £3.00 and £3.50 an hour and *(f)* between £3.50 and £4.00 an hour.

Mr. Ancram: Information on hourly earnings in Northern Ireland is available only from the new earning survey and relates to the proportion of employees within each earnings band. The latest available figures are for April 1994 and are as follows:

Percentage of employees earning:

	Percentage
Less than £1.50 per hour	0.1
£1.50—£2.00 per hour	0.2
£2.00—£2.50 per hour	1.1
£2.50—£3.00 per hour	2.8
£3.00—£3.50 per hour	5.9
£3.50—£4.00 per hour	7.5

Note:

The information provided relates to gross average hourly earnings, including overtime of full-time employees on adult rates. It may be unreliable for some earnings bands due to the small number of respondents.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Commissioners

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the number of European Commissioners and the cost of their cabinets in *(a)* 1971, *(b)* 1981 and *(c)* 1991; and what is the estimated cost for 1995.

Mr. David Davis: There were nine members of the European Commission in 1971, 14 in 1981 and 17 in 1991. When Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the Union on 1 January this year, the number of Commissioners became 20. On the question of cost, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave him on 13 January, *Official Report*, column *213*.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what was the absenteeism rate for the Natural Resources Institute in each year since 1991.

Mr. Baldry *[pursuant to his reply 24 January 1995, c.103]:* The chief executive of the Natural Resources Institute, Mr. Anthony Beattie, has now written providing details of staff sick leave.

Letter from Anthony Beattie to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 10 February 1995:

Further to my letter of 24 January about absenteeism rates in the Natural Resources Institute, the figures you have asked for are as follows:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Days absence per staff year	6.49	6.56	6.28	6.20

The figures include all sickness absences whether certificated or uncertificated. There is no separate definition of absenteeism for which records are maintained. A year is taken to be 365 days and sickness absences spanning weekends and public holidays are included in the calculation.

I should also explain that a different set of data exists which is collated by the Civil Service Occupational Health Service but which is available only for the calendar years 1992 and 1993. These data exclude weekends and public holidays from the reckoning and are calculated on the basis of a year consisting of 225 working days. On this basis, NRI's record was:

	1992	*1993*
Working days absence per 225 working days	5.45	4.82

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he is giving to the report on famine in Iraq sent to him by Mr. Riad-el-Taher about his recent visit to Baghdad.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply to his identical question today.

SCOTLAND

Cochlear Implants

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) at which hospitals in Scotland cochlear implants are available for young children;

(2) what restrictions apply to Crosshouse hospital carrying out further cochlear implants in the rest of the current financial year;

(3) when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie of 20 December relating to operations for cochlear implants;

(4) how many staff in Crosshouse hospital are skilled in conducting cochlear implants;

(5) if he will make a statement about the consequences for young deaf children of delaying cochlear implant operations;

(6) if he will make more funds available for cochlear implants in Scotland during the current financial year;

(7) how many children are on the waiting list for cochlear implants in Scotland;

(8) how many children have had cochlear implant operations postponed because of financial restrictions at Crosshouse hospital this year;

(9) how many cochlear implant operations have been carried out at Crosshouse hospital in each month of the current financial year; and how many operations are projected for the remaining months of this financial year;

(10) what proposals he has to increase the budget for cochlear implants at Crosshouse hospital in the next financial year; and what assessment he has made of the correlation between increases in funding and the number of operations performed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Paediatric cochlear implantation is at present centrally funded as a national specialist service and is provided at Crosshouse hospital, Kilmarnock which is part of the North Ayrshire and Arran NHS trust. Funding in 1994–95 has enabled five paediatric operations to be carried out. The service is provided by a multi-disciplinary team led by a consultant ear, nose and throat surgeon.

There are currently five children on the waiting list for cochlear implantation. No child on the waiting list has been given a date for operation in the current financial year which has subsequently been postponed. The waiting list is prioritised according to who needs treatment most urgently. A recent Medical Research Council evaluation study has indicated that, in general terms, cochlear implantation has favourable outcomes up to the age of seven years.

Provision of cochlear implantation services in Scotland is currently under review and future funding requirements will be identified following consideration of the MRC evaluation of cochlear implantation and the paediatric cochlear implantation needs assessment. Both are to be published shortly.

The following operations have been carried out in the current financial year. No further operations are expected to take place in the remainder of the year.

	Adult	*Child*
April	1	1
May	—	1
June	2	—
July	1	1
August	1	—
September	—	—
October	1	1
November	—	—
December	—	1
January	[1]1	—
Total	7	5

[1] One operation has been charged to the "Help to Hear" Fund

A reply to the hon. Member's letter of 20 December was issued on 26 January.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the expenditure proposed for 1994–95 and 1995–96 by Scottish Homes in the categories *(a)* headquarters administration in Edinburgh, *(b)* publicity and publications, *(c)* regional office costs, *(d)* seed corn funding for housing associations set up to purchase Scottish Homes housing stock, *(e)* other funds for housing associations set up to purchase Scottish Homes housing stock and *(f)* other expenditure not directly for the interest and repayment of loans for house building or the maintenance of housing stock.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury on 6 February 1995, *Official Report,* column 69.

Smoking

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been spent on the adult and parental health education programme in relation to cigarette smoking over each of the past two years; and how much money will be spent in 1995–96 and 1996–97.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* Health education on smoking at national level in Scotland is undertaken by the Health Education Board for Scotland. Of total expenditure by the board of £1.47 million on anti-smoking activity in 1993–94, £969,000 was spent on action focusing on parents and other adults. The corresponding figures for 1994–95 will amount to some £770,000 and £520,000 respectively. The board's operational plan for the years 1995–96 and 1996–97 will shortly be finalised and will maintain a continuing focus on smoking among adults. Smoking issues are also addressed in other work undertaken by the board, for example in relation to coronary heart disease.

LORD CHANCELLOR' S DEPARTMENT

Child Witnesses

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures are being taken to expedite cases involving child witnesses; and if he will outline any initiatives to ensure that delay is minimised.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In relation to criminal proceedings, section 53 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 allows for cases of a serious violent or sexual nature, where a child might be called as a witness, to be transferred directly to the Crown court, thereby minimising the delays in waiting for a case to come to trial. The replacement of all committal proceedings with transfer procedures, which is due to take place later this year, will ensure that this applies to all cases. Furthermore, the introduction of a national scheme of plea and directions hearings, which should be completed by the end of this year, will provide for closer judicial case management. Child liaison officers, whose responsibilities include ensuring, as far as possible, that delays in cases involving child witnesses are kept to a minimum, are now in place in all Crown court centres. In addition, fast tracking schemes, which set local time limits for each stage of the prosecution process, have now been established in a number of Crown court centres.

In relation to family proceedings, Dame Margaret Booth DBE had been commissioned by this Department to identify the causes of delay, and to suggest improvements to procedures to eradicate avoidable delay.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures are being taken to ensure members of the judiciary are trained in conduct towards child witnesses in cases of alleged abuse.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Judicial Studies Board is responsible for training the judiciary. The evidence of child witnesses is covered in courses for both Crown court judges and those who hear cases under the Children Act.

Legal Aid

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what powers he has in respect of restricting the legal aid in respect of an individual case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Neither the Lord Chancellor nor I may intervene in individual cases. Under the provisions of the Legal Aid Act 1988, responsibility for the grant of civil legal aid in individual cases, rests with the Legal Aid Board. Responsibility for the grant of criminal legal aid in individual cases rests with the relevant court.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what is the current total cost of legal aid support to the Maxwell brothers; and how much he estimates the total bill is likely to be at the conclusion of the court consideration of the case;

(2) if he will list all those who have received payment from legal aid funds for their activity in respect of the Maxwell brothers' case; how much in total each of them has been paid to date; if he will list their hourly fee, where appropriate; if he will summarise the nature of the activity they have undertaken; and if he will estimate what their likely total bill will be at the conclusion of the court case.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The total amount of criminal legal aid paid to date to lawyers acting for all six defendants in R. *v.* Kevin Maxwell and Others is £4,028,008 inclusive of VAT. This amount includes final costs in the magistrates courts of—£829,377—as well as payments on account, as of 9 November 1994, in the Crown court of £3,198,631. All payments include VAT and disbursements, such as expert witness and accountancy fees, and other expenses necessarily incurred. I do not consider it would be appropriate while the case is continuing to give a further breakdown of those figures, nor do I consider it appropriate to speculate as to what the final costs might be.

TRANSPORT

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has received on whether train operating companies should have the status of public benefit bodies for the purposes of European legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The term "public benefit body" is not recognised.

Through Ticketing

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which train stations currently provide through-ticketing facilities within *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* South West Trains.

Mr. Watts: Only those stations linked to the computer seat reservation system and equipped with APTIS machines have the capability of issuing a full range of through tickets. these stations are as follows:

(a) Hampshire

Brockenhurst

Southampton Central

Fareham

Portsmouth and Southsea

Portsmouth Harbour

Havant

Southampton Airport Parkway

Winchester

Andover

Basingstoke

Farnborough Main

Aldershot

Ryde Esplanade

(b) South West Stations

Andover

Basingstoke

Bracknell

Brockenhurst

Farnborough

Guildford

Kingston
Portsmouth and Southsea
Salisbury
Aldershot
Havant
Poole
Richmond
Southampton Central
Bournemouth
Clapham Junction
Fareham
Farnham
Portsmouth Harbour
Southampton Airport (Parkway)
Wimbledon
Staines
Surbiton
Winchester
Woking
Walton-on-Thames
Weymouth

Network SouthEast

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Franchising Director will publish proposals for passenger service requirements for the franchise of the south central division of Network SouthEast; and what will be the consultation procedures.

Mr. Watts: It is currently the Franchising Director's intention to publish his proposals for the passenger service requirement for network south central this summer. He will be undertaking a formal consultation on his proposals with affected local authorities at both county and district level and also with the relevant rail users consultative committee in accordance with paragraph 9 of the objectives instructions and guidance issued to the Franchising Director by the Secretary of State for Transport on 22 March 1994.

Traffic Congestion, London

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to investigate the proportion of traffic congestion in London which could be reduced by *(a)* improved co-ordination of road works, and *(b)* better supervision of construction sites, *(c)* more effective traffic signal operation and maintenance, *(d)* faster reaction to breakdowns and *(e)* other measures.

Mr. Norris: In 1993, the Transport Research Laboratory investigated the causes of traffic hold-ups in London using the "congestion file" maintained by the Metropolitan police. I am sending the hon. Member a copy of its report, "The frequency and importance of incidents which cause congestion in urban areas", TRL contractor report 342.

Licences

Mr.Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* heavy goods vehicles, *(b)* HGV trailers and *(c)* buses and coaches were licensed to operate on public roads in each year since 1991–92.

Mr. Norris: The following information is based on the number of vehicles licensed in United Kingdom in each class, as of the 30 September each year:

	Year	*Number*
Heavy goods vehicles (over 3,500 kgs gross weight)	1994	410,623
	1993	403,215
	1992	407,150
	1991	416,673
Trailer HGVs (HGVs pulling a drawbar trailer where a trailer supplement is payable)	1994	6,623
	1993	6,316
	1992	6,188
	1991	6,110
Buses and Coaches (more than 16 seats)	1994	67,181
	1993	65,349
	1992	65,252
	1991	63,783

Heathrow Airport (Security)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes in security standards and procedures have been made at Heathrow Airport; and what factors led to them.

Mr. Norris: The Department keeps under review all of its security requirements, including standards and procedures, but has not made any recent changes specific to Heathrow airport. A number of changes to improve the standard of aviation security have been introduced over the last year, affecting the majority of airports and airlines subject to the United Kingdom national aviation security programme, including Heathrow. These changes include the introduction of an air cargo security regime, accounting and authorising international hold baggage for carriage, and the continuing introduction of international hold baggage screening. These are examples of the Government's continuing commitment to aviation security and the ICAO eight-point plan.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral statement of 16 January, *Official Report*, column 550, on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, if he will give the date, the parties and a summary of the judgment in the Court of Appeal decision referred to.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The Court of Appeal judgment to which I referred was given on 30 June 1994 in the case of the Secretary of State for Transport *v.* Colonel Owen and Barbara Owen. The judgment required the Secretary of State to redetermine the discretionary purchase application made by Colonel Owen, whose property lies near the proposed Cirencester bypass. In the light of the judgment, the Department is required to take into account loss in value of property attributable to a proposed scheme when assessing whether the applicant's enjoyment of the property is seriously affected within the meaning of the statutory provision and therefore whether it falls to be considered for discretionary purchase.

Transec

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what have been the cost of the Transec teams and related organisations over the past 10 years.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The transport security division in my Department has existed in its current form since October 1991. Its running costs expenditure in 1992–93 was £2,114,000 and in 1993–94 was £3,736,000. Its expected outturn in 1994–95 is £4,116,000. All figures are expressed in cash terms. Comparable figures for earlier years could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the specific functions of those officers of Transec whose jobs will be cut following the reduction in costs announced by the Minister for Aviation and Shipping.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* More than half of the posts identified in the efficiency savings exercise are support or managerial. The remainder are inspectorial or investigatory.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total saving of the reduction in Transec expenditure announced by the Minister of Aviation and Shipping.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The agreed running cost budget for the transport security division for 1995–96 represents a reduction of £655,000 compared with the outturn in 1993–94, the base year for the efficiency savings exercise in my Department. It also represents a saving of £961,000 on the forecast outturn for 1994–95. All figures are expressed in 1994–95 terms.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation there has been with *(a)* the BAA, *(b)* other airport operators, *(c)* port owners and occupiers, *(d)* airlines and *(e)* port users about the implications for them of the decision to reduce the expenditure on Transec; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* My right hon. Friend has responsibility within Government for transport security. My Department lays down relevant security requirements for each mode of transport after careful consideration and consultation with the industries and other parties as appropriate. It is the responsibility of the industries to implement the requirements, which include the provision of all security installations and staff. It would not be appropriate to consult those industries about changes in the way my Department discharges its responsibilities.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what ports or airports he *(a)* visited and *(b)* inspected in 1994.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* Since becoming Secretary of State for Transport in July 1994, my right hon. Friend has passed through several ports and airports as a passenger. In the course of his official duties he has visited Heathrow, London city airport, Manchester airport and the ports of Harwich, Felixstowe and Dover. He did not inspect any of them in the sense of monitoring their performance of legal requirements placed upon them.

Airport and Port Security

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the United Kingdom's treaty obligations on airport and port security and of the desirability of a revision of the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990.

Mr. Norris: *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The United Kingdom's international obligations and legislation relating to transport security are kept under review as a matter of course. I am satisfied with the current position.

Motorail and Sleeper Services

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will instruct the Director of Rail Franchising to consult with rail users consultative committees prior to withdrawal of subsidy in respects of Motorail services;

(2) if he will instruct the Director of Rail Franchising to consult the rail users consultative committees prior to withdrawal of subsidy in respect of London-Fort William and cross-country sleeper services.

Mr. Watts *[holding answers 7 February 1995]:* Paragraph 9 of the objectives instructions and guidance issued to the Franchising Director by the Secretary of State on 22 March 1994 requires him to liaise with the central rail users consultative committee and the rail users consultative committees and to take into account their views on the pattern and quality of services to be provided through franchising. I understand that Opraf will consult with rail users consultative committees about the content of the ScotRail passenger service requirement prior to issuing an invitation to tender for the franchise.

For the present, timetable changes remain a matter for the British Railways Board, which I understand notifies the relevant rail users consultative committees of proposed changes so as to give them an opportunity to make representations.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Channel 5

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what provision he is making to allow Channel 5 bids from those who, if successful, would breach the current cross-media ownership rules; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Independent Television Commission invitation to apply for the Channel 5 licence made it clear that, when considering applications, it would apply the regulations in force at the time.

Cross-media Ownership

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to announce the results of his Department's review of cross-media ownership.

Mr. Dorrell: I will announce the Government's conclusions once we have completed our examination of the issue.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns 779–80, if he will give further

details of the £283,000 cost incurred by his Department for the transfer of functions of the conservation unit to his Department.

Mr. Dorrell: The £283,000 transferred to my Department for the conservation unit is broken down as follows:

	£000
Salaries	99
Non-pay running costs	90
Accommodation	91
Other	3
Total	283

National Lottery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage who appointed the head of the Arts Council lottery committee.

Mr. Dorrell: Appointments to the Arts Council of England are made by the Secretary of State for National Heritage. In appointing Mr. Peter Gummer, my predecessor asked him to take special responsibility for the Arts Council's activities as a national lottery distributor.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether any of the funds raised for good causes by the national lottery are being invested in gilt-edged securities prior to disbursement by the lottery distribution bodies..

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* The proceeds of the national lottery held in the national lottery distribution fund are being invested in a range of investments which include gilt-edged securities. At 1 February, the investment portfolio for the fund was as follows:

	£ million	Percentage
Treasury Bills	65	41
Local Authority Stocks and loans	62	39
Gilts	22	14
Ways and Means	9	6
Total	158	

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* My Department was established in April 1992 and took on responsibility for funding its own consultancies in August 1992. For the two financial years for which figures are available, my Department's expenditure is as follows.

Year	Expenditure £	In 1994 prices £
1992–93	2,850,277	2,995,884
1993–94	6,003,555	6,123,666

My Department uses consultants for a wide variety of tasks, only a small proportion of which are aimed at achieving cost savings. No central record is held on overall savings and it would not be possible to isolate those consultancies and quantify the cost savings without incurring disproportionate cost.

TREASURY

VAT (Building Work)

Mr. Day: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the annual cost to the Exchequer if the United Kingdom were to adopt an 8 per cent. rate of VAT on the repair, maintenance and improvement of listed buildings.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Alterations to listed buildings are currently zero rated. An 8 per cent. rate of VAT would bring in an estimated £30 million. Repairs and maintenance of listed buildings are currently standard rated. Information on expenditure on repairs and maintenance of listed buildings are not readily available. Moving repairs and maintenance to 8 per cent. would involve some loss of revenue.

Alcohol

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals have been prosecuted for selling on alcohol bought on the continent for personal consumption since the lifting of restrictions governing the payment of duty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: From the start of the single market on 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1994, 135 people have been prosecuted by Customs for single market offences involving either alcohol alone or in combination with other excise goods.

Excise Duties

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made on the EU's biennial review of excise duties.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The date for the first review was set for 31 December 1994 at the latest. However, no proposal has yet been delivered by the Commission.

Fundamental Expenditure Review

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what instruction he gave to ensure the fundamental expenditure review has no detrimental effect on activities surrounding anti-drug smuggling.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The terms of reference I agreed for the fundamental expenditure review included the need to determine the scope for improved effectiveness and efficiency of all work areas, including anti-drug smuggling. The outcome is that by putting greater emphasis on quality results in terms of seizures and concentrating even more on drug-trafficking organisations, Customs and Excise is confident that its

success rate will be enhanced, and it has set targets to reflect this.

EU Finances

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the total sums paid to each EU member state from EU sources, *(b)* the total sums paid to the EC by each member state, *(c)* the gross national product of each state and *(d)* the percentage of gross national product of each state derived from sums paid to it from EU funds in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* The information in respect of items *(a)* to *(c)* for the years 1984 to 1993 is set out in tables 1 to 3. Table 4 sets out the annual amount of Community payments member states received as a percentage of their gross national product.

Table 1: Payments made to the Member States of the European Community (million european currency units)

	B	DK	D	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK	Misc.	EC12
1984	840.1	1,020.1	4,019.3	1,364.0	—	4,342.5	1,210.4	4,962.4	11.2	2,122.6	—	4,092.5	13.1	23,998.2
1985	1,070.0	912.5	4,185.0	1,702.8	—	5,416.4	1,548.7	4,480.3	8.5	2,231.9	—	3,107.4	39.9	24,703.4
1986	1,164.2	1,211.8	4,988.4	1,905.1	2,415.5	6,323.6	1,573.9	4,523.3	6.5	2,449.5	497.8	3,386.8	43.2	30,489.6
1987	985.4	1,144.2	4,541.8	1,876.9	1,984.8	6,744.3	1,438.0	5,256.2	12.0	2,890.2	731.4	3,121.5	85.3	30,812.0
1988	838.5	1,286.2	5,427.7	1,921.5	4,012.3	7,314.6	1,487.5	5,551.0	14.2	3,945.6	914.8	3,253.9	161.3	36,129.1
1989	683.3	1,045.3	4,579.8	2,564.5	3,544.4	5,676.5	1,711.7	6,177.1	8.2	3,829.9	945.5	3,214.3	72.4	35,659.7
1990	989.8	1,197.6	4,807.1	3,033.8	5,382.7	6,284.6	2,260.7	5,681.0	14.5	2,983.6	1,103.2	3,147.4	391.4	37,277.5
1991	2,634.0	1,379.8	6,597.4	3,688.5	6,874.8	8,152.5	2,809.7	7,311.2	268.5	2,999.8	2,228.2	4,069.5	4,782.7	53,796.6
1992	2,404.6	1,311.4	7,299.9	4,332.6	7,567.6	9,049.8	2,602.4	7,775.6	287.5	2,705.0	2,978.0	4,314.6	5,944.4	58,573.2
1993	2,454.5	1,583.4	7,246.1	5,147.9	8,263.0	10,525.9	2,939.3	8,739.6	356.6	2,704.0	3,418.0	4,500.8	6,328.6	64,207.6

Source:
Court of Auditors Reports.
Notes:
1. Miscellaneous expenditure by the European Commission covers payments not made to the Member States; the principal item being expenditure on aid to third countries.
2. With effect from 1988 payments to the Member States no longer included 10 per cent. collection costs in respect of Member States contributions of sugar and agricultural levies and customs duties. As from 1988 Member States retained 10 per cent. of their levies and duties contributions before making these contributions available to the community. After 1987, therefore, collection costs ceased to be accounted as payments to the community and were deducted, at source, from Member States resource payments.
3. Totals may not add up to the sum of the columns due to rounding.

Table 2: Actual own resources by Member State 1984–93 (million european currency units)

	B	DK	D	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK	EC12
1984	1,283.3	532.9	7,052.4	355.8	—	4,802.3	286.3	3,443.4	51.3	1,687.8	—	5,429.5	24,880.0
1985	1,292.6	620.4	7,504.3	388.0	—	5,319.2	296.4	3,629.5	50.7	1,889.4	—	5,090.3	26,080.8
1986	1,448.1	790.7	8,730.2	632.4	2,320.6	6,885.1	343.8	4,718.2	65.8	2,232.0	278.6	4,825.2	33,270.7
1987	1,702.6	844.7	9,384.6	340.4	1,708.7	7,330.0	337.5	5,191.6	73.5	2,366.2	341.8	5,727.5	35,349.1
1988	1,833.5	955.6	11,534.9	429.9	2,678.1	9,095.5	328.2	5,426.8	81.6	2,795.6	399.9	5,323.9	40,883.3
1989	1,807.2	871.1	11,110.4	566.3	3,575.1	8,622.8	370.9	7,605.9	72.8	2,700.5	458.3	6,568.1	44,329.3
1990	1,763.7	775.1	10,357.5	563.6	3,671.4	8,089.5	368.2	6,097.7	74.5	2,615.2	502.4	6,534.3	41,413.1
1991	2,217.4	1,033.5	15,394.2	762.1	4,580.2	10,602.0	452.4	8,699.8	108.8	3,537.7	712.0	4,736.4	52,836.5
1992	2,239.1	1,034.8	16,997.5	728.6	4,828.0	10,493.4	462.3	8,279.9	123.5	3,534.0	838.1	6,702.4	56,261.7
1993	2,394.9	1,206.5	19,076.4	1,011.2	5,172.6	11,545.5	567.4	10,265.0	167.0	4,030.6	909.6	7,626.6	63,973.3

Source:
Court of Auditors Reports.
Notes:
1. Figures for own resources are after account is taken of the UK's abatement and the bringing to account of surpluses and deficits in respect of Member States contributions in earlier years.
2. With effect from 1988, inclusive, Member States contributions exclude 10 per cent. collection costs in respect of their contributions of sugar and agricultural levies and customs duties—which they deduct from their contributions for levies and duties before making their contributions available to the community. Prior to 1988 Member States' made their sugar and agricultural levies and customs duties contributions available in full to the community. The 10 per cent. collection costs were paid from the expenditure side of the budget to Member States and thus scored as receipts from the community.
3. The revenue available to the community also includes relatively small amounts of miscellaneous revenue derived from such sources as the sale of publications, disposal of property etc.
4. Totals may not add up to the sum of the columns due to rounding.

Table 3: Gross national product of the Member States of the European Community (million european currency units)

	B	DK	D'	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK
1984	96.319	66.461	787.852	51.607	198.490	631.349	20.548	521.960	5.950	160.898	26.125	552.578
1985	103.965	73.440	824.006	51.908	215.772	687.925	22.350	556.083	6.709	169.255	29.235	606.258
1986	112.657	80.523	909.740	47.457	233.002	743.069	24.100	610.859	7.395	182.016	33.084	572.721
1987	119.948	85.278	966.890	47.586	252.052	768.449	24.454	653.693	7.574	188.067	35.399	597.804
1988	126.975	88.577	1,016.200	53.692	288.065	813.402	25.778	705.305	8.164	194.450	39.887	703.563
1989	138.263	91.484	1,086.440	59.979	342.470	875.544	28.527	783.177	9.205	207.257	46.382	758.885

Table 3: Gross national product of the Member States of the European Community (million european currency units)

	B	DK	D[1]	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK
1990	149.818	97.349	1,193.210	63.946	384.279	936.382	31.209	851.785	10.396	223.737	52.449	759.778
1991	159.084	100.219	1,405.330	69.891	423.034	964.520	32.982	919.158	11.190	234.222	62.552	807.505
1992	169.757	105.061	1,531.000	73.374	439.910	1,012.900	35.088	926.856	11.896	246.543	73.888	804.914
1993	180.827	111.583	1,630.670	76.945	404.057	1,060.510	35.706	833.394	12.486	263.809	72.238	803.813

Source:
Eurostat.
Note:
[1] Includes East Germany from 1991 onwards.

Table 4: Payments made to Member States as a percentage of GNP

	B	DK	D[1]	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK
1984	0.87	1.53	0.51	2.64	0.00	0.69	5.89	0.95	0.19	1.32	0.00	0.74
1985	1.03	1.24	0.51	3.28	0.00	0.79	6.93	0.81	0.13	1.32	0.00	0.51
1986	1.03	1.50	0.55	4.01	1.04	0.85	6.53	0.74	0.09	1.35	1.50	0.59
1987	0.82	1.34	0.47	3.94	0.79	0.88	5.88	0.80	0.16	1.54	2.07	0.52
1988	0.66	1.45	0.53	3.58	1.39	0.90	5.77	0.79	0.17	2.03	2.29	0.46
1989	0.49	1.14	0.42	4.28	1.03	0.65	6.00	0.79	0.09	1.85	2.04	0.42
1990	0.66	1.23	0.40	4.74	1.40	0.67	7.24	0.67	0.14	1.33	2.10	0.41
1991	1.66	1.38	0.47	5.28	1.63	0.85	8.52	0.80	2.40	1.28	3.56	0.50
1992	1.42	1.25	0.48	5.90	1.72	0.89	7.42	0.84	2.42	1.10	4.03	0.54
1993	1.36	1.42	0.44	6.69	2.05	0.99	8.23	1.05	2.86	1.02	4.73	0.56

Note:
[1] Includes East Germany from 1991 onwards.

DEFENCE

WE177 Free-fall Nuclear Bomb

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost of the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb.

Mr. Soames: The annual operating cost of the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb is estimated to be £20 million.

Nuclear Forces

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the defence budget was spent on maintaining and operating all British nuclear forces in the last financial year.

Mr. Soames: Some 7.2 per cent. of the 1993–94 defence budget was spent on maintaining and operating British nuclear forces.

RAF Hospital, Wroughton

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Treasury rules prohibit the lease of the RAF hospital, Wroughton.

Mr. Soames: Treasury guidelines require that once land or property has been identified as surplus to defence requirements, it should be disposed of within three years. These guidelines further state that sale rather than lease should be the rule unless there are strong reasons to the contrary. Where outright sale is impractical, however, it would be our normal practice to consider a lease, among other options, pending a longer-term solution to the problem.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long he intends to lease the RAF hospital, Wroughton, to the Princess Margaret hospital, Swindon, after April 1996.

Mr. Soames: We are aware of the interest expressed by the Princess Margaret hospital Swindon—Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust—and have held preliminary discussions with it regarding its wish to make use of the Princess Alexandra RAF hospital, Wroughton, when it closes in March 1996. Formal negotiations have not yet begun, however, and it is too early to say what the outcome might be.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the possible future use of the land and buildings at the RAF hospital, Wroughton after April 1996.

Mr. Soames: Discussions are taking place with Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust regarding the continued use of Wroughton hospital for medical purposes. My Department is well aware of the sensitive nature of the site, which is an area of outstanding natural beauty. It is too early to consider alternative uses, but should that become necessary we would liaise closely with the local authority, in accordance with our normal practice.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* national health service patients were treated at RAF hospital, Wroughton, during the last five years and *(b)* beds were required at the RAF hospital, Wroughton by the Princess Margaret hospital, Swindon, during each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames: The total numbers of NHS in-patient, and day-patient attendances at the Princess Alexandra's Royal Air Force hospital, Wroughton, in the years in question are as follows:

1989–90: 22,213

1990–91: 17,703

1991–92: 19,505

1992–93: 17,794

1993–94: 21,577

Figures for the number of beds at Wroughton required by the Princess Margaret hospital, Swindon, are not available for the entire period. In 1994 and 1995, however, some beds at the Princess Alexandra's hospital have been made available to the Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust for a period of seven and a half and 12 weeks respectively.

Drag Hunting

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are taken to provide drag hunting by military personnel.

Mr. Soames: A small number of personnel participate in drag hunting, as one of a number of recognised sporting activities, during periods set aside for this purpose.

Low Flying

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the eight Royal Air Force Tornados flying at 500 ft above Barnoldswick and Earby at 6.15 pm on Monday 30 January came from.

Mr. Soames: Two formations of four Tornados from RAF Bruggen were authorised to fly in the general area in which the towns are located on 30 January at around the time in question. An investigation is under way to establish whether these aircraft flew over the towns at the height alleged. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member when the investigation is complete.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he takes to inform hon. Members of exercises by low-flying military aircraft.

Mr. Soames: When it is practical to do so, advance warning of major exercises is given to hon. Members whose constituents are likely to be affected. It would be impractical to provide prior notice of all low-level sorties since they are often determined at short notice to take account of variable factors such as weather conditions.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum height for low flying by military aircraft in the United Kingdom and Germany.

Mr. Soames: The normal minimum height for low flying by military fixed wing aircraft in the United Kingdom is 250 ft minimum separation distance, but a small amount of operational low flying down to 100 ft MSD is permitted in three specially designated tactical training areas located in the borders, northern Scotland and central Wales. Germany applies a general limit of 100 ft but allows some military flying below this height.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on low-flying military aircraft over urban areas.

Mr. Soames: Military aircrew are instructed to avoid flying low over major towns and conurbations, and to avoid all other populated areas wherever possible, whether they are listed for avoidance or not.

Falklands and Gulf Wars

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *688*, how the cash contributions from Governments were apportioned within his Department, and between his Department and other Government agencies and departments.

Mr. Soames: Apart from a £25,000,000 contribution by Japan, taken as an appropriation in aid of the defence budget in 1990–91, cash contributions were accounted for as consolidated fund extra receipts in the defence appropriation accounts, and thus offset the Government's increased expenditure arising from the conflict. Details of the Government's additional costs are listed in the minutes of evidence, pages 2 and 3, of the 55th report of the Committee of Public Accounts.

Contingent Liabilities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the agencies or projects triggering contingent liabilities under the Ordnance Factories and Military Services Act 1984 and shown in the Consolidated Fund accounts for the years 1984–85 to 1989–90.

Mr. Soames: The figures shown in section 4 of the supplementary statements to the consolidated fund and national loans fund accounts as the contingent liabilities under the Ordnance Factories and Military Services Act 1984 for the period 1985–86 to 1989–90 are estimates of the corporate risk incurred by International Military Services Ltd. for the years in question. The detailed make-up of these estimates is commercially confidential.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to "Public Bodies 1993" issued by the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service and Science, pages 7 and 8 of which detail Ministry of Defence non-departmental public bodies. There are no plans at present to change the status of any of these bodies.

Trident

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current annual cost of maintaining the Trident system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: We currently estimate that the average annual operating cost of Trident over its life will be about £200 million.

Land Mines

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of self-destruct mines as used by the British forces do not self destruct as specified by their manufacturers.

Mr. Freeman: None of the land mines currently in service with United Kingdom forces have self-destruct mechanisms.

However, the Army is due to be equipped later in the year with the multiple launch rocket system phase II, which will deploy anti-tank land mines; these will have self-destruct mechanisms. My Department is undertaking trials to ensure that the stringent specification is met.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much it would cost to fit self-destructing and self-neutralising mechanisms retroactively on current United Kingdom anti-personnel mine stocks.

Mr. Freeman: The Government's policy is not to export these mines from MOD stocks. If required for use in war, they would be used only in accordance with the UN weaponry convention.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training a United Kingdom military field commander receives to enable him to judge accurately the short and long-term military and humanitarian costs and benefits of anti-personnel mine laying; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Training within the armed forces is a continuous process and the military and humanitarian costs and benefits of using military equipment, which includes anti-personnel mines, is included in the syllabus of a number of courses, which are attended by those appointed as field commanders. I will write to the hon. Member with fuller details of the nature of these courses.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what level of authority must be sought within the UK armed forces to permit mine laying by UK soldiers.

Mr. Soames: If required during an operation, the authority to lay mines will be sought, through the chain of command, from the operational commander.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more a self-destructing or self-neutralising anti-personnel mine will cost than its dumb equivalent; and if he will give figures.

Mr. Freeman: Details of the purchase cost of self-destructing and self-neutralising mines are not held by my Department and therefore a cost comparison is not possible.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of state foe Defence what would be the financial cost to the Department of a total ban on the production, stockpiling, sale and use of anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Freeman: Since there is no such ban, we have made no assessment of what the financial consequences might be.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the precise principles and criteria which UK military commanders must use when complying with article 3, paragraph 3 of protocol II of the UN's inhumane weapons convention which prohibits the indiscriminate use of mines.

Mr. Soames: The UK would not use land mines indiscriminately. Minefields have to have a specific military purpose, and must be clearly marked using the correct NATO marking system. The location of mines is recorded to facilitate subsequent de-mining operations. The set rules and procedures that have to be followed are taught as part of the courses for Royal Engineers and any other soldiers who are responsible for mine laying and mine clearance.

Service Accommodation

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has the results of the audit work on official service residences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: In his written answer of 4 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *85*, my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), described the audit work that we had set in hand on official service residences following the discovery of significant overspends on the refurbishment of Haymes Garth, currently the residence of the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel and Training Command. He undertook to make a full report at the conclusion of this work.

The external investigation of circumstances surrounding Haymes Garth was carried out by Ms Sheila Masters of KPMG Peat Marwick, building on earlier work by the Ministry's internal auditors. Her report establishes the sequence of events, identifies the failures of control which occurred, and makes recommendations for the future. The latest estimate of expenditure on Haymes Garth is £380,000. It is our intention to dispose of the property as soon as practicable, subject to the availability of suitable alternative accommodation for the AOCinC.

Internal auditors have, as my right hon. Friend indicated, also been conducting a wider examination of expenditure on official service residences, covering a selection of properties in each of the three services.

The general conclusion is that management of a majority of residences was generally satisfactory, but there were significant failures of control in some cases, including Haymes Garth. The Ministry's established procedures for the devolution of budgetary powers and responsibilities did not always operate as intended. The reports make it clear that this was partly due to lack of agreed standards for official service residences, which meant that too much was left to subjective judgements. There was also evidence that some staff have an incomplete understanding of the relevant procedures. Obligations to consult were sometimes ignored. This is not acceptable.

There are no findings of illegality or culpable impropriety, but failures of control imply individual failures in management and responsibility. The reports we now have, call into question the judgment of a number of individuals to a degree which may require action by the appropriate authorities. This is in hand.

Meanwhile, budget holders have been reminded that normal budgetary disciplines apply to expenditure of this kind, and that financial oversight at senior level should be maintained at all times. Steps to remedy the system defects which have come to light are being vigorously pursued. The effect will be to define most closely the standards of provision for residences and their furnishings and to ensure improved reporting of actual expenditure. Residences are provided to enable the occupant to do his job; provision should be limited to what is necessary for this purpose.

Beyond this, as I reported to the House on 18 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns 159-60, it was felt appropriate that the wider question of representational entertainment in the armed forces should be examined, and Sir Peter Cazalet agreed to carry out the investigation. As well as examining the requirement for senior officers to entertain, he is considering whether there are most cost-effective ways of doing so than the use of official residences and similar quarters, and in the light of that whether any properties can be sold. Future policy on the use of official service residences including Haymes Garth will be formed in the light of his recommendations.

I am placing a paper concerning the financial management of official service residences in the Library of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Scheme Leavers

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the number and proportion of trainees who six months after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on another Government training programme, *(g)* on a full-time education or training course, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit, *(i)* unemployed and not claiming benefit, *(j)* in a job club and *(k)* doing something else, as shown in the results of the youth training leavers survey for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, for the period April 1993 to March 1994, for all leavers and separately for male and female, for each ethnic group, and for those with a disability or health problem;

(2) what are the results of the training for work leavers survey for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, for the period between April 1993 and March 1994, for all leavers and separately for male and female, for each ethnic group, and for those with a disability or health problem, broken down to show the number and proportion of training for work leavers who *(a)* have been entered for a vocational qualification, *(b)* had obtained a vocational qualification, *(c)* had failed to obtain a vocational qualification and *(d)* were awaiting their results; what was the number and proportion of training for work leavers who six months after leaving were (i) in a full-time job with their work experience employer, (ii) in a full-time job with another employer, (iii) employed in their own business, (iv) in a part-time job, (v) in voluntary work (vi) on another Government training programme, (vii) on a full-time education or training course, (viii) unemployed and claiming benefit, (ix) unemployed and not claiming benefit, (x) in a job club and (xi) doing something else; and what is the number and proportion of training for work leavers who had completed the training agreed in their initial action plan.

Mr. Paice: As this information is contained in a large number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what are the results from the training for work leavers survey for the period December 1992 to January 1994 for each training and enterprise council area in England and Wales and each local enterprise company area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of leavers who *(a)* had been entered for a vocational qualification, *(b)* had obtained a vocational qualification, *(c)* had failed to obtain a vocational qualification and *(d)* were awaiting their results; what was the number and proportion of training for work leavers who six months after leaving were (i) in a full-time job with their work experience employer, (ii) in a full-time job with another employer, (iii) employed in their own business, iv) in a part-time job, (v) in voluntary work, (vi) on another Government training programme, (vii) on a full-time education or training course, (viii) unemployed and claiming benefit, (ix) unemployed and not claiming benefit, (x) in a job club and (xi) doing something else; and what was the number and proportion of training for work leavers who had completed the training agreed in their initial action plan;

(2) what are the results of the youth training leavers survey for the period December 1992 to January 1994 for each training and enterprise council area in England and Wales and each local enterprise company area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of youth training leavers who were *(a)* in full-time work with the same employer, *(b)* in full-time work with a different employer, *(c)* in part-time work, *(d)* on a full-time course at a college or training centre, *(e)* on another youth training scheme, *(f)* doing something else, *(g)* unemployed and *(h)* had obtained a vocation qualification; and what was (i) the number of questionnaires issued, (ii) the usable percentage response and (iii) the percentage of respondents who were early leavers.

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I placed in the Library on 13 January in answer to questions tabled by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman).

Employment Service

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the internal working group was set up in Scotland to develop Employment Service services for Employment Service clients living in rural areas.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. G. Johnson to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 10 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence on business of the Chief Executive, to reply to your question about when the internal working group was set up in Scotland.

The working group was established to address issues concerning the provision of Employment Service programmes and services in rural areas and to look at ways in which improvements could be made to assist our clients in these areas. The first meeting was held on 25 November 1994.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list by region those areas which have access to Employment Service freephone services in Scotland;

(2) if he will list by region the number of mobile jobcentres operating in Scotland;

(3) if he will list by region which press and radio are used to publicise Employment Service services in Scotland.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. G. Johnson to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 10 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence on business of the Chief Executive, to reply to your questions about Scotland concerning the areas which have access to Employment Service (ES)

freephone services, the number of mobile Jobcentres, and press and radio used to publicise ES services.

The information you require is listed, by Regional and Island Council Authorities, in the following tables.

I hope this is helpful.

Table 1: Freephone services for clients in Scotland

Regional authority	*Jobcentre*	*Area served*
Strathclyde	Campbeltown	Kintyre
		Islay
		Jura
		Gigha
	Oban	Lochgilphead
		Inverary
		Tarbet
		Coll
		Colonsay
		Iona
		Mull
		Tiree
	Kilmarnock A / Kilmarnock B	Irvine Valley
		Stewarton
		Kilmaurs
	Kilwinning	Dalry
Borders	Eyemouth / Hawick / Kelso	Roxburgh and Berwickshire
	Galashiels	Ettrick
		Lauderdale
		Peeblesshire
Shetland Islands Council	Lerwick	Shetland Isles
Lothian	Portobello	Craigmillar
Highland	Inverness	Inverness
		Ullapool
		Drumnadrochit
		Gairloch
		Aviemore
		Grantown on Spey
		Black Isle

Table 2: Mobile jobcentre for clients in Scotland

Regional authority	*Jobcentre*	*Area served*
Fife	Cupar	Auchtermuchty
		Newburgh
	Leven	Anstruther
	Kirkcaldy	Burntisland
	Dunfermline	Dalgety Bay
		Valleyfield
		Rosyth
		Kincardine
	Cowdenbeath	Cardenden
		Kinross
		Lochore

Table 3: Press and radio publicity in Scotland

Regional authority	*Press/Radio*
Strathclyde	*Gryffe Weekly News*
	Paisley Gazette
	Paisley Express
	Lanark Gazette
	Wishaw Press
	Motherwell Times
	Lanarkshire People
	Lanarkshire World
	Clyde Weekly News
	Daily Record
	Glasgow Herald
	Glasgow Evening Times
	Drumchapel News
	County Reporter
	Oban Times
	The Star
	Lennox Herald
	Irvine Times
	Irvine Herald
	Cumnock Chronicle
	Ayr Advertiser
	Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald
	Troon Times
	Carrick Herald
	Kilmarnock Standard
	Ayrshire Leader
	Ayrshire Post
	Arran Banner
	Largs and Millport Weekly
	Garnock Herald
	Greenock Telegraph
	Clyde Post
	The Buteman
	Dunoon Observer
	Glaswegian
	East End Independent
	Hamilton Advertiser
	Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser
	East Kilbride News
	Wishaw Press
	Rutherglen Reformer
	Lanarkshire World
	Southside Extra
	Castlemilk Free Press
	Scottish Jobs
	East End Independent
	Cumbernauld News
	Kirkintilloch Advertiser
	Radio Clyde
	Q96
	West Sound Radio
Borders	*Southern Reporter*
	Pebblesshire News
	Borders Telegraph
	Hawick News
	Berwickshire News
Tayside	*Courier and Advertiser (Dundee)*
	Evening Telegraph (Dundee)
	Perthshire Advertiser
	Blairgowrie Advertiser
	Arbroath Herald
	Montrose Review
	Tayside Business News
	Radio Tay
Fife	*Fife Free Press*
	Courier and Advertiser (Fife)
	East Fife Mail
	Fife Leader
	Dunfermline Press

Table 3: Press and radio publicity in Scotland

Regional authority	*Press/Radio*
	Dunfermline Extra
	Central Fife Times
	Dunfermline Herald and Post
Dumfries and Galloway	*Dumfries and Galloway Standard*
	Galloway Gazette
	Wigtown Free Press
	Dumfries Courier
	Annandale Herald
	Annandale Observer
Central	*Stirling Observer*
	Falkirk Herald
	Alloa Advertiser
Lothian	*Edinburgh Evening News*
	Wester Hailes Sentinel
	Portobello Advertiser
	East Lothian Toun Crier
	Craigmillar Festival Society News
	Midlothian Advertiser
	Lothian Times
	Lothian News
	Lothian Courier
	Herald and Post
	Musselburgh News
	Radio Forth
	Hailes FM (Wester Hailes)
Highland	*Press and Journal*
	Northern Scot
	Highland News
	Ross-shire Journal
	Lochaber Life
	John O'Groats Journal
	Fort William Star
	Moray Firth Radio
	BBC Highland
	Moray Firth Radio
	Nevis Radio
Grampian	*Press and Journal*
	Evening Express
	Fraserburgh Herald
	Buchan Observer
Shetland Islands Council	Shetland
	Shetland Radio
Western Isles Island	*Stornoway Gazette*
	Radio FM
Orkney Islands Council	*The Orcadian*
	BBC Radio Orkney

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the timetable for linking *(a)* libraries, *(b)* community centres and *(c)* other focal points in rural communities to the Employment Service computer network;

(2) what system is in place to ensure that vacancy displays in post offices, libraries, community centres and other focal points in rural communities are regularly updated.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. G. Johnson to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 10 February 1995.

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence on business of the Chief Executive, to reply to your questions about the systems used to update vacancy displays in rural locations and the timetable for linking such locations to the Employment Service (ES) computer network.

The currency of vacancies in Jobcentres is one of the standards of performance outlined in the ES Jobseeker's Charter. Our aim is that when clients look at our job vacancy boards, they will find the vacancies up to date and available.

Where vacancies are displayed at locations other than Jobcentres such as libraries or community centres, this aim may be achieved by way of local agreements with the relevant organisations who, on our instruction, remove old vacancies and replace them with new ones. Alternatively, one of my officers will travel to visit the location to update the displays. In some cases, depending on the distances between the Jobcentre and the vacancy display, both activities will take place.

There are no plans to link these outside locations to our present computerised vacancy handling system, "Supervacs".

Jobsearch Plan

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will withdraw question 18 on page 10 from the draft jobsearch plan.

Miss Widdecombe: No. The draft jobsearch plan has been designed to enable jobseekers to set out information to help them prepare for the discussions with an employment adviser about their jobseeker's agreement. The jobsearch plan form will ask for details of availability for work, the sort of work being sought and how the jobseeker intends to find it. Questions relating to the level of pay being sought are relevant to these matters.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, in response to question 18 on page 10 of the draft jobsearch plan which requires the jobseeker to state the lowest wage that he or she is willing to work for, he would expect a person from an ethnic minority to state a lower wage rate than a white person.

Miss Widdecombe: No.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, in response to question 18 on page 10 of the draft jobsearch plan which requires the jobseeker to state the lowest wage that he or she is willing to work for, he would expect women to state a lower wage rate than men.

Miss Widdecombe: No.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the status of the jobsearch plan under the Jobseekers Bill; and what sanctions can be imposed upon claimants if they refuse to sign the jobsearch plan.

Miss Widdecombe: The jobsearch plan has no status under the Jobseekers Bill. It will be used to gather information to help draw up the jobseeker's agreement. No sanctions will be imposed for not signing the plan.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to introduce a minimum level for the lowest wage a person needs to

declare under the draft jobsearch plan under the Jobseekers Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: None.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment at what interval the jobsearch plan will be renewed by an individual claimant under the Jobseekers Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: The jobsearch plan will be used to gather information to help the employment officer and jobseeker to draw up an initial jobseeker's agreement. A new jobsearch plan might in some cases be appropriate to help the employment officer and the jobseeker vary a jobseeker's agreement during a claim.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which questions contained within the jobsearch plan are at present contained in a signed document; and what is the sanction for failing to declare or making a false declaration.

Miss Widdecombe: Nearly all of the information which it is proposed should be gathered by the new jobsearch plan form is at present collected on forms which are signed by the claimant. The order and phrasing of some of the questions has been altered in the current draft of the plan. The section on efforts to find work, in particular, has been re-designed to help the jobseeker set out his jobsearch plans in more detail.

There will be no sanctions for failing to fill in a new jobsearch plan form. It is, however, an offence for a jobseeker to make a statement or representation he knows to be false and we propose to continue this under the jobseeker's allowance.

Regulated Economies

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her oral answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column 7, if she will list the international evidence that more regulated economies are less successful in creating jobs.

Mr. Oppenheim: There is a growing body of work—much of it through international comparisons—on the effect of regulation on labour markets. This work was recently summarised in the OECD jobs study, "Evidence and Explanations Part II: The Adjustment Potential of the Labour Market", Chapter 6, pages 63–100. Among its conclusions are

"the employment/population ratio . . . tends to be lower in countries with high levels of job security"

measured by the strictness of statutory employment security provisions. The OECD jobs study drew heavily on recent work including:

D. Grubb and W. Wells, "Employment Regulation and Patterns of Work in EC Countries", OECD Economic Studies No. 21, winter 1993;

W. Wells, "Does the Structure of Employment Legislation Affect the Structure of Employment and Unemployment?", paper at United Kingdom EC Presidency Labour Market Conference, Glasgow, November 1992;

Other studies of the effects of labour market regulation include:

S. Bentolila and G. Bertola, "Firing Costs and Labour Demand: How Bad is Eurosclerosis?" Review of Economic Studies, 1990;

S. Bentolila and G. Saint-Paul, "The Macroeconomic Impact of Flexible Labour Contracts, with an Application to Spain", European Economic Review, 1990;

G. Bertola, "Job Security, Employment and Wages", European Economic Review, 1990;

M. Emerson, "Regulation or Deregulation of the Labour Market: Policy Regimes for the Recruitment and Dismissal of Employees in the Industrialised Countries", European Economic Review, 1988;

E. Lazear, "Job Security Provisions and Employment", Quarterly Journal of Economics, 1990;

OECD Employment Outlook, 1993, chapter 3, section D;

OECD Employment Outlook, 1994, chapter 4, section D.

Wages

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in each English region and for Wales and Scotland earn *(a)* less than £1.50 an hour, *(b)* between £1.50 and £2.00 an hour, *(c)* between £2.00 and £2.50 an hour, *(d)* between £2.50 and £3.00 an hour, *(e)* between £3.00 and £3.50 an hour and *(f)* between £3.50 and £4.00 an hour.

Mr. Oppenheim: Estimated numbers of both full and part-time employees are given in the following table:

Estimated numbers of full and part-time employees (in thousands rounded to the nearest 10,000).

	Estimated number with gross hourly earnings:					
Region	Less than 1.50	£1.50–£2.00	£2.00–£2.50	£2.50–£3.00	£3.00–£3.50	£3.50–£4.00
South East region	20	30	40	110	300	400
East Anglia region	—	—	10	30	60	70
South West region	10	10	10	50	160	150
West Midlands region	10	10	20	50	170	180
East Midlands region	10	10	20	50	140	150
Yorkshire and Humberside region	10	10	20	50	160	180
North West region	—	10	30	60	180	200
North region	—	—	20	30	100	110
Wales	10	—	10	30	80	100
Scotland	10	10	20	40	160	190

Notes:
—denotes estimate less than 5,000.
Source:
1994 New Earnings Survey and Employees in Employment for June 1994.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 13 February 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Expenditure on all forms of advertising prior to 1987–88 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Expenditure on advertising for each year thereafter is shown in the table. In 1993–94, the way in which expenditure is recorded changed, so the figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95—to December—include all forms of publicity. The Lord Chancellor is responsible for three agencies: Her Majesty's Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office. As the hon. Member's question concerns specific operational matters, on which the chief executives are best placed to provide answers, I have accordingly asked the chief executives to reply direct.

Year	*£*
1987–88	6,990
1988–89	5,117
1989–90	6,745
1990–91	5,893
1991–92	24,324
1992–93	16,450
1993–94	78,541
1994–95[1]	80,096

[1] To December

Note:
1993–94 prices—adjusted by the GDP deflator published 29 November, 1994.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 10 February 1995:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about advertising.

1. The Public Record has spent the following sums (at 1994 prices) on staff recruitment advertising:

1986–87: nil
1987–88: nil
1988–89: nil
1989–90: nil
1990–91: £28
1991–92: £20,666
1992–93: £10,326
1993–94: £77,392

2. In addition to the above figures, since 1991–92 the Office has spent approximately £1,500 per annum advertising its own products for sale.

3. Information for earlier years is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, I am confident that any expenditure on advertising in the earlier years would have been occasional and very small.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 10 February 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning total expenditure by HM Land Registry on all forms of advertising for each year since 1979. I can provide the following information:

Year	*Total advertising costs at 1994 Prices £*
1979–80	59,340
1980–81	12,254
1981–82	14,329
1982–83	9,296
1983–84	5,795
1984–85	6,792
1985–86	11,609
1986–87	19,112
1987–88	47,020
1988–89	94,278
1989–90	45,719
1990–91	24,327
1991–92	6,932
1992–93	15,770
1993–94	16,558

The Registry major expenditure on advertising has been for staff recruitment, particularly to meet the property boom of the late 1980's; for advertising in connection with the registration of high value transactions (until 1980); and to give effect to a continuing statutory requirement concerning the replacement of Land and Charge Certificates.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr Malcolm Bruce, dated 10 February 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's response to your parliamentary question listed on 9 February 1995, regarding expenditure on all forms of advertising since 1979.

The Public Trust Office does not have a policy of advertising its services and there has been no expenditure on advertising since 1987/88.

The office is only obliged to keep expenditure accounts for six years and if any spending took place on advertising prior to 1987/88 this could only be ascertained if available at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Office for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

The Prime Minister: None.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Cardiff Bay Opera House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the impact on funding from the millennium fund of the

proposed Cardiff Bay opera house of *(a)* breaches in the rules of the competition organised by the Cardiff Bay opera house trust and *(b)* breaches of the planning permission of the local planning authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place a copy in the Library of the House.

TREASURY

Privatisation

Mr. Booth : To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what executive agencies formerly in the civil service will soon be privatised.

Sir George Young: The Government have announced plans to transfer the following executive agencies to the private sector: the Transport Research Laboratory; the National Engineering Laboratory; the Laboratory of the Government Chemist; ADAS, in part; the Natural Resources Institute; and the Accreditation Services, part of the National Physical Laboratory.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is public expenditure per head in Wales in the current financial year; and what is the equivalent in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Aitken: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave to the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on 2 February, *Official Report,* column *1199.*

Expenditure Review

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the redundancy terms offered to staff in his Department following the Treasury's fundamental review of expenditure.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury's fundamental expenditure review is still continuing. At all but the most senior grades the precise staff levels required have not yet been finalised. If there is a surplus of staff at any level, it will be managed by means other than redundancy, where possible.

The financial terms in the event of redundancy are those set out in the civil service compensation scheme. This scheme—formerly section 10 of the principal civil service pension scheme—which applies throughout civil service, was laid before Parliament on 20 December 1994.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates the Treasury has for the annual costs to companies and members of the public of accounting for and paying capital gains tax.

Sir George Young: The Inland Revenue is not aware of any recent studies of capital gains tax compliance costs.

The deregulation task force chaired by Francis Maude is looking at capital gains tax as part of its efforts to reduce compliance costs for businesses. We shall consider carefully any recommendations the task force may make in due course.

European Monetary Institute

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report,* columns *63–64,* about the European Monetary Institute, what period of time is intended to be covered by the institute's budgeted expenditure for which the total capital requirement is 615.6 million ecu.

Mr. Nelson: The capital resources will be used to generate an income necessary to cover the expenditure of the European Monetary Institute until its liquidation, in accordance with article 1091 of the EC treaty. The Council of the EMI intends to review the size of the resources three years after the establishment of the EMI, at the end of 1996.

Income Tax Evasion

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money his Department estimates was lost through income tax evasion in each year from 1990 to the latest year for which figures are available.

Sir George Young: No reliable estimates are available.

Company Shares

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to amend the tax law regarding the buy-back of company shares.

Sir George Young: The current Finance Bill contains no proposals relating to the tax treatment of the purchase by a company of its own shares, but, as with a wide range of tax issues, the position is kept under review.

Clearing Banks (Charges)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the clearing banks to discuss charging policies and the need for openness with customers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: My colleagues and I meet the chairmen and other representatives of the clearing banks from time to time to discuss a wide range of issues. Bank charges for business customers were looked at in reviews of the financing of small firms published by the Bank of England in January 1994 and January 1995. Neither highlighted charges as a significant problem. For the retail sector, the code of banking practice, introduced by all the major banks, already encourages greater openness between banks and their customers. All the major banks have now introduced, or are introducing, pre-notification of charges.

Civil Servants

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the numbers of staff with science, engineering and technology qualifications employed in the civil service by grade in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* 1993.

Sir George Young: This information is not held centrally. Below the open structure, there are civil servants employed in the professional and technology group and the science group. Details of the numbers and grades of these staff are available in table 4 of "Civil Service Statistics" for each of the years. Copies of "Civil Service Statistics" are available in the Library.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government's policy is on relocating civil service jobs to areas of high unemployment and low opportunities.

Sir George Young: Departments and agencies should review the location of their work with the intention of securing cost savings, and wider employment and economic development benefits, including consistency with Ministers' wider regional and inner-city area policies.

Departments considering relocation liaise closely with other Departments, the Government offices for the English regions, local authorities and the training and enterprise councils over their proposals for change.

Ecu

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what work the Government have undertaken to facilitate the use of the ecu.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Since 1988 the Government have issued ecu denominated debt. In addition to widening the options for management of the United Kingdom's reserves, this programme shows the importance the Government attach to providing further opportunities for the development of the private ecu markets in London.

Home Owners (Benefit Entitlement)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral answer of 2 February to the hon. Member for Warrington, North, (Mr. Hoyle) *Official Report,* column 1201, what advice he has received from the Council of Mortgage Lenders about the likely effect of the changes he proposed in the Budget to income support for home owners' mortgage interest payments on the number of repossessions.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* The Department of Social Security has on-going discussions with the Council of Mortgage Lenders and will continue to do so throughout the consultation process. The council has expressed concern about the possible impact of the proposals. The Government are listening carefully to its concerns but believe that the proposed changes will result in the development of comprehensive quality insurance which will provide better protection for all home owners against repossession, not just those who currently receive income support mortgage interest.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his office and its agencies for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office incurred no expenditure in respect of advertising over the years in question. I am not responsible for any agencies.

SCOTLAND

NHS Trusts

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* direction he has issued to NHS trusts in Scotland relating to local pay bargaining; and if he will place copies of these documents in the Library.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: NHS in Scotland employers are aware of the Government's policy. Responsibility for devising pay arrangements should be delegated wherever possible to those who are responsible for managing the delivery of services. NHS employers in Scotland are responsible for taking appropriate steps to develop and implement local pay.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Lang: The Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1994", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House, lists non-departmental public bodies, nationalised industries, public corporations and NHS bodies. None of the bodies listed as being sponsored by my Department has been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector. Non-departmental public bodies are subject to review every five years, at which time consideration is given inter alia to the possibility of privatisation. The position of the other bodies is also considered regularly.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland why he has not yet provided the information about next steps agencies requested by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton in his question of 20 January.

Mr. Lang: I apologise for the delay in answering the right hon. Member's question, which was in fact answered on 8 February, *Official Report,* column *336.*

Dundee Port Authority

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public investment in the form of Government and European grants has been given to Dundee port authority in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

No Government grants were paid to the authority for port-related developments over this period. Payments from the European regional development fund were:

Year	*£*
1985	104,957
1986	80,178
1987	Nil
1988	1,389,300
1989	874,200
1990	Nil
1991	353,905
1992	178,270
1993	47,491
1994	520,679
1995 (to date)	Nil
Total	3,548,980

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he or his officials have had with Dundee port authority in relation to proposals for privatising that authority.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

Dundee port authority's chairman has met my noble Friend Lord Goschen, and with his professional advisers has had a number of meetings with officials of the Department.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by, or on behalf of, Ministers in his Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Heseltine: Within the framework of collective responsibility there is no practical distinction between publicity described as being issued by a single Minister or Her Majesty's Government.

Centrally produced DTI advertising does not refer to either Her Majesty's Government or an individual Minister, but generally includes the DTI logo and its descriptor.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of his proposals for the Insolvency Service on the rights of the employees of the service to transferred rights and conditions.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In the absence of any decision to contract out the work of official receivers, it is too early to consider the issue of Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, the implications of which may not become clear until the nature of proposals in any bidding process could be assessed.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what adjustments to the spending plans for his Department he has made following his proposals for the Insolvency Service;

(2) what provision he has made for redundancy costs arising out of his proposals for the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the announcement my right hon. and noble Friend Earl Ferrers made on 10 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *94*. No early retirement or severance provisions have been made by my Department, as the preparatory work on increasing private sector involvement in the work of the official receivers is still on-going, nor has my Department made any adjustments to its spending plans.

Insolvency Practitioners

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he proposes to take to remedy the criticism of insolvency practitioners made by the National Audit Office.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The reports of the National Audit Office and of the Public Accounts Committee contained recommendations that the Insolvency Service should seek to improve the quality and timeliness of reports submitted by insolvency practitioners concerning unfit conduct of directors in insolvent companies.

The Insolvency Service has issued revised guidelines to insolvency practitioners which emphasised the need for timeliness of reports and the adequacy of evidence to support allegations of unfit conduct. These guidelines are being reinforced by the newly constituted joint insolvency monitoring unit set up by the insolvency profession to raise standards of its members. In addition, the Insolvency Service has commenced a programme of visits to practitioners who have a poor record of reporting, backed by prosecution in extreme cases.

Steel Imports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the levels of steel imports into the United Kingdom for each three-month period since January 1993 from *(a)* the United States of America, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* Korea and *(e)* Japan.

Mr. Needham: The information is in the following table:

United Kingdom imports of steel[1]

000 tonnes

	United States of America	*France*	*Germany*	*South Korea*	*Japan*
1993					
Q1	10.0	83.7	312.6	0.3	14.2
Q2	12.7	79.6	354.7	0.3	14.3
Q3	8.9	94.1	315.9	3.4	17.5
Q4	11.8	415.3	358.8	0.2	16.9
1994					
Q1	9.1	185.2	359.7	4.2	10.0
Q2	8.8	191.6	391.6	0.2	17.5
Q3	11.5	191.4	381.4	2.1	8.4

Source:
Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.
Note:
[1] Products of the steel industry in the Standard Industrial Classification (1980), Groups 221, 222 and 223.

Shipbuilding

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to encourage United Kingdom shipbuilding yards to develop their capacity to produce floating oil and gas platforms.

Mr. Eggar: My Department established a working group on floating production systems last year and the group has made positive proposals to strengthen the competitiveness of UK yards and other suppliers in this sector. Its recommendations are being pursued with the industry and a report will be published shortly.

Oil Companies (Equipment Purchases)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to encourage United Kingdom oil companies to purchase equipment from United Kingdom producers.

Mr. Eggar: My Department helps oil companies in the UK and overseas to identify competitive UK suppliers and supports initiatives to help the suppliers improve their competitiveness.

Ferrybridge

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what allowance was made in the liabilities of PowerGen's accounts for the flue gas desulphurisation of Ferrybridge power station when the company was privatised; what is his estimate of that sum in 1995 prices; and how much has been spent on flue gas desulphurisation of Ferrybridge station.

Mr. Eggar: The expectation that investment in 4 GW of flue gas desulphurisation equipment at PowerGen's coal-fired plant would form part of its capital expenditure programme was taken into account at privatisation. The 1991 prospectus for the sale of PowerGen gave an estimated cost of £250 million for the fitting of flue gas desulphurisation equipment at Ratcliffe power station. PowerGen had applied for planning permission to fit flue gas desulphurisation equipment at Ferrybridge C. This permission has subsequently been granted. Information on expenditure on particular capital projects is a matter for the company.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is required to review the conditions of integrated pollution control authorisations granted to power stations and may impose new conditions to prevent or reduce emissions of pollutants subject to the application of BATNEEC—best available technique not entailing excessive cost.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has power to direct whether specific conditions should or should not be imposed.

Cars (Distribution)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has received on EU proposals to restrict the block exemptions governing the distribution of cars; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The European Commission has published a draft regulation—OJ 379/16—intended to replace Commission regulation 123/85. This regulation governs the selective and exclusive dealership agreements for motor vehicles, and is due to expire in June 1995.

My Department has consulted interested parties representing United Kingdom manufacturers, dealers, trade associations, consumer groups and legal bodies to obtain their views on the draft. It has received representations from, or held discussions with, some 40 companies and representative organisations.

N. M. Rothschild and Son Ltd.

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report* columns *760–61*, if the contract awarded to N. M. Rothschild was for a fixed fee; which tender was recommended to the then Secretary of State for Energy for acceptance by the interdepartmental group; and when the contact is expected to end.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The contract was awarded on the basis of hourly rates. The then Secretary of State for Energy acted in accordance with the advice he received from officials. The contract will end once the privatisation of the British coal Corporation, including the non-mining activities, is completed.

Military Equipment Exports (Indonesia)

Mrs. Clywd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list military equipment that has been refused export licences to Indonesia on the grounds that such equipment might be used for internal repression

between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1993 and between 31 December 1993 and 1 February 1994.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* It has been the practice of successive Governments not to reveal details of export licences or applications for licences unless the requirements of confidentiality are outweighed by the public interest.

In this instance, I believe that the public interest is served by disclosing the following information:

Three applications were made in the first period for licences to export military equipment which were ultimately refused.

The goods were night vision goggles, an HF transceiver station together with battery charger, cable and ancillaries, and a thermal imager with laser range finder and teleconverter lens.

No applications for licences made during the second period were refused.

Recent rejections have been riot guns and CS cartridges for the Indonesian Police and pump action shotguns for the prison service.

The potential for the use against the civilian population was one of the factors taken into account during the processing of the applications.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Witnesses (Disabilities)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions by the Crown Prosecution Service have been dropped within the last five years on the grounds that the principal witnesses or victims have a hearing difficulty or suffer from mental illness.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service maintains no central records regarding witnesses or victims of crime. The information is recorded on individual case files, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Waste Sites

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the domestic waste dump sites in Northern Ireland where environmental problems have arisen, indicating the type of problem which has arisen at each site.

Mr. Moss: At present, 28 landfill sites are authorised to receive domestic waste. Twenty-six are operated under district council control and two are operated by the private sector, but regulated by statutory authorities. Prior to 1980, landfill sites were used without proper design and building plans. Since then, authorised sites are engineered to deal with and contain leachate and gas emissions. Environmental problems associated with landfill sites can be litter, smell and bird invasion.

The degree to which any of these problems may be found at a particular site will depend upon a range of factors such as location, the engineering technology used in design and operation of the site and on-going site management.

Visual Disability

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to redefine the term blind so that a person who is unable to pass the vision test associated with the driving test should be regarded as being unable to do any work for which eyesight is essential.

Mr. Moss: No.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he has given to abandoning the system of two categories of registrable visual disability.

Mr. Moss: The system of distinguishing between blindness and partial sight assists in service planning as the needs of blind and partially sighted people are not identical. Fewer people might be willing to register with social services departments if doing so meant they were required to accept the label "blind". We have no plans to change the present system.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to instruct Department of Health officials to issue new guidelines to approve consultant ophthalmologists to certify all persons with a visual acuity of 6/18, or less, as blind and registrable in that category with social services.

Mr. Moss: None.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the practice in other countries of having only one category of registrable visual disability.

Mr. Moss: None. The system in use throughout the United Kingdom has been established over many years enabling trends in causes of blindness and partial sight to be monitored. There are no plans to amend the system.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Sir John Wheeler: The public bodies for which the Secretary of State retains departmental responsibility are set out in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1994", copies of which are available in the Library. Since "Public Bodies 1994" was published, the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Agency was established.

None of these bodies has been identified as being suitable for placing in the private sector.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the termination payments made to chief executives and general and senior managers in each NHS trust since its inception, indicating the size and number of individual payments.

Mr. Moss: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Consideration is being given to the collection of data on termination payments in Northern Ireland.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is listed:

Year	*Expenditure £ (in 1994 prices)*
1979–80	1,146,986
1980–81	999,033
1981–82	1,159,163
1982–83	2,731,538
1983–84	4,821,516
1984–85	4,360,906
1985–86	6,004,314
1986–87	5,651,684
1987–88	5,719,217
1988–89	6,100,684
1989–90	6,393,354
1990–91	6,769,594
1991–92	7,953,941
1992–93	7,770,377
1993–94	6,046,557
1994–95	[1]5,241,690

[1] Consists of estimated expenditure or expenditure to date for Departments.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Advisory Board for the Research Councils

28. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the final recommendations of the disbanded Advisory Board for the Research Councils.

Mr. David Hunt: The final recommendations were in December 1993 and consisted of advice on the then science budget. I have placed copies on the Library.

Government-funded Research

30. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total spending reduction in Government-funded research which took place when near-market research was abandoned.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Over the period—1987–88 to 1991–92—there was a cash increase of 19 per cent. in total Government-funded R and D expenditure.

36. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster by what method he is kept informed as to scientific developments and breakthroughs that warrant funding and other support from Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Many different methods.

Space Funding

37. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions he has had with the Department of Trade and Industry on funding of space science.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I met my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for space last November, to discuss the funding of space science and our two Departments continue to work closely together.

There is continual contact between the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, my Department and the British National Space Centre at an official level, through which we are currently looking in detail at the cost-effectiveness of the UK's participation in the European Space Agency's science programme.

I recognise fully that our space scientists have an excellent reputation and we will continue to support our best space science research.

Large Hadron Collider

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to the letter from the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what discussions Her Majesty's Government are having with CERN partners on ways in which the original timetable for the large hadron collider and associated developments in particle physics can be adhered to.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The timetable of the large hadron collider project agreed by member states in December 1995 foresees full operation in 2008. This can be achieved within known existing resources. Completion before this date will require significant additional contributions from non-member states.

The CERN director general is taking the lead in discussing with potential partners the terms on which they might participate scientifically and financially. He has the full support of the UK and other CERN member states. We stand ready to give the director general every assistance to help these discussions reach a satisfactory conclusion. Any proposal for the participation of non-member states will be discussed by member states in the CERN council.

Market Testing

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will name the companies which have been successful in obtaining contracts to provide services for Government Departments as a result of the market-testing process; and if he will list them by Government department.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: For information on the contracts awarded by the Office of Public Service and Science, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *455*. Other Ministers provided similar information on their Departments to the hon. Member for Darlington. Their answers were published in the *Official Report* between 12 December and 16 December. The Ministry of Defence provided a full list of contractors in an answer to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) *Official Report*, 30 January 1995, columns *546–48*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Somaliland

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he or

international organisations have to restart mine clearing operations in Somaliland.

Mr. Baldry: We have no plans. We understand the UN has been unable to agree a programme for mine clearance work with the regional authorities, which include adequate systems for monitoring, reporting and accountability.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the ODA co-ordinator in Hargeisa has made of the priorities for British and European assistance to Somaliland.

Mr. Baldry: North-west Somalia's needs are extensive. Britain's priorities remain support for programmes to help re-establish basic health and education services and help for those displaced by the recent fighting. EU assistance includes support for the livestock sector; water and sanitation and income generation. We agree with the NGO liaison and support officer's judgment that these remain priority areas for assistance.

Wealth Distribution

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the statistical impact made by his Department's programme in the relative distribution of wealth between the world's 20 richest and 20 poorest countries.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* Twenty-nine per cent. of the United Kingdom's total bilateral net official development assistance disbursements in 1992 went to the 20 countries listed as poorest in GNP per capita terms according to World bank information. The only countries with a higher percentage than the United Kingdom were Norway, Denmark and Finland, all of which had lower total disbursements to these countries in volume terms.

However, it is not possible to isolate the statistical effect of aid disbursements to these countries—let alone disbursements by a single donor—from other factors when examining their economic growth.

EMPLOYMENT

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to monitor the suitability of employment agencies offering domiciliary care provision; and how such agencies are monitored in terms of conduct and suitability.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Agencies Act 1973 and its associated regulations require all employment agencies to abide by specified minimum standards of conduct. Inspectors from the Department's Employment Agency standards offices investigate all complaints and other indications of breaches of the standards of conduct and undertake random checks.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money was owed by South Thames TEC to Southwark college *(a)* for work undertaken before 7 November 1994 and *(b)* for work undertaken after 7 November 1994.

Mr. Paice: I am as yet unable to assess the financial impact of the receivership of South Thames training and enterprise council on Southwark college. Money owed by South Thames TEC to Southwark college before 7 November 1994 is a matter for the receiver, who is still establishing the total amount involved. The Department has processed invoices from the college for 7 November 1994 to 1 January 1995 to the value of £133,209.55 and these will be paid to the college by the end of next week.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the financial impact of the receivership of South Thames TEC on Southwark college.

Mr. Paice: I am as yet unable to assess the financial impact of the receivership of South Thames training and enterprise council on Southwark college.

Jobseekers

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria will be used to assess an individual's skills, qualifications and experience for the purposes of entering into the jobseeker's agreement.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The employment officer and the jobseeker will seek to draw up a jobseeker's agreement. The terms and conditions of the agreement have to be such that if the jobseeker complies with the agreement he will satisfy the conditions set out in regulations on availability and actively seeking work.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria will be used by the adjudication officer to determine what is reasonable for purposes of deciding whether a claimant for jobseeker's allowance considers the agreement as a condition of entitlement to be unreasonable.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Adjudication officers will be expected to have regard to the legislation and any relevant caselaw. They will be assisted by guidance issued by the chief adjudication officer.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what procedures will apply when the adjudicating officer charged with deciding whether the agreement as a condition of entitlement for jobseeker's allowance is reasonable, rules it *(a)* to be reasonable and *(b)* to be unreasonable.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* *(a)* If the adjudication officer determines that it is reasonable to expect the jobseeker to comply with the terms and conditions of a proposed agreement, the jobseeker can accept his determination or appeal to a social security appeals tribunal.

(b) If the adjudication officer determines that it is not reasonable he may give directions as to the terms and conditions on which the employment officer is to enter into an agreement with the jobseeker. If the jobseeker does not consider the adjudication officer's terms reasonable, he can appeal to another adjudication officer, and if he is still not content he can appeal to a social security appeals tribunal.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have died in prison from natural causes in the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Robert Litherland, dated 13 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many people have died in prison from natural causes in the past five years.

A total of 147 people have died from natural causes whilst in custody during the last five years.

1990: 37
1991: 20
1992: 32
1993: 31
1994: 27

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether decisions relating to the searching of category A prisoners and their visitors are policy or operational matters.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The power to search prisoners and their visitors is set out in the prison rules, which are made by the Secretary of State. Decisions relating to the rules themselves and changes to them are policy matters.

The actions which are taken to implement the rules, including the procedures for searching category A prisoners and their visitors, are operational matters, as are the day-to-day decisions to search individual prisoners or visitors.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what cuts to its budget have been proposed by the Prison Service; and what new equipment and materials have been cancelled.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Prison Service has not proposed any cuts to its budget and no new equipment and materials have been cancelled.

Data Centre, Bootle

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report,* column *50,* for what reasons the transitional and restructuring costs in the contract between his Department and the Sema Group in respect of the privatisation of the data centre in Bootle remain in confidence now that the contract has been agreed; what proportion this element of the contract was of the total contract amount; if any part of the agreement prior to the contract being signed required such commercial secrecy; if permission of Sema is required to publish the figure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: It is not the usual practice to publish commercially sensitive information about contracts particularly where that would involve the disclosure of details of the pricing arrangements or structure of competitive bids and this applies both before and after a contract is let. The purpose is to preserve the legitimate business interests of competing companies who may wish to bid for future contracts. This consideration applied to the contract between the Home Office and Sema Group plc and I continue to regard information about the proportion of the contract costs which relate to transitional and restructuring activities as commercially confidential. If it was considered appropriate to disclose commercially sensitive information from tender or contractual documents, I would regard it as necessary to discuss the matter in advance with the contractor concerned.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report,* column *50,* how many people were employed at the data centre in Bootle prior to its privatisation; how many of those employees *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be made redundant as a result of the Sema Group's proposals; and if he will indicate the type of staff, and the number in each category, made redundant.

Mr. Howard: Following the award of a contract for the supply of Home Office administrative information technology services, staff in the undertaking were transferred to Sema Group plc under the terms of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981; this included 272 staff based on Merseyside.

Although subsequent redundancies by Sema Group are a matter for it, we understand from the company that, in order to make efficiency savings identified following an operational review of business requirements, it invited applications for voluntary redundancy in November 1994 from staff on Merseyside. As a result, 92 former Home Office staff on Merseyside have been accepted for voluntary redundancy under terms equivalent to those which would have applied if they had remained civil servants. I understand that all of these were formerly administrative grade civil servants in the grades administrative assistant to grade 7.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report.* column *50,* what is the expected percentage level of overspend or underspend for the estimated total payments from his Department for the Sema Group's transitional and restructuring costs against the amount allocated for these costs in the contract.

Mr. Howard: Payments to Sema Group plc to cover transitional and restructuring costs are expected to be at the level set out in the contract. Sema Group's bid contained an element for such costs, a proportion of which were estimated because they were dependent on the outcome of an operational review which they would conduct if awarded the contract. However, the contract specified a maximum to be paid by the Home Office on the basis that any costs over that amount would be met by Sema Group. It is expected that the level of payments from the Home Office to Sema Group will be at that maximum level, which was the level assumed in evaluating the bid.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Howard: The following non-departmental public bodies presently fall within my Department's responsibility:

Alcohol Education and Research Council
Commission for Racial Equality
Community Development Foundation
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Fire Services Examinations Board
Gaming Board for Great Britain
Horserace Betting Levy Board
Horserace Totalisator Board
Office of the Data Protection Registrar
Police Complaints Authority
Police Promotions Examinations Board
National Lottery Charities Board
Advisory Board on Restricted Patients
Advisory Committee on Service Candidates
Advisory Council on Race Relations
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs
Animal Procedures Committee
Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council
Firearms Consultative Committee
National Board for Crime Prevention
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales
Parole Board
Poisons Board
Police Negotiating Board
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel
Data Protection Tribunal
Horserace Betting Levy Appeals Tribunal for England and Wales
Interception of Communications Tribunal
Misuse of Drugs Advisory Body
Misuse of Drugs Professional Panel
Misuse of Drugs Tribunal
Police Arbitration Tribunal
Police Discipline Appeals Tribunal
Security Services Tribunal
Boards of Visitors to Penal Establishments

These NDPBs are subject to a rolling review every five years, the first stage of which includes an examination of prior options, including the scope for privatisation. At present, none has been identified for privatisation.

Police and Prison Services (Radio)

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of running the Home Office supply service for radio and high technology equipment to the police and prison services.

Mr. Howard: The police and prison services now purchase their radio and high technology equipment directly from suppliers. The Department, through the radio frequency and communications planning unit, undertakes frequency regulation and management functions and provides strategic advice and technical guidance on radio matters to the police, fire, prison and other Home Office Departments. The cost of this service is approximately £940,000 in 1994–95.

Parkhurst

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who advised him that the installation of geophones in the perimeter fence at Parkhurst would have to wait until building work was complete.

Mr. Howard: After the escapes from Parkhurst which took place on 3 January, I was informed by the Prison Service of the reasons why geophones had not been installed, as I explained to the House in my statement on 10 January, column 34.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Howard: Expenditure on television, radio press and poster advertising by my Department and its agencies, except the Forensic Science Service agency, for each year since 1979 is as follows:

1993–94 prices (using the GDP deflator)

	£
1979–80	7,131,352
1980–81	3,422,914
1981–82	3,470,771
1982–83	3,456,974
1983–84	4,659,770
1984–85	5,243,644
1985–86	5,037,696

1993–94 prices using the GDP deflator

	£
1986–87	7,395,028
1987–88	6,599,918
1988–89	7,107,320
1989–90	6,766,316
1990–91	6,524,067
1991–92	7,797,182
1992–93	7,569,370
1993–94	9,345,196

The projected spend for 1994–95 is £10,178,074.

The above figures do not include the marginal advertising spend for the Forensic Science Service since it became an agency in 1991. The agency does not have data to separate advertising spend from general publicity. Its systems will be modified to provide a breakdown from 1995–96.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what has been the cost of policing the demonstrations against the export of live calves;

(2) if he will require commercial organisations to pay the full cost of policing their commercial operations.

Mr. Maclean: The policing of recent demonstrations against the export of live animals has arisen from the duty of the police to uphold the law and I should not expect charges to be made for this.

Information on the total costs of policing demonstrations against the export of live calves is not available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Drugs

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of prisoners were estimated to be drug users *(a)* when they entered prison, and *(b)* when they were released from prison in (i) womens' prisons and (ii) mens' prisons in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 13 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on how many and what proportion of prisoners were estimated to be drug-users on entering and upon release from prison for both male and female establishments for each of the past 15 years.

The information currently available on the prevalence of drug misuse among prisoners does not enable me to provide you with the information that you requested. However, the Prison Service will be introducing mandatory drug testing for prisoners. As part of the mandatory drug testing programme prisoners will be required to participate in random drug testing. This will provide statistical information on the extent of drug misuse in prison.

Bathing Beaches

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that monitoring shall be carried out of the number of accidents and fatalities resulting from the use of bathing beaches.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No. But I would refer the hon. Member to the work of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and, so far as concerns fatal accidents, to the reply which I gave to his question on 25 January, column *236*.

Prevention of Terrorism Powers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many non-United Kingdom nationals in each year, to date, have been *(a)* excluded from the United Kingdom, *(b)* are currently excluded from the United Kingdom and *(c)* have had exclusion orders withdrawn under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 7 February 1995]*: Only persons who are not British citizens may be excluded from the United Kingdom under the 1989 Act: 14 persons are currently so excluded. Figures for each year since 1989 are shown in the following table:

Persons excluded from the United Kingdom

	Orders in force on 1 January	*New orders made during year*	*Orders renewed during year*	*Orders revoked/lapsed during year*
1989	35	—	4	5
1990	30	4	2	12
1991	22	3	6	7
1992	18	1	4	1
1993	18	—	4	1
1994	17	1	5	3
1995[1]	15	—	—	1

Note:
[1] As at 7 February.

HEALTH

National Blood Authority

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the relationship between the National Blood Authority and the promotion of national prune week.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the National Blood Authority.

RAF Hospital, Wroughton

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations her Department made to the Ministry of Defence regarding the implication for the NHS of the closure of RAF hospital, Wroughton.

Mr. Sackville: Regular discussions take place between officials of the Department of Health and the Ministry of Defence about plans for the future of military hospitals and their impact on the national health service, including RAF Wroughton. The timing and management of change at individual hospitals are discussed in joint machinery involving officials from my Department, NHS managers and Ministry of Defence officials.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on bovine somatotropin following recent research at Musgrave Park hospital on concentrations of insulin-like growth factor 1.

Mr. Sackville: All cows' milk contains IGF-1, an insulin-like growth factor. Administering artificially produced bovine somatatrophin to dairy cows results in marginally increased levels of IGF-1 in their milk.

I understand that doctors at the Musgrove Park hospital, Taunton, have been conducting research into possible links between BST and cancer.

Pregnancy

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number and rate of *(a)* conception, *(b)* full-term pregnancies and *(c)* terminations for each of the last 10 years for girls in the age group 12 to 15 years; and if she will indicate the levels of disaggregation for which figures are available currently.

Mr. Sackville: The information available for England as a whole is shown in the table. Corresponding information for regional health authorities is published in birth statistics series FM1—Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys—and that for district health authorities from 1986 onwards, with rates averaged over three-year periods, in the OPCS monitor, "Conceptions in England and Wales 1991: residents of regional and district health authority areas FM1 94/1", copies of which are in the Library.

Conception at ages under 16 England

Year	*Number*
1984	9,096
1985	8,829
1986	8,684
1987	8,590
1988	8,246
1989	7,922
1990	8,111
1991	7,362
1992[1]	7,475

[1] Provisional.

Note:

1. Rates in the table use the mid-year population estimates revised following the rebasing of mid-1991 estimates using the 1991 Census of Population.

Rates per 1,000 women aged 13–15 England

Year	*Total conceptions*	*Conceptions leading to maternities*	*abortions*
1984	8.7	3.8	4.9
1985	8.6	3.8	4.9
1986	8.8	4.0	4.8
1987	9.3	4.2	5.1
1988	9.4	4.3	5.0
1989	9.4	4.5	4.9
1990	10.0	4.9	5.1
1991	9.3	4.5	4.8
1992[1]	9.2	[2]—	[2]—

[1] Provisional.

[2] Data not yet available.

Note:

1. Rates in the table use the mid-year population estimates revised following the rebasing of mid-1991 estimates using the 1991 Census of Population.

Royal Liverpool Hospital

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the length of time currently taken to treat a patient arriving at the Royal Liverpool hospital seeking treatment in the accident and emergency department between their arrival and the time of treatment.

Mr. Sackville: District health authorities are responsible for setting and monitoring performance standards for accident and emergency services locally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Liverpool health authority, Mr. Donald Tod, for this information in respect of the Royal Liverpool hospital.

Paramedics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will fund the training of the paramedics required to meet her 1995 target.

Mr. Sackville: The funding arrangements for paramedic training are matters for individual ambulance services.

NHS Audits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who appoints external auditors for *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* NHS trusts.

Mr. Sackville: The Audit Commission.

Accident and Emergency Closures

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the closure of London accident and emergency facilities on emergency ambulance response times.

Mr. Sackville: We understand that, at the request of health authorities and others, the London ambulance service has looked at patient flows resulting from changing patterns of accident and emergency provision in London. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Martin Gorham, chief executive of the LAS.

Anaphylaxis

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the availability within the NHS of user-friendly adrenaline injection kits for the treatment of anaphylaxis.

Mr. Sackville: There are at least three presentations of self-injectable adrenaline preparations available, but only one of which is licensed for use under the Medicines Act 1968. Doctors can prescribe any product which they feel necessary for the treatment of their patients at national health service expense, providing it is not included in schedule 10 to the NHS (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992. However, doctors must take full responsibility for the patient's welfare when prescribing an unlicensed product. Arrangements are in place to enable these to be obtained.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the adequacy of guidelines for the treatment of anaphylaxis in accident and emergency departments of NHS hospitals in England and Wales.

Mr. Sackville: We are not aware of any clinical guidelines on the treatment of anaphylaxis in accident and emergency departments. The development of such guidelines and their upkeep would be a matter for the medical profession. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the adequacy of equipment and training for the treatment of anaphylaxis for ambulance services in England and Wales.

Mr. Sackville: All national health service paramedics in England and Wales are trained in the emergency treatment of anaphylaxis, and I am informed that the equipment needed for such treatment is standard on all front-line ambulances.

Staff Loans

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a list of *(a)* trusts and *(b)* health authorities that have made loans to staff members in the latest year for which figures are available, indicating the sums involved.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Smoking

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what attempts were made, and what controls were in place to safeguard and judge the effectiveness of the 1994 no smoking campaign;

(2) what proposals she has to improve the *(a)* targeting and *(b)* monitoring of future Government no smoking campaigns; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: All health education campaigns on smoking are aimed at particular groups in line with "The Health of the Nation" targets on smoking and are evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in changing knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

Mr. Alex Carlile : To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the sum spent last year on the no smoking campaign was disbursed.

Mr. Sackville: Resources for health education campaigns on smoking in 1993–94 and 1994–95 were allocated to programmes aimed at particular target groups as follows:

	1993–94 £000	*1994–95 £000*
Teenage smoking campaign	1,199	1,260
Smoking in pregnancy	446	480
Adult and parental smoking	6,611	7,552

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current estimated cost to the national health service of treating smoking-related diseases.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 13 January, column *257*.

Mental Illness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of people registered as mentally ill in the community is assigned a key worker.

Mr. Bowis: Mentally ill people in the community are not required to register with health or social services authorities or with any other agency. All patients subject to the care programme approach should have an identified key worker, but we do not require information on numbers of such patients to be submitted to the Department.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* guidelines or *(b)* rules her Department sets to ensure that people released from long-stay mental hospitals are given (i) social security advice, (ii) housing advice and (iii) financial advice.

Mr. Bowis: The "Mental Illness Key Area Handbook" advises health and local authorities that under the care programme approach, a systematic assessment of the health and social care needs of the patient should be undertaken prior to discharge. The assessment will include the person's housing and financial needs.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many long-stay mental hospitals in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham, and *(c)* Manchester are open; and how many have set closure plans.

Mr. Bowis: Information on all long-stay mental illness hospitals is not routinely collected. Details on the remaining large mental illness hospitals—with over 100 beds—including closure plans if any, were published in the mental health task force report, "Survey of English Mental Illness Hospitals, March 1993", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham, and *(c)* Manchester are registered with health authorities as mentally ill in the community.

Mr. Bowis: Mentally ill people living in the community are not required to register with health authorities. National health service agencies will generally only hold details of those people in contact with specialist services and we do not require this information to be submitted to the Department.

NHS Beds

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new acute psychiatric beds in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham, and *(c)* Manchester are due to become available in 1995.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *29*, if she will provide a breakdown by region of the number of general practitioner fundholders who have overrun their budgets; and by what amount in each year since their inception.

Mr. Malone: Regional health authorities are responsible for the fundholding scheme in their areas. Information from regions is provided in the table. Final audited information for 1993–94 is not yet available.

Region	1991–92 Number of GP fundholders who overspent their budget	1991–92 Total overspend (£ million)	1992–93 Number of GP fundholders who overspent their budget	1992–93 Total overspend (£ million)
Northern	8	0.4	10	0.5
Yorkshire	5	0.3	20	2.4
Trent	6	0.3	19	1.1
East Anglia	1	0.0	3	0.1
North West Thames	1	0.1	8	0.5
North East Thames	0	0.0	7	0.4
South East Thames	0	0.0	12	0.6
South West Thames	4	0.4	22	1.7
Wessex	3	0.2	5	0.3
Oxford	5	0.2	6	0.3
South Western	7	0.4	9	0.4
West Midlands	0	0.1	6	0.3
Mersey	1	0.0	3	0.0
North Western	5	0.2	17	1.0

Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest £100,000.

Early Retirement

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts and health authorities have given early retirement to chief executives or senior and general managers in each of the last three years, indicating the number and value of awards made.

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Charging Policy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her policy with regard to local authorities charging for services provided under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Bowis: We are advised that local authorities do not have legal powers to charge for services provided under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account has been taken of local authorities' inability to charge for services provided under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in the special transitional allocation.

Mr. Bowis: None.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the assumption that 9 per cent. of expenditure on domiciliary care is recovered from charges excludes domiciliary and day care services provided under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Bowis: Section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 has no bearing on the level of an individual authority's personal social services standard spending assessment. In the calculation of PSS SSAs for day and domiciliary services for people aged 65 and over and for services to people aged 18 to 64, no explicit account is taken of actual income from charges. The formulae for both elements implicitly assume that all local authorities recover costs at the same rate.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of operations for breast cancer in 1993–94 were performed in hospitals where *(a)* more than 150 such operations took place, *(b)* between 100 and 150 took place, *(c)* between 50 and 100 took place and *(d)* fewer than 50 took place.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent on breast cancer research in each year since 1990–91 broken down by *(a)* Government contribution and *(b)* the contribution of charities.

Mr. Sackville: Government expenditure on breast cancer research since 1990–91 is shown in table.

	£ million
1990–91	3.22
1991–92	2.12
1992–93	3.80
1993–94	3.72

Cancer charities' expenditure on breast cancer research is not available centrally.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by her Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Sackville: Information for the years 1979–80 to 1984–85 is not available. Annual spend for the financial years 1985–86 to 1992–93 at 1993–94 prices is shown in the table:

Year	£ million
1985–86	4.732
1986–87	11.786
1987–88	9.119
1988–89	4.014
1989–90	8.956
1990–91	5.464

Year	£ million
1991–92	8.656
1992–93	5.637
1993–94	6.076
1994–95 (estimated)	4.090

Figures for 1985–86 to 1990–91 are for advertising publicity only. Figures for 1991–92 include the costs of Departmental and Agency recruitment advertising.

Consultants

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* clinical oncology consultants and *(b)* medical oncology consultants there are currently in England and Wales; and how many of each are funded by charities.

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table. Information on the funding of national health service consultant posts by charities is not available centrally.

Hospital medical consultants in selected specialties by number England and Wales as at 30 September 1993

Specialty	Number
Clinical oncology	237
Medical oncology	60

Local Authority Contracts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contracts have been awarded by local authority social services departments to the private sector in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

EDUCATION

Independent Schools (Surplus Butter)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many independent schools with charitable status benefit from the sale on favourable terms of surplus EC butter; and what is her estimate of the total value in 1994 of such sales at *(a)* the actual price charged and *(b)* the average retail price.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department does not collect this information.

Education Assets Board

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what was the date of appointment of each of the members of the Education Assets Board; and by whom each was appointed;

(2) what is the remuneration of the chairman, chief executive and members of the Education Assets Board.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is given in the table:

Education Assets Board

	First appointed	Reappointed
Chairman		
Mr. R. Suddards CBE, DL Salary: £31,400	January 1994	
Chief Executive		
Mr. S. Hoare (ex-officio board member) Salary: £49,100	July 1990	August 1992
Board Members		
Mr. B Arthur, CBE	July 1990	August 1992 February 1995
Mr. K. Bridge	July 1988	July 1990 August 1992
Ms K. Buckley	August 1992	
Mr. H. Couch TD	July 1988	July 1990 August 1992 February 1995
Mr. M. Edwards CBE, QC	July 1988	January 1991 August 1992
Miss A. Lees	July 1988	July 1990 August 1992
Mr. P. Lewis	August 1992	
Mrs. M. Ryding	November 1994	
Mr. A. Solomons	July 1988	July 1990 August 1992 February 1995

Members receive expenses and a fee of £155 for attending Board meetings.

The Chairman and Board Members are appointed by the Secretary of State.

The Chief Executive is appointed by the Board subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.

Independent Schools

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list those independent schools registered with her Department which have charitable status.

Mr. Robin Squire: There are currently 1,312 independent schools in England registered with this Department which have informed us that they have charitable status. I have placed a list of these schools in the Library.

School Performance Tables

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will make it her policy to include measures in school performance indices comparing numbers of pupils not achieving any GCSE grades from one year to the next;

(2) if she will list the criteria to be used in comparing school performance from one year to the next.

Mr. Forth: We shall be consulting soon on the arrangements for the 1995 school and college performance tables.

Mature Students Allowance

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate she has made of the savings which would arise from the abolition of the mature students' allowance.

Mr. Boswell: We estimate that savings will amount to £5 million, £20 million and £30 million in the 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 financial years respectively.

Grant-maintained Schools, Lancashire

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the grant-maintained schools in Lancashire, giving in each case their location and their parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is set out in the table:

Grant-maintained Schools	*Parliamentary Constituency*
Archbishop Temple School (Ex William Temple), St. Vincent's Road, Fulwood, Preston	Nigel Evans, Esq., MP, Ribble Valley
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School Glen Road, Waterfoot, Rossendale	Ms Janet Anderson, MP, Rossendale and Darwen
Baines School, Highcross Road, Poulton-le-Fylde	Keith Mans, Esq., MP, Wyre
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School, York Street, Clitheroe	Nigel Evans, Esq., MP, Ribble Valley
Lancaster Girls Grammar School, Regent Street, Lancaster	Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman, MP, Lancaster
Lancaster Royal Grammar School, East Road, Lancaster	Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman, MP, Lancaster
Leyland St. Mary's RC GM School, Royal Avenue, Leyland, Preston	Robert Atkins, Esq., MP, South Ribble
Newton Bluecoat C of E GM Primary School, School Lane, Newton Kirkham, Preston	Michael Jack, Esq., MP, Fylde
Salesbury CE Primary School, Lovely Hall Lane, Salesbury, Blackburn	Nigel Evans, Esq., MP, Ribble Valley
St. Peter's CE Grant-Maintained School, Eaves Lane, Chorley	Den Dover, Esq., MP, Chorley
St. Wilfrid's CE High School, Shakespeare Streat, Blackburn	Jack Straw, Esq., MP, Blackburn

Schools, Shropshire

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the aggregate financial balances held by schools in Shropshire at the latest available date, and for the corresponding date in 1994 and 1993.

Mr. Robin Squire: The figures are £4.574 million at 31 March 1994, the latest date for which the information is available: £5.339 million at 31 March 1993. These figures relate to primary and secondary schools which were covered at those dates by the local education authority's scheme for the local management of schools

Information relating to financial balances held by grant-maintained schools is held by the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to my right hon. Friend.

College Funding

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education to what extent the funding formula for colleges takes into account the extra needs of inner-city students.

Mr. Boswell: The Further Education Funding Council's funding methodology currently allows colleges to claim full reimbursement from the council for the provision of free tuition to unemployed people, people on low incomes, and those taking programmes of English for speakers of other languages, or adult basic education. In 1995–96, the funding methodology will also recognise the additional needs of students on low incomes who have child care responsibilities.

Bradford University (Bursaries)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column 727, if he will place a copy of the survey together with replies, undertaken in 1994 in the Library.

Mr. Boswell: The survey undertaken in 1994 covered the academic year 1992–93. A copy of the letter to institutions seeking information about students on the courses supported through the Department's postgraduate scheme and tables summarising the responses have been placed in the Library.

William Morris Academy

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she has asked the Further Education Funding Council to consider bringing forward proposals to incorporate the William Morris Academy into the further education sector.

Mr. Boswell: Yes.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Forth: The expenditure figures for advertising, including press, television and radio, by the Department for the financial years since 1979 are provided in the table:

Year	*Advertising £000*	*At 1993–94 prices £000*
1979–80	91.6	224.9
1980–81	8.9	18.5
1981–82	86.9	164.4
1982–83	6.0	10.6
1983–84	9.6	16.2
1984–85	18.5	29.7
1985–86	14.8	22.5
1986–87	532.0	786.8
1987–88	280.0	393.2
1988–89	515.0	677.8
1989–90	249.8	307.3
1990–91	2,604.0	2,965.9
1991–92	3,037.9	3,255.5

Year	Advertising £000	At 1993–94 prices £000
1992–93	1,086.4	1,119.6
1993–94	1,442.2	1,442.2
1994–95	[1]150.0	147.1

Note:
[1] Estimate.

The Department's agencies are responsible for their own expenditure on advertising. Such information is not held centrally.

Southwark College

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement about the funding of Southwark college.

Mr. Boswell: Southwark college was guaranteed core funding by the Further Education Funding Council of £10.266 million for 1994–95. The college's bid for an additional £0.650 million was allocated in full, giving a total recurrent funding allocation for 1994–95 for £10.916 million.

ENVIRONMENT

Aquifers, London

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state, or investigate, the extent to which water in the aquifers of the London geological syncline could be used in greater volumes, either in the public water supply or other purposes; what is the current cost of obtaining potable water from this source; and what capital and revenue costs would be incurred in using sufficient water for these uses so as to stabilise the height of the local water table.

Mr. Atkins: The National Rivers Authority has, at the request of the Department, improved the monitoring network of groundwater levels in the London area, and has worked closely with Thames Water Utilities Ltd. to investigate the potential of this resource to provide additional water for public supply. The TWUL is currently involved in several groundwater schemes in the London area including recharge and abstraction schemes in north London and south London and an exploratory scheme in central London.

In 1989, the Construction Industry Research and Information Association published a report "The Engineering Implications of rising groundwater levels in the deep aquifer beneath London", part-funded by the Department. Since that time, the TWUL has investigated 20 sites in central London. Of these, seven provided yields of sufficient quantity and quality to be of potential use for public supply. However, the development of this resource for public water supply is relatively expensive. I am informed that the TWUL is not likely to require it in the short or medium term because of the success of the north London recharge scheme, improved leakage control and the construction of the London ring main.

Capital and operational costs for public water supplies are a matter for the water undertakers, within the price limits determined by the Director General of Water Supplies.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds were awarded under objective 1 to Liverpool during the past 12 months: how many bids were entered for this money; how many were accepted; what is the total amount of money used from the allocation; what is the residue; and how the residue is to be used.

Sir Paul Beresford: The objective 1 programme covers the five boroughs of Merseyside, including Liverpool. The first round of applications seeking £243 million grant were submitted in August 1994. Many applications, for example for business support services or for training schemes, were not targeted at Liverpool alone and it is therefore not possible to say how much funding was bid for the borough. Approvals in principle for the first round of successful applications involving grant of £175 million were announced in November 1994. This includes £36 million of ESF for training projects, of which a significant amount will benefit Liverpool, and over £12 million of ERDF to projects based in Liverpool.

Over £550 million of European funding remains for the rest of the programme up to 1999. It will be used in accordance with the single programme document. A second round of applications is currently under consideration.

Imperial War Museum, Hartlepool

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to give Treasury authorisation for the commencement of building the new Imperial war museum in Hartlepool.

Sir Paul Beresford: A proposal to construct the Imperial war museum for the north in Hartlepool has been submitted by Teesside development corporation and is under consideration.

Social Housing

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures have been prepared by his Department to estimate the need for new social housing provision in England on a framework for the investment programme set out in the 1995–96 budget.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Banks) on 1 February, *Official Report*, columns *685-86*.

Boreholes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what compensation will be available under the Environment Bill to those affected by damage caused by underground water abstractions from boreholes.

Mr. Atkins: The Environment Bill currently contains no provisions on this subject, although relevant amendments have been proposed in another place. Compensation for damage caused by water abstractions from boreholes is governed mainly by the common law and the provisions of chapter II of part II of the Water Resources Act 1991.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of local authority highways department road building on sites of special scientific interest;

(2) what studies he has undertaken to monitor the impact of road building on sites of importance to wildlife, other than sites of special scientific interest.

Sir Paul Beresford: Comprehensive information about the effect of road building or widening programmes might have on wildlife sites is not held centrally and could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost. All relevant considerations are taken into account in the planning process before final decisions are made.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are taken to monitor water tables in sites of special scientific interest and other areas of environmental sensitivity, where developments of roads could result in drainage changes.

Sir Paul Beresford: If necessary, conditions may be attached to a planning permission if there is likely to be a significant effect on drainage that would affect the integrity of the SSSI.

Roads (Wildlife)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment has been made of the effect of road development on *(a)* otter and *(b)* badger populations; and what record of road mortality is kept for these species.

Sir Paul Beresford: An assessment of the overall impact on these species and other wildlife is undertaken at the planning stage of road development and mitigating measures, for example fencing and tunnels, installed where appropriate and practicable. There are no records kept of species killed on roads, but it is estimated that some 47,000 badgers die each year from road accidents. This rate of loss is not considered to affect the conservation status of the species.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies have been undertaken to identify the impact of road noise on *(a)* wildlife breeding success and *(b)* breeding distribution.

Sir Paul Beresford: None. However, I am advised by English Nature that during 1995-96 work is likely to be commissioned to review indirect effects such as noise and lighting.

Black Smoke Emissions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for black smoke emissions in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: Total national emissions of black smoke in 1992 were 457,000 tonnes.

Nitrous Oxide Emissions

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 200 highest records for nitrous oxide emissions in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins: The table below lists the UK 1993 NOx emissions from existing and new large combustion plants.

Emissions of NOx (in tonnes) from existing and new large combustion plant in the United Kingdom for 1993

Operator	*Plant*	*NOx (in tonnes)*
Plant > 300 MWth		
National Power	Aberthaw A and B	26,512
National Power	Agecroft	280
National Power	Blyth A and B	12,700
National Power	Didcot	28,303
National Power	Drax	70,200
National Power	Eggborough	23,546
National Power	Fawley	1,630
National Power	Ironbridge	19,990
National Power	Littlebrook	4,971
National Power	Padiham	1,728
National Power	Pembroke	2,948
National Power	Rugeley A and B	24,958
National Power	Skelton Grange	1,980
National Power	Staythorpe	5,515
National Power	Thorpe Marsh	16,635
National Power	Tilbury	18,385
National Power	Uskmouth	1,050
National Power	West Burton	29,916
National Power	West Thurrock	2,980
National Power	Willington A and B	5,714
PowerGen	Castle Donington	128
PowerGen	Cottram	40,859
PowerGen	Drakelow B	79
PowerGen	Drakelow C	11,849
PowerGen	Ferrybridge C	44,895
PowerGen	Fiddlers Ferry	13,853
PowerGen	Grain	1,485
PowerGen	High Marnham	6,817
PowerGen	Ince	8,222
PowerGen	Kingsnorth	13,542
PowerGen	Ratcliffe	43,464
PowerGen	Richborough	2,334
SP	Longannet	23,690
SP	Cockenzie	7,840
SHE	Peterhead	18,616
NIE	Belfast West	2,992
NIE	Ballylumford B	6,487
NIE	Coolkeeragh	371
NIE	Kilroot	8,310
BASF	Seal Sands	2,194
BP Chemicals	Baglan Bay	4,737
British Alcan	Lynemouth	11,555
British Steel	Llanwern	350
British Steel	Port Talbot	842
British Steel	Redcar	461
British Steel	Scunthorpe	373
Brunner Mond	Winnington	1,880
Ford Motor Co	Dagenham	291
Grovenhurst Energy	Sittingbourne	2,408
ICI	Runcorn	749
ICI	Wilton	7,270
Phillips	Seal Sands	220
UML	Bromborough	650
Total (53 plants)		589,754
Refineries		
BP Oil	Grangemouth	2,794
BP Oil	Llandarcy	838
Conoco	South Killingholme	2,085
ELF	Milford Haven	971

Emissions of NOx (in tonnes) from existing and new large combustion plant in the United Kingdom for 1993

Operator	Plant	NOx (in tonnes)
ESSO	Fawley	5,051
Gulf	Milford Haven	764
Lindsey	Killingholme	2,773
Mobil	Coryton	2,513
PIP	North Tees	299
Shell	Shell Stanlow	4,655
Shell	Shell Haven	1,728
Texaco	Pembroke	3,070
Total (12 plants)		27,541
Total all UK existing combustion plant		636,339
New Combustion Plant		
Albright and Wilson	Whitehaven	91
Slough Trading Estate	Slough	88
Glaxo	Stevenage	2
BP	Grangemouth	70
Total new plant		251
Total all UK existing combustion plant		636,339
Total new plant		251
Total		636,590

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list nitrogen oxide emission sources by tonne within the United Kingdom, for each year since 1980.

Mr. Atkins: The list below gives estimated emissions of nitrogen oxides, by source, for 1980–1992.

Estimated emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) by source category for 1980–1992

Thousand tonnes

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Power stations	880	839	799	787	711	775	807	826	800	769	777	718	694
Domestic	68	68	67	67	64	72	75	74	72	68	68	75	73
Commercial/public service	62	61	61	62	63	64	65	61	60	55	56	60	58
Refineries	43	38	37	36	36	34	35	33	33	35	35	37	37
Iron and steel	44	52	47	48	48	50	45	50	54	53	51	49	47
Other industrial combustion	211	191	186	177	164	169	171	165	168	158	156	158	152
Non-combustion processes	11	12	12	13	13	13	13	13	9	9	9	9	9
Extraction and distribution of fossil fuels	44	50	54	59	63	66	68	73	76	78	82	85	88
Road transport	839	846	867	907	974	1,015	1,080	1,205	1,311	1,418	1,434	450	1,398
Railways	41	39	35	37	35	37	37	35	35	32	30	31	32
Civil aircraft	10	9	10	10	11	11	11	12	13	14	14	14	14
Shipping	121	104	119	111	123	116	108	101	102	127	131	133	130
Waste treatment and disposal	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Agriculture	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4
Total	2,392	2,328	2,312	2,332	2,321	2,438	2,533	2,664	2,749	2,842	2,860	2,835	2,750

Source:
Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics No. 16 1994.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in descending order of population those former county boroughs for which a recommendation of unitary status has not yet been made.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The following former county borough areas have not been recommended for unitary status by the Local Government Commission for England:

	Population
Northampton	187,244
Warrington	185,005
Blackpool	153,614
Blackburn	139,528
Canterbury	132,391
Preston	132,166
Oxford	131,967
Norwich	128,050
Chester	120,845
Ipswich	114,806
Exeter	105,087
Gloucester	104,805
Carlisle	102,878
Great Yarmouth	88,799
Worcester	87,638
Eastbourne	86,794
Lincoln	85,502
Barrow in Furness	73,299
Burton on Trent[1]	60,000

Population figures above are mid-1993 resident populations.
[1] The former county borough of Burton on Trent is currently subsumed within the district of East Staffordshire which has a total population of 98,300.

The Local Government Commission has recommended unitary status, within a larger unitary authority, for the areas of the former county boroughs of Brighton, Grimsby and Bath.

New Forest Heritage Area

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State of the Environment what are the current boundaries of the New forest heritage area in which national park planning

policies apply; and what proposals there are to change these boundaries.

Mr. Atkins: The New forest heritage area includes all the surrounding countryside which both has strong visual and historic links with the forest and provides off-forest grazing land needed to sustain commoning. The boundary as currently delineated has no statutory designation but was adopted in 1985 by the New Forest district council and is reflected in local development plans.

The new planning regime will apply to the definition of the New forest heritage area as it emerges from the current process of preparing and adopting local plans.

Cleveland (Structural Change) Order 1994

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has issued to other Government Departments, regarding the meaning of article 12 of the Cleveland (Structural Change) Order; and if he will publish that guidance.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None.

Water Companies

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the value of the current five-year investment projections for each of the water companies; and what was the variation from the stated figure at the time the K factors were announced.

Mr. Atkins: Capital expenditure for individual water companies for the period 1995–2000 is shown in Ofwat's "Future Charges for Water and Sewerage Services" published in July 1994. The extent to which actual expenditure varies from these projections will be known only when returns of actual expenditure are available from individual water companies. This is monitored on an annual basis by the director general.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Sir Paul Beresford: Advertising expenditure by my Department over the last five years was:

1989–90: £24,635,221
1990–91: nil
1991–92: £ 733,481
1992–93: £ 6,205,659
1993–94: £ 4,477,643

Expenditure by departmental agencies was nil with the exception of Ordnance Survey, which spent £24,378 in financial year 1990–91 and £213,736 in financial year 1991–92.

Figures are expressed at 1994 prices using the retail price index and are exclusive of VAT.

Information relating to the advertising spend alone for the financial years before 1989–90 cannot be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Office of Water Services

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many staff are currently employed at present by the Office of Water Services; and what were the figures *(a)* 12 and *(b)* 24 months previously;

(2) on what terms Credit Lyonnais has been appointed as consultant adviser to the water industry regulator.

Mr. Atkins: These are matters for the Director General of Water Services.

Housing Bond Guarantee Schemes

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will approve and support the operation of housing bond guarantee schemes in 1995–96 and subsequently.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: If the hon. Member is referring to schemes under which local authorities provide rent deposits or equivalent indemnities to private sector landlords, the Government believe that they have a very useful role to play in helping people in housing need to secure accommodation. We are consulting the local authority associations about a general consent for local authorities to operate these schemes.

Water (Leaks)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the figure for leakage as a percentage of total treated water supply for each of the water companies for each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins: This information is to be found in Ofwat's "Report on the Cost of Water Delivered and Sewage Collected", for the years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94. Copies of the reports are available in the Library.

National Forest Company

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an announcement about the composition of the board of the National Forest Company.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I have invited the following people to serve on the board of the National Forest Company.

Chairman
Mr Rodney Swarbrick—(Lancashire farmer, former President of the Country Landowners Association, and currently a Countryside Commissioner)

Directors
Miss Bridget Bloom—(Journalist and Forestry Commissioner)
Mr. Duncan Jeffray—(Nature conservation expert and current Chairman of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation)
Mr. Derrick Penrose—(Former Chief Agent of the Chatsworth Estate)
Mr. Geoff Steeley—(Local authority and planning expert, and current Director of Planning, Hertfordshire County Council)
Mr. David Taylor—(Forestry consultant)
Mr. John Thompson—(Responsible for access and recreation for the Peak District National Park)
Mr. Rupert Wilkins—(Management consultant, local to the Forest area)
Miss Susan Bell—(Chief Executive of National Forest Company)

The National Forest Company will commence operations on 3 April this year.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take concerning the administrative expenses of the Energy Saving Trust.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State proposes to lay before Parliament an

order designating the Energy Saving Trust under section 153 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This will provide a statutory basis, subject to parliamentary approval of an appropriate estimate, for the Government to contribute to the running costs of the trust.

In the Government's view, the trust has a key role in future as an effective catalyst for change in a policy area which is important for progress on our economic, climate change and sustainable development objectives. The trust has had a difficult and uncertain year. It now needs to review its plans. It can do that only with a measure of certainty over funding. The trust must maintain its independence, but it is important that it is able to develop new and innovative ideas at a time of major change in the gas and electricity industries.

I envisage contributing to the trust's administrative and salary costs if the trust can put forward satisfactory and cost-effective proposals to develop new initiatives to promote energy efficiency in the rapidly changing energy markets. Once the trust has drawn up proposals, my officials will discuss the plans with the trust and its other members. This will provide a basis for deciding on an appropriate contribution from Government, taking into account other contributions.

United Nations Environment Programme

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to ensure the success of the next meetings of the Commission for Sustainable Development and the governing council of the United Nations environment programme.

Mr. Gummer: On 10 and 11 February, the United Kingdom Government hosted a meeting to discuss the future role of these two organisations. It was attended by Environment Ministers from 13 countries, the European Environment Commissioner, the chief executive officer of the Global Environment Facility and the heads of the two organisations. The Indian Minister of Environment and Forests, Mr. Kamal Nath, and I jointly chaired the meeting.

The meeting achieved a welcome degree of consensus about the respective roles of the two organisations which I believe will pave the way for productive meetings of both organisations over the next few months.

Mr. Nath and I produced a note of the chairmen's conclusions at the end of the meeting. I have placed a copy of this note in the Library.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who represented the United Kingdom Government at the recent United Nations conference on trade and development meeting in Prague to discuss carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer Friday 10 February 1995]:* The meeting took place on 12 to 14 January in Pruhonice near Prague and was attended by an official from my Department. The meeting was sponsored by the Czech Republic and its theme was "Economic Instruments for Sustainable Development". A new UNCTAD Paper entitled "Combining Global Warming: Possible Rules, Regulations and Administrative Arrangements for a Global Market in CO_2 Emission Entitlements" was introduced by one of its joint authors on the final morning. This paper is now being studied by my Department.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Africa

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions preventive diplomacy has been successfully undertaken by the Government in Africa.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has carried out diplomatic activity on many occasions in response to possible crises in Africa. It is seldom possible to assess the effectiveness of any particular action but recent examples where we have played a constructive role include Lesotho and Mozambique. One objective of the United Kingdom initiative on African peacekeeping is to strengthen institutional support for preventive diplomacy by African nations.

Somaliland

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he or international organisations have to stimulate peace and development in Somaliland.

Mr. Baldry: Peace and development in the north-west and throughout the country is dependent on the Somalis reaching agreement on national reconciliation. We are encouraging other countries in the region to assist and the United Nations is willing to continue political efforts if the Somalis wish. However, responsibility for the process lies with the Somalis themselves.

International agencies and NGOs continue to implement activities in the north-west where security permits, and we shall continue to support their work giving priority to those displaced by recent fighting.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he or international organisations have to increase the pressure on the rulers of Nigeria to return the country to civilian and democratic rule.

Mr. Baldry: Members of the European Union have agreed that the measures against the Nigerian military jointly imposed in 1993 should remain in force, in the absence of progress towards a return to civilian rule. Our policy towards Nigeria is under constant review.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he or international organisations are currently considering for an embargo on oil sales from Nigeria, and what is his policy on such an initiative.

Mr. Baldry: We are not aware of plans for any such initiative.

Indonesia

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he proposes to apply additional pressure on Indonesia to ratify the international covenant on civil and political rights.

Mr. Goodlad: We regularly encourage all countries to ratify the international covenant on civil and political rights and other United Nation human rights instruments. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs did so most recently at the UN Commission on Human Rights on 8 February.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations his Department has received from foreign Governments over future changes in size in the United Kingdom's nuclear arsenal.

Mr. David Davis: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not received specific representations from foreign Governments on this issue. However, many countries express their opinions on nuclear deterrence in a number of international fora.

Turkey

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Turkey during the last 12 months on the subject of the Kurds living within its boundaries.

Mr. David Davis: We have made representations at ministerial and official level to the Turkish Government many times during the last 12 months on the subject of their human rights performance overall and in particular the human rights abuses arising from the conflict in the south-east of the country between the Turkish military authorities and the Kurdish separatist movement: most recently when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—together with his French, German and Italian colleagues—met the Foreign Minister Karayaclin in London on 2 February.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage the Government of Turkey to take steps *(a)* to safeguard the Christian community in south-east Turkey and *(b)* to halt its destruction of Christian villages.

Mr. David Davis: The Turkish Government are well aware that we take a close interest in the Christian communities in Turkey in the context of our wider concerns about human rights there. We take every opportunity to make known these concerns, which are shared by our western partners. Most recently my right honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and his French, German and Italian colleagues raised human rights with the Turkish Foreign Minister when they met him in London on 2 February.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues concerning Turkey's Christian minority he raised with the Turkish parliamentary delegation during its recent visit.

Mr. David Davis: My honourable Friend the Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised the issue of Turkey's overall human rights performance when he gave lunch to the Turkish parliamentary delegation on 1 February.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage the Government of Turkey to end its discrimination against Turkey's Armenian community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: The Turkish Government are well aware that we take a close interest in the minority communities in Turkey in the context of our wider concerns about human rights there. We take every opportunity to make known these concerns, which are shared by our western partners.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on whether the Sudanese Government will allow a visit by Amnesty International; and what representations he has made.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Sudanese Government have refused to agree to a visit by Amnesty International. This disappointing decision follows the recent publication of a report by Amnesty International detailing human rights abuses in Sudan. We regularly raise our concerns about human rights abuses with the Sudanese authorities bilaterally as well as through the EU and UN. We shall continue to urge them to accept visits by international humanitarian organisations such as Amnesty.

Iran

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about Iran developing nuclear weapons and purchasing ballistic missiles; what information he has on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: The Government remain deeply concerned at reports that Iran is interested in developing nuclear weapons and in acquiring ballistic missiles. We discuss such reports regularly with our partners in the missile technology control regime and nuclear suppliers group. We remain firmly committed to strengthening international efforts to combat the proliferation of both nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy with regard to Iran's nuclear power programme.

Mr. David Davis: Iran is a state party to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency. All of Iran's nuclear facilities are under IAEA safeguards, and open to inspection. But we remain concerned at reports that Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons. Since March 1993, we have decided that, with two exceptions, licence applications for significant nuclear items destined for Iran should not be approved.

It is also our policy not to approve items for Iran where there is knowledge or reason to suspect that it would go to a military end-user or be used for military purposes.

Mr. Roy Ricks

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what employment, duties or services were carried out for his Department or its agencies by Mr. Roy Ricks and over which periods of time.

Mr. Goodlad: To my knowledge there has been none.

European Ombudsman

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the procedures involved in the appointment of the European ombudsman.

Mr. David Davis: The post of ombudsman is established by article 138 (e) of the treaty which states that the European Parliament shall appoint the ombudsman. The Council decision of 7 February 1994 approved the regulations and general conditions governing the performance of the ombudsman's duties. The procedure involved in the appointment is set out in rule 159 of the European Parliament's "Rules of Procedure". A copy of both the decision and the "Rules of Procedure" are in the House Library. The hon. Member should be aware, however, that the Rules Committee of the European Parliament is currently considering whether or not to amend this rule; the main change would be to allow the European Parliament's Petitions Committee to submit the names of up to five candidates to the EP plenary. The present rules allow for only one.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *86-87*, what have been the obstacles to increasing the number for human rights monitors in Rwanda; and if these obstacles have now been removed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UN human rights monitors in Rwanda have been funded by voluntary contributions. Although the British contribution of £250,000 and four vehicles was made quickly in response to the appeal by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the response of the international community as a whole has been disappointing. Some 80 UN monitors have now been deployed, but the High Commissioner continues to face funding difficulties.

The UN Centre for Human Rights, which is responsible for mounting the programme, has been hindered by lack of previous experience of managing such an operation.

The European Union is planning to deploy a team of human rights monitors shortly, to work with those from the UN.

Prisoners of War, Japan

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he has achieved with the establishment of a fund for prisoners of war held captive by the Japanese in world war two; and if he will list the donations so far received from Japanese companies trading within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Goodlad: We have concluded that in present circumstances the proposal for a non-governmental fund to help former prisoners of war and civilian internees is unlikely to succeed. We are therefore exploring with the Japanese Government other possible ways of addressing this issue.

Inhumane Weapons

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether measures have been proposed by Her Majesty's Government to help verify and enforce an updated UN inhumane weapons convention; and what is his assessment of their effectiveness.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UN inhumane weapons convention is to be reviewed in September this year. We have played a full and active part in preparations for the review conference and shall continue to work hard to secure a strengthened and more effective convention at the conference itself.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Goodlad: Total expenditure on promotional material and recruitment advertising in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Diplomatic Wing and Overseas Development Administration) since 1979 at 1993–94 prices was:

1979–80: 773,379
1980–81: 544,123
1981–82: 701,848
1982–83: 645,044
1983–84: 772,957
1984–85: 617,116
1985–86: 657,625
1986–87: 834,308
1987–88: 766,714
1988–89: 1,288,287
1989–90: 1,798,965
1990–91: 2,082,746
1991–92: 1,913,947
1992–93: 2,095,207
1993–94: 2,130,264

TRANSPORT

Drivers (Eyesight)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide figures for each of the last five years of the number of drivers *(a)* who have committed an offence by not complying with the eyesight requirements of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to report their disability to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, *(b)* who have reported themselves to the DVLA and who have been found to have visual defects rendering them unfit to hold a licence to drive and *(c)* who have been reported by the police as having visual defects rendering them unfit to hold a licence to drive.

Mr. Norris: The information is not available.

Interlogic Control Engineering

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will place in the Library a paper setting out the financial and commercial reasons underlying the proposal by British Rail's subsidiary, Interlogic Control Engineering, to close its York office; and what reasons he has received from Interlogic for adopting this proposal rather than closing one of its other offices or reducing the size of the work force at several locations;

(2) how much British Rail's subsidiary, Interlogic Control Engineering, estimates that it will cost *(a)* itself and *(b)* the Exchequer to make redundancy payments to the 169 staff at its York office.

Mr. Watts: The deployment of staff in Interlogic Control Engineering, the closure of the York office and associated redundancy payments are management matters for the British Railways Board. The cost of redundancy payments, which falls entirely to the British Railways Board, will depend upon individual circumstances. There are no direct costs to the Exchequer.

Rail Funding

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been applied for and how much granted under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974, over the last 12 months.

Mr. Watts: Two grant applications were approved at a total value of £2,911,720. Five other applications with an estimated total value of £7 million are still under consideration. No decisions have been taken on these applications.

Grant claims totalling £2,193,683 were paid in respect of four freight facilities grants awarded before February 1994.

Section 8 of the Railways Act 1974 has been replaced by section 139 of the Railways Act 1993.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been applied for and how much granted under section 137 of the Railways Act 1993.

Mr. Watts: The Department has received seven formal applications for track access grant. Five are under consideration, one has been withdrawn, and one has been rejected. Grant is payable only up to the level needed to tip the balance in favour of rail, and the precise amount of grant to be paid for each of these schemes is currently being considered.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Dr. Mawhinney: "Public Bodies 1994", copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House, lists bodies in existence at 1 April 1994 for which I am responsible. I also have responsibility for European Passenger Services Ltd. which was established as a Government-owned company on 9 May 1994.

BR has been restructured and its main constituent parts are being transferred to the private sector. The first passenger service franchise contracts are due to be awarded by the end of 1995. The maintenance depots of British Rail Maintenance Ltd. should be in private sector ownership very shortly. The three rolling stock leasing companies are set for trade sales during 1995. Trainload Freight has been restructured in preparation for sale later this year and good progress is being made with the transfer to the private sector of the remainder of the domestic freight businesses, Rail Express systems and BR's support systems.

Railtrack Group plc, the Government-owned company responsible for operating track and infrastructure, is to be privatised by stock market flotation within the lifetime of this Parliament.

EPS is due to be privatised during 1995–96 as part of the competition to construct and operate the channel tunnel rail link.

A public consultation was held in spring 1994 on the possible privatisation of National Air Traffic Services, currently part of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Link Road Offices

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost to date, and what is the annual cost, of the Link road offices in *(a)* Wanstead and *(b)* Leyton.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency.

I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen dated 13 February 1995:

Mr. Steven Norris has asked me to write in response to your recent Parliamentary Question about the cost of the Link Road Offices.

Our records do not disaggregate the costs of the Wanstead and Leyton offices. However, since we did not take over the Leyton premises until early 1993, very little, if any, costs for this accrued before the 1993/94 financial year. All the figures include staff costs, but since staff are not allocated specifically to one office it is not possible to split their costs between the two.

The total costs of both offices are:

Financial year	*Cost £*
1992–93	174,976
1993–94	260,673
1994–95 to date	172,153
Total	607,802

Our estimate of future running costs is about £200,000 annually.

Coventry Airport

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to prosecute those involved with the export of calves from Coventry airport on board Air Algerie aircraft during November and December 1994 for operating without the permits required under the Air Navigation Order 1989.

Mr. Norris: The question of prosecution for breaches of article 88 of the Air Navigation Order 1989 will be decided when the current inquiry has been completed and the findings assessed.

Emergency Stop Signals (Trains)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure that all British Rail trains can pick up an emergency stop signal from a control centre which does not have a blind spot; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The issue of train communication and radio black spots is being considered as part of the investigations of the accidents at Cowden, Kent and Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria.

Seat Belts

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to conclude his consultation on proposed seat belt legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: We intend to go out to formal consultation shortly. We shall then consider the responses carefully before final decisions are taken.

Security

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what factors led to his decision to delete 35 posts from his Department's security division; and what work will cease to be done as a result.

Dr. Mawhinney: The reduction in posts in the transport security division is part of my Department's general drive for increased efficiency. In Transec's case the efficiency gains will be achieved through a combination of delayering, more efficient working and the completion of projects.

Over half the posts identified are support or managerial. The remainder are inspectorial or investigatory.

This change will make no difference to the implementation of security measures which, along with the provision of equipment and staff, is the responsibility of operators.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Norris: The total expenditure on above the line advertising by the Department and its agencies for each year since 1984 in 1994 prices is:

	RPI (1987 base)	*Transport Spending (1994 prices)*	*DVLA Spending (1994 prices)*
1984–85	90.1	5,118,798	0
1985–86	95.4	5,375,542	0
1986–87	98.3	[1]12,947,094	0
1987–88	102.4	[1]12,610,640	0
1988–89	108.4	3,504,481	0
1989–90	116.6	4,391,466	0
1990–91	129.3	3,130,790	563,386
1991–92	134.6	5,027,472	380,392
1992–93	139.4	5,990,156	692,593
1993–94	141.9	4,338,400	725,790
1994–95	145.0	n/a	n/a

n/a = Not yet available

All figures provided by COI and exclude VAT. Figures prior to 1984 not readily available.

Statutory and road scheme advertising figures before 1992 are not included because they were not centrally collated at the time.

[1] Includes BA and BAA flotation advertising costs.

Networker

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact on J. R. Manufacturing (Cardiff) Ltd. and other subcontractors of the decision by British Rail not to exercise its option to purchase 40 new Networker electric

multiple units; and what estimate he has made of the number of jobs that will be lost as a result of this decision.

Mr. Watts: British Rail has asked ABB and GEC Asithom whether they wish to submit leasing proposals for further trains. Choice of subcontractors would be a commercial matter for the main supplier.

Disabled People (Sea-Fishing)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *201*, if he will now make it his policy to collate and publish statistics on the number of people disabled as a result of accidents at work in the sea-fishing industry.

Mr. Norris: It is not feasible for this Department to collect information on disabilities resulting from injuries sustained at work in the sea-fishing industry. However, major and serious injuries are required to be reported to the Department's marine accident investigation branch under the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1994. The information is collated by MAIB for inclusion in its annual report.

Road Building

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which sites of special scientific interest will be affected by future proposals for road building.

Mr. Watts: Information on the effect of trunk road proposals on sites of special scientific interest is held by the Highways Agency and I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member. Information about the effect of local authority road proposals on such sites is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 23 February 1995:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about those sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) that will be affected by future proposals for road building.

I enclose a list of the Trunk Road and Motorway schemes in England, for which preferred routes have been announced, that are likely to involve permanent or temporary landtake from a SSSI and a list of schemes that may have an impact on a SSSI but do not involve landtake. Schemes marked with an asterisk have been under construction in 1994/95. The remaining schemes are at varying stages of design.

You will, I hope, appreciate that the lists are therefore dynamic and will be subject to change as, and when, scheme designs are developed.

I hope this is helpful.

Schemes which may involve permanent or temporary landtake from SSSIs

Road scheme	*SSSI*
*A30 Indian Queens Bypass	Goss and Tregoss Moors
A31 Poole Harbour Crossing	Poole Harbour (Holes Bay)
A31 Poole Link Road	Slop Bog and Uddens Heath, Canford Heath
A35 Chideock—Morcombelake Bypass	Morcombelake, West Dorset Coast
A43 Geddington Bypass	River Ise and Meadows
A46 Upper Swainswick—Pennsylvania	Monkswood Valley
*M4/M49 Second Severn Crossing	Magor and Undy, Severn Estuary

Schemes which may involve permanent or temporary landtake from SSSIs

Road scheme	*SSSI*
M5 Widening J18–10	Severn Estuary
A456 Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley	Hurcott and Podmore Pools
Birmingham Northern Relief Road	Chasewater Heath
A1(M) Redhouse—Ferrybridge	Brockadale
A650 Bingley Northern Relief Road	Bingley South Bog
*A13 Thames Avenue—Wennington	Inner Thames Marshes
A120 Stansted to Braintree (S.272)	High Wood, Dunmow
*M6 J30–32 Widening	Red Scar and Tun Brook Woods
*M6 J20–21A Widening	Woolston Eyes
A249 Iwade—Queenborough Improvement	The Swale, Medway Estuary and Marshes
*A249 M2—Iwade Improvement	The Swale
A259 Bexhill and Hastings Western Bypass	Combe Haven, Pevensey Levels, Marline Valley Woods
A259 Dymchurch—M20 J11 Improvement	Lympne Escarpment (The Roughs)
A259 Pevensey—Bexhill Improvement	Pevensey Levels
A259 Rye Bypass	Walland Marsh, Camber Sands and Rye Saltings, Rye Harbour
A17 Leadenham—Sleaford Imp	High Dyke
A10 Setchey and West Winch Bypass	River Nar
A27 Lewes—Polegate Improvement	Southerham Grey Pit, Milton Gate Marsh
A2/A282 Dartford Crossing	Darenth Wood
A34 Newbury Bypass	Snelsmore Common
M2 J1–4 Widening	Shorne and Ashenbank Woods, Cobham Woods
*M3 Bar End—Compton	St. Catherine's Hill, Itchen Valley Water Meadows
A5 Dunstable Eastern Bypass	Blows Down

Schemes with possible indirect impact on SSSIs but do not involve landtake

Road schemes	*SSSI*
A45 Stonebridge GSJ	River Blythe
A31 Ashley Heath	Avon Valley, Hurn Common
A5 Dunstable Eastern Bypass	Houghton Regis Marl Lakes
A1(M) Ferrybridge—Hook Moor	Fairburn and Newton Ings
A303 Wylye—Stockton Wood	Stockton Wood and Down
A303 Ilminister—Marsh	Long Lye
A21 Kipping's Cross—Lamberhurst	Brookland Wood
A57/A628 Mottram Tintwistle Bypass	Dark Peak
Birmingham Northern Relief Road	River Blythe
A40 Witney Bypass—Cassington	Pixey and Yarnton Meads
A419 Latton Bypass	North Meadow, Cricklade, River Churn
A10 Wadesmill High Cross—Colliers End Bypass	Plashes Wood
A1(M) Hook Moor—Bramham	Hook Moor
A64 York—Malton Bypass	Mount Pleasant Query
A65 Hellifield and Long Preston Bypass	Long Preston Deeps, Pan Beck Fen
M6 Widening J11–16	Doxey and Tillington
Western Orbital Route	Hurcott Pools
A556(M) M6–M56 Imp	Rostherne Mere

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report,* column *53,* what assessment he has made of the time scale of the threat to the structural integrity of the Forth rail bridge.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 10 February 1995]:* Railtrack continues to carry out detailed assessments of the Forth bridge. The structure is being inspected more thoroughly than ever before so as to ensure that attention can be concentrated on the areas which are in the most deserving condition. New shotblasting methods are currently being concentrated on the lattice tie-members of the bridge. Although relatively small components, these are of great importance to the bridge's structural integrity. Railtrack assessments confirm that the present maintenance and painting programme is fully adequate to protect the structural integrity of the bridge.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the classes of vehicle currently exempt from vehicle excise duty for which vehicle excise duty will become payable from 1 July; and if he will give the amount of vehicle excise duty that will be payable in each class.

Mr. Norris *[pursuant to his reply, 27 January 1995, c. 383]:* The information requested is as follows:

Current exempt class	*Proposed class*	*Proposed duty*
Special vehicles		
Road roller	road rollers	£135 (under 3.5 tonnes) £150 (over 3.5 tonnes)
Road construction		
Street cleansing	PLG or HGV	£135—[1]£5,000
Street lighting		
Vehicles used for short journeys between private land	[2]as appropriate	£15—[1]£5,000
Special concessionary		
Electric	electric	
Gritter	gritter	£35
Snowplough	snowplough	

[1] No increase of more than £1,000 in first year of vehicle relicensing from 1 July 1995.
[2] Vehicles will license in appropriate new classes; the majority in special concessionary.

WALES

Out-of-town Shopping Centres

17. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to limit the growth of out-of-town shopping centres.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The need for attractive, vital and viable town centres, and their importance in the life of communities is emphasised in my right hon. Friend's published planning guidance, in the press release he issued last November and in his environmental agenda.

Local Government Staff

19. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local government staff are employed in Wales; what population they serve, and at what cost; what are the figures for *(a)* England an*(b)* Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Figures for local authority staffing are compiled by the Local Government Management Board. These show that in June 1994, there were 117,000 local government employees in Wales serving a population of almost 3 million and costing £2 billion. Comparable figures for England were 1,677,000 employees for a population of 48.5 million at a cost of £32.4 billion; and for Scotland, 255,000 employees for a population of over 5 million at a cost of £4.6 billion.

Rare Beef Breeds

20. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of Sate for Wales what measures he is taking to promote the export of rare Welsh beef breeds for human consumption and for breeding.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The development agencies provide financial support for Welsh Food Promotions Ltd. which has recently launched an initiative to promote Welsh beef, including Welsh Black beef.

Jobseekers Allowance Bill

21. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made on the future effects on Welsh jobs of the Jobseekers Allowance Bill.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The jobseeker's allowance will help unemployed people to obtain jobs.

Morriston Hospital, Swansea

22. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce his decision on the future of the cardiac unit at Morriston hospital, Swansea.

Mr. Richards: I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Training and Enterprise Councils

23. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales that representations he has received on the resources allocated to training and enterprise councils in Wales for the current financial year.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend and I have received no recent representations on this matter. I met TEC chairmen on 11 January to discuss, in broad terms, the 1995–96 training and enterprise public expenditure package. Allocations to TECs have not yet been made for 1995–96; the Department will begin negotiations with TECs shortly.

Unemployment (Coal Mining Areas)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to lessen unemployment levels in former coal mining areas in south Wales.

Mr. Richards: We are using the full range of the Welsh Office's responsibilities, in conjunction with public bodies, development agencies and the private sector, to

help to provide both job opportunities and skills training for the people of the former coal mining areas in south Wales. Most importantly, the Government are creating the framework for a healthy economy in which businesses create jobs.

Crewe-Holyhead Railway Line

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what priority he has given to the Crewe to Holyhead railway line as a link between member states of the European Union.

Mr. Richards: The Crewe to Holyhead line is included in the European Commission's proposals for trans-European transport networks.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to approve the necessary staff transfer order where there is a local agreement to the effect that all local government staff within a locally agreed area would transfer to a new authority following local government reorganisation.

Mr. Gwilyn Jones: That already is my policy.

I wrote to the Staff Commission for Wales on 20 January as follows:

"Once a group of authorities in a particular area has agreed which staff should be transferred to them, [the Secretary of State] would be prepared to give effect to the decision in the staff transfer order to be made under section 42 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994."

Flooding

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation his Department has undertaken of the role of the National Rivers Authority in relation to serious flooding in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office maintains close contact with the National Rivers Authority over its handling of flooding defence and I am pleased to report that there has been no serious flooding of developed areas in Wales so far this winter, despite the unusually wet weather.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to earmark or ring-fence a sum to each district and borough council in Wales to enable it to discharge its obligations effectively under its permissive drainage powers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office funds local authorities through the annual local government revenue and capital settlements. It is for individual authorities to decide how to apportion those moneys between and within their various functions in accordance with their statutory obligations and their own priorities. However, the Welsh Office does make grant aid available under the Land Drainage Act 1991 specifically to assist district councils to undertake capital works under their permissive drainage powers.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Redwood: Advertising expenditure, expressed in 1994 prices, for my Department and its executive agency, Cadw, since 1979 is as follows:

Year	*Welsh office £000*[1]	*Cadw £000*[1]
1979–1980	146	—
1980–1981	128	—
1981–1982	184	—
1982–1983	170	—
1983–1984	178	—
1984–1985	103	—
1985–1986	46	—
1986–1987	109	—
1987–1988	317	—
1988–1989	227	—
1989–1990	495	—
1990–1991	317	—
1991–1992	366	58
1992–1993	434	71
1993–1994	275	126

Note:

1. Cadw was set up as an executive agency in April 1991.[1] At 1993–1994 prices, using the retail prices index.

Arts in Wales

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to meet officials of the Arts Council in Wales to discuss funding for the arts in Wales.

Mr. Richards: I am meeting the chairman of the Arts Council of Wales on 27 March to discuss the council's plans for 1995–96.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EU Spending

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, if he will list *(a)* the spending on agriculture by the EU and *(b)* the national Government spending on agriculture by each member state (i) in the current year, (ii) in the previous year and (iii) five years ago.

Mr. Jack: Details of expenditure on agriculture by the EU, broken down by member state, are contained in annexe 2 of the annual financial reports on the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, guarantee section, copies of which have been deposited in the Library of the House. The latest report available relates to 1993. Provisional figures for 1994 are set out in the table.

Details of United Kingdom expenditure on agriculture are contained in table 9.1 of the annual publication "Agriculture in the United Kingdom", copies of which are also deposited in the Library of the House. Comparable information for other member states is not readily available. Summary information on national aids to agriculture in other member states is available in the Commission's periodic surveys of state aids in the European Community. The latest of these covers 1986 to 1990 and is available in the Library of the House. This information is not, however, fully representative of

national Government expenditure on agriculture—for example, it excludes aid for research but includes aid financed by parafiscal charges.

Expenditure on CAP support from the EC budget by member state

1994 (provisional)	*MECU*	*£ million*
Belgium	1,170	904
Denmark	1,277	986
Germany	5,174	3,997
Greece	2,626	2,029
Spain	4,255	3,287
France	8,019	6,195
Ireland	1,457	1,126
Italy	3,464	2,676
Luxembourg	12	9
Netherlands	1,916	1,480
Portugal	652	504
United Kingdom	2,797	2,161
Non-attributed direct payments	103	80
Total	32,924	25,433

Note:
1. The figures are rounded and do not add up to the totals shown.
Source:
Commission Working Document
Exchange rate: 1 ecu = £0.77249

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Jack: The bodies are listed in "Public Bodies 1994" which has recently been placed in the Library of the House. None of these has been identified as currently suitable for placing in the private sector.

Flooding

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has carried out into the effect of the removal of hedges and trees on the propensity of land to flood; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Research is being funded by MAFF into the hydrological effects of urban growth and the run-off response of river catchments, which are major factors influencing storm water run-off and therefore the propensity of land to flood. The removal of hedges and trees, taken on its own, is unlikely to have a significant effect on flood flows and this is therefore not seen as a priority area of research.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will include the option of negotiating to leave the common fisheries policy and developing a policy for fisheries management based on the premise that each member state can reclaim the sovereignty of its waters as part of his policy group review of the common fisheries policy;

(2) what are the terms of reference of his policy group reviewing the common fisheries policy; what evidence it will take from the industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The arrangements for the group to review the common fisheries policy are currently under consideration and an announcement will be made in due course.

Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why he has not yet provided the information about the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce requested from him by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton in his question about next step agencies on 20 January.

Mr. Waldegrave: The intervention board is an independent Government Department established under the European Communities Act 1972 responsible to all four Agriculture Ministers. Although it is an executive agency, it is not a next steps agency in my Department, and did not therefore come within the terms of the right. hon. Member's question. It has not, however, acquired its own buildings, its staff numbers have declined since it became an agency; it publishes no periodical journals; has no executive cars; its logo pre-dates agency status and was internally designed at no cost; it has no corporate clothing, although it provides protective clothing to specialist staff when their duties require it, and it has always had its own corporate stationery. This was redesigned in August 1993 at a cost of under £500.

Lead Contamination

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies he has undertaken to identify risks to human health resulting from lead contamination from petrol entering the human food chain; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: MAFF routinely monitors the dietary intakes of lead by the United Kingdom population. The average intake is very low and in 1991 had further decreased to about half that found in 1988. The results of specific studies on the effect of lead fall-out from the atmosphere on the food chain, which would include lead from petrol, were reported in 1989 in "Food Surveillance Paper" No. 27 published by HMSO.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what impact this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Waldergrave *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The following rules and regulations were revoked by my Department over the last 12 months. Many, however, were replaced by new, but wherever possible less burdensome, legislation. The Department is continuing to identify rules and regulations for withdrawal. Those for withdrawal in the next 12 months will be announced as and when consultations are completed. The manpower implications will be taken into account in the Department's central manpower plans which will be published in the Department's annual report in March:

The Milk Marketing Scheme 1933, SR and 1933/789 as amended.

Part 1 of the Agriculture Marketing Act 1958, in relation to milk.

The Common Agricultural Policy (Wine) Regulations 1993, SI 1993/517 as amended.

The Pig Carcase (Grading) Regulations 1988, SI 1988/180 as amended.

The Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) Regulations 1993, SI 1993/2631 as amended.

The Poultry Meat (Hygiene) Regulations 1976, SI 1976/221 as amended.

The Diary Produce Quotas Regulations 1993, SI 1993/923 as amended.

The Agricultural Holdings (Units of Production) Order 1993, SI 1993/2037.

The Sea Fishing (Enforcement of Community Quota Measures) Order 1993, SI 1993/387.

The Third Country Fishing (Enforcement) Order 1993, SI 1993/1197.

The Sea Fishing (Enforcement of Community Control Measures) Order 1993, SI 1993/2016.

The Sea Fishing (Enforcement of Community Conservation Measures) (Amendment) (No. 5) Order 1992, SI 1992/2936.

The Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Food) Regulations 1988, SI 1988/1378.

The Movement and Sale of Pigs Order 1975, SI 1975/203 as amended.

The Movement of Animals (Records) Order 1960, SI 1960/105 as amended, in relation to pigs and bovine animals.

The Markets, Sales and Lairs Order 1925, SR and O 1925/1349 as amended, in relation to pigs.

Articles 8 (1)(a) and (e) and 18 The Swine Fever Order 1963, SI 1963/286.

The Bovine Animals (Identification Marking and Breeding Records) Order 1990, SI 1990/1867 as amended.

Article 14 (3) to (6) and (8) (b) of The Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990, SI 1990/2628.

The Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992, SI 1992/3304.

The Export of Animals (Protection) Order 1981 SI 1981/1051, in relation to the export of animals to another member state.

The Poultry Pens, Fittings and Receptacles (Disinfection) Order 1952, SI 1952/437 as amended.

The Poultry Premises and Vehicles (Disinfection) Order 1956, SI 1965/11.

The Fowl Pest (Infected Areas Restrictions) Order 1956, SI 1956/1611 as amended.

The Live Poultry (Movement Records) Order 1958, SI 1958/1344.

The Fowl Pest Orders (Amendment) Order 1983, SI 1983/941.

The Infectious Diseases of Poultry Order 1986, SI 1986/1755.

The Racing Pigeons (Vaccination) Order 1994, SI 1994/944.

The Medicines (Leaflets for Veterinary Drugs) Regulations 1993, (SI 1983/1727.

The Medicines (Veterinary Medicinal Products) (Applications for Product Licences) Regulations 1983, SI 1993/2398 as amended.

The Medicines (Labelling) Regulations 1976, except for regulations 9 and 13, SI 1976/1726 as amended in respect of veterinary drugs placed on the market in accordance with the Marketing Authorisations for Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994.

The Medicines (Veterinary Drugs) (Renewal Applications for Licences and Animal Test Certificates) Regulations 1993 SI 1993/1227.

The Medicines (Restriction on the Administration of Veterinary Medicinal Products) Regulations 1983, SI 1983/1732.

Article 4 of the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974, SI 1974/2211 as amended, in respect of commercially traded cats and dogs from other member states.

The Medicines (Fees Relating to Medicinal Products for Animal Use) Regulations 1992, SI 1992/694.

The Welfare of Livestock (Intensive Units) Regulations 1978, SI 1978/1800 as amended.

The Welfare of Battery Hens Regulations 1987, SI 1987/2020.

The Welfare of Calves Regulations 1987, SI 1987/2021.

The Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1990, SI 1990/1445.

The Welfare of Pigs Regulations 1991, SI 1991/1477.

The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Compensation Order 1990, SI 1990/222.

The Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) (Fees) Regulations 1990, SI 1990/617 as amended.

The Plant Breeders' Rights (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1993, SI 1993/430.

The Marek's Disease (Restriction on Vaccination) Order 1987, SI 1987/905.

Partial revocation of The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (England) Order 1991, SI 1991/6.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support (Mortgages)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the Council of Mortgage Lenders regarding changes in income support for mortgage interest; what views he received from the council; what plans he has to review his decision; and what further plans he has to meet the Council of Mortgage Lenders for further discussions of his proposals.

Mr. Roger Evans: We have on-going discussions with the Council of Mortgage Lenders and will continue to do so throughout the consultation process. The council has expressed concern about the possible impact of the proposals. We are listening carefully to its concerns but believe that these proposals will result in the development of comprehensive quality insurance and will provide better protection for all home owners, not just those who currently get help from income support mortgage interest.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from charities for the homeless regarding his proposals for changes in income support for mortgage interest.

Mr. Roger Evans: We have received one representation from a charity for the homeless. We hope that all interested parties will take the opportunity to make representations to the Social Security Advisory Committee during its consultation on these proposals.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently on invalidity benefit in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* each Welsh county and *(d)* each Welsh constituency; in each case, what percentage of the population this represents; what were the figures in (i) 1979, (ii) 1983 and (iii) 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: No information is available in respect of the Welsh counties and constituencies.

Information for Great Britain, and Wales is in the table. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is responsible for Social Security statistics in Northern Ireland.

The number of Invalidity Benefit recipients in Great Britain and Wales at a particular time, and the percentage of the population they represent

	Number of recipients	*Percentage of population*
Great Britain:		
1979	610,000	1.7
1983	737,000	2.0
1987	968,000	2.6
1993	1,580,000	4.2
Wales:		
1979	69,000	3.8
1983	87,000	4.8
1987	122,000	6.6
1993	172,000	9.2

Notes:
1. The number of recipients figure is at June for 1979, and April for 1983, 1987 and 1993.
2. The Welsh 1979 figure may contain a small number of claimants not in receipt of benefit.
3. The estimated population figures used are mid-year, and are in respect of men aged 16 to 69 and women aged 16 to 64.

Sources:
1. Invalidity benefit information is based on a one per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Estimated mid-year population figures supplied by population estimates unit, OPCS.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women received *(a)* a full and *(b)* a partial retirement pension on the contribution record of their husbands in each of the last 30 years.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The available information is in the table.

Number of women receiving full (a) or partial Retirement Pension on their husbands contribution record payable in Great Britain

	Category B widows (b)		*Category B married women (a)*				*Total*	
			Category B (L)		*Category A/B(L)(e)*			
	full rate	*reduced rate*	*full rate*	*reduced rate*	*full rate*	*reduced rate*	*full rate*	*reduced rate*
31.12.64*(c)*	1,269,900	62,420	1,098,320	25,480	—	—	2,368,220	87,900
31.12.65*(c)*	1,281,280	64,180	1,139,800	27,360	—	—	2,421,080	91,540
31.12.66*(c)*	1,288,820	62,820	1,180,120	28,500	—	—	2,468,940	91,320
31.12.67*(c)*	1,301,100	60,560	1,226,620	31,660	—	—	2,527,720	92,220
31.12.68*(c)*	1,316,800	59,840	1,272,780	33,660	—	—	2,589,580	93,500
31.12.69*(d)*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
31.12.70*(d)*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
31.12.71*(c)*	1,378,350	55,370	1,398,890	53,900	—	—	2,777,240	109,270
30.11.72*(c)*	1,423,145	58,402	1,434,781	59,172	—	—	2,857,926	117,574
30.11.73	1,475,288	60,138	1,471,773	61,303	—	—	2,947,061	121,441
29.11.74	1,510,945	62,962	1,518,145	63,959	—	—	3,029,090	126,921
28.11.75	1,582,473	44,250	1,556,967	39,419	—	—	3,139,440	83,669
26.11.76	1,639,875	42,820	1,611,094	39,973	—	—	3,250,969	82,793
25.11.77	1,716,099	39,873	1,652,205	40,438	—	—	3,368,304	80,309
30.11.78	2,020,940	76,140	1,685,220	39,830	—	—	3,706,160	115,970
30.11.79	2,045,650	75,730	1,707,440	40,910	7,920	70	3,761,010	116,710
28.11.80	2,055,980	71,290	1,716,800	40,270	30,040	230	3,802,820	111,790
30.08.81	2,073,950	69,780	1,715,520	40,020	45,080	180	3,834,550	109,980
31.05.82	2,073,740	66,660	1,703,970	38,550	72,980	330	3,850,690	105,540
31.03.83	2,068,690	64,370	1,671,020	39,760	102,560	960	3,842,270	105,090
31.03.84	2,024,830	59,330	1,623,660	40,360	139,610	820	3,788,100	100,510

Number of women receiving full (a) or partial Retirement Pension on their husbands contribution record payable in Great Britain

	Category B widows (b)		Category B married women (a)				Total	
			Category B (L)		Category A/B(L)(e)			
	full rate	reduced rate	full rate	reduced rate	full rate	reduced rate	full rate	reduced rate
31.03.85	2,033,850	70,970	1,602,710	40,130	182,690	1,010	3,819,250	112,110
31.03.86	2,013,410	65,910	1,554,690	37,750	264,360	1,510	3,832,460	105,170
30.09.87	1,981,230	53,830	1,490,620	37,790	366,450	1,910	3,838,300	93,530
31.03.88	1,962,880	53,100	1,463,630	38,350	394,110	1,950	3,820,620	93,400
31.03.89	1,933,910	51,420	1,417,850	38,480	445,040	2,210	3,796,800	92,090
30.09.90	1,876,810	50,040	1,375,150	39,180	522,530	2,790	3,774,490	92,010
31.03.91	1,859,670	48,990	1,349,990	39,680	543,530	2,800	3,753,190	91,470
31.03.92	1,823,070	50,810	1,320,390	42,680	586,870	2,770	3,730,330	96,260
31.03.93	1,783,330	51,640	1,284,950	45,790	625,560	2,930	3,693,840	100,360
31.03.94	1,736,610	52,090	1,243,940	47,800	661,200	2,910	3,641,750	102,800

Notes:

(a) Full rate category BL and category A/B(L) pension is equal to approximately 60 per cent. of the full rate of category B pension.

(b) Excluding pensions paid at a reduced rate on the basis of age at widowhood and pensions based on a combination of the woman's own contributions and those of her late husband.

(c) Figures include a small number of pensions paid to persons overseas.

(d) Figures not available.

(e) Category A/B(L) retirement pension based on a combination of the woman's own contributions and those of her husband was introduced with effect from 6 April 1979.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claimed the retirement pension who have incomes from work in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is estimated that, on average, 630,000 people in the United Kingdom receiving state retirement pension also have income from earnings.

Source: 1992 family expenditure survey.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Security (1) what assessment he has made of the causes for 9 per cent. of people over retirement age failing to qualify for a national insurance retirement pension; if he will break down the main failures in a claimant's contributory record, signifying the significant changes over time; and if he will divide these data according to whether the non-pensioner claimants are men or women;

(2) how many pensioners drew a reduced retirement pension because of an inadequate insurance record for each of the last 30 years; if he will divide these data by gender; if he will give the totals as a percentage of all those drawing a retirement pension; and if he will list the main causes of the inadequate contributions records.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available in the form requested. The available information is in the table.

As stated at footnote 5 to my answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *202-204*, the "People without RP" at column 6 of tables 1A and 1B includes people receiving invalidity benefit and widows' benefit in place of retirement pension. The information for 1993 is that there are 314,000 men aged 65 or over and 630,000 women aged 60 or over who do not receive a retirement pension. Of these, around 229,000 men are in receipt of invalidity benefit or sickness benefit while around 101,000 women are receiving invalidity benefit, sickness benefit or widows benefit. In addition, married women aged over 60, with a husband aged less than 65, or who has not yet claimed retirement pension, would be entitled to a retirement pension only if they satisfied the contribution conditions in their own right.

The main causes of inadequate contribution records are:

non-liability due to:

earnings, if any, being below the threshold for payment of contributions

periods spent outside UK

full time education

exercise by a married women or a widow of the right to pay contributions at a reduced rate giving no pension entitlement

In the case of the self-employed, a small earnings exception from payment of contributions.

Source:

Retirement pension biannual inquiry

Sickness benefit/invalidity benefit one per cent. sample.

Population figures from OPCS.

Number of claimants receiving less than 100 per cent. standard rate contributory Retirement Pension in Great Britain in the last 30 years

		Men	
	All Category A men	Reduced rate	Per cent.
31.12.64(a)	2,048,160	63,420	3.10
31.12.65(a)	2,120,780	68,120	3.21
31.12.66(a)	2,191,560	71,900	3.28
31.12.67(a)	2,291,460	79,780	3.48
31.12.68(a)	2,373,320	84,780	3.57
31.12.69(e)	—	—	—
31.12.70(e)	—	—	—
31.12.71(a)	2,591,360	121,620	4.69
30.11.72(a)	2,653,509	126,277	4.76
30.11.73	2,719,684	136,217	5.01
29.11.74	2,784,488	147,528	5.30
28.11.75	2,796,047	98,129	3.51
26.11.76	2,883,681	102,198	3.54
25.11.77	2,932,847	103,394	3.53
30.11.78	2,993,060	103,660	3.46
30.11.79	3,049,140	105,850	3.47
28.11.80	3,084,590	105,800	3.43
30.06.81	3,099,920	105,530	3.40
31.05.82	3,107,940	103,650	3.34
31.03.83	3,096,620	107,670	3.48
31.03.84	3,078,490	107,480	3.49
31.03.85	3,107,140	118,520	3.81
31.03.86	3,160,600	122,310	3.87
30.09.87	3,219,820	123,300	3.83
31.03.88	3,215,530	124,590	3.87
31.03.89	3,224,120	128,450	3.98
30.09.90	3,263,520	136,220	4.17
31.03.91	3,260,930	139,080	4.27
31.03.92	3,280,200	148,730	4.53
31.03.93	3,293,560	161,030	4.89
31.03.94	3,302,300	172,310	5.22

Number of claimants receiving less than 100 per cent. standard rate contributory Retirement Pension in Great Britain in the last 30 years

				Women											
	All women	*All reduced Categories*	*Per cent.*	*All Category A women*	*Category A reduced*	*Per cent.*	*All Category A/B(L) (b)(c)*	*Category A/B(L) reduced*	*Per cent.*	*All Category B (a)*	*Category B reduced*	*Per cent.*	*All Category B(L) (b)*	*Category B(L) reduced*	*Per cent.*
31.12.64(d)	4,110,160	263,040	6.40	1,654,040	175,140	10.59	—	—	—	1,332,320	62,420	4.69	1,123,800	25,480	2.27
31.12.65(d)	4,236,340	275,380	6.50	1,723,720	183,840	10.67	—	—	—	1,345,460	64,180	4.77	1,167,160	27,360	2.34
31.12.66(d)	4,348,420	286,280	6.58	1,788,160	194,960	10.90	—	—	—	1,351,660	62,820	4.65	1,208,620	28,500	2.36
31.12.67(d)	4,477,720	301,420	6.73	1,857,780	209,200	11.26	—	—	—	1,361,660	60,560	4.45	1,258,280	31,660	2.52
31.12.68(d)	4,600,120	313,220	6.81	1,917,040	219,720	11.46	—	—	—	1,376,640	59,840	4.35	1,306,440	33,660	2.58
31.12.69(e)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
31.12.70(e)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
31.12.71(d)	4,807,490	373,480	7.61	2,020,980	264,210	13.07	—	—	—	1,433,720	55,370	3.86	1,452,790	53,900	3.71
30.11.72(d)	4,999,553	384,259	7.69	2,024,053	266,685	13.18	—	—	—	1,481,547	58,402	3.99	1,493,953	59,172	3.96
30.11.73	5,092,180	391,267	7.68	2,023,678	269,326	13.33	—	—	—	1,535,426	60,138	3.92	1,533,076	61,303	4.00
29.11.74	5,177,185	404,000	7.80	2,021,174	277,079	13.71	—	—	—	1,573,907	62,962	4.00	1,582,104	63,959	4.04
28.11.75	5,181,664	323,429	6.24	1,958,555	239,580	12.23	—	—	—	1,626,723	44,250	2.72	1,596,386	39,419	2.47
26.11.76	5,263,672	328,126	6.23	1,929,910	245,333	12.71	—	—	—	1,682,695	42,820	2.54	1,651,067	39,973	2.42
25.11.77	5,327,166	323,574	6.07	1,878,553	243,265	12.95	—	—	—	1,755,972	39,873	2.27	1,692,641	40,436	2.39
30.11.78	5,399,160	330,020	6.11	1,577,000	214,050	13.57	—	—	—	2,097,080	76,140	3.63	1,725,050	39,830	2.31
30.11.79	5,474,400	355,130	6.49	1,596,680	238,490	14.94	7,990	70	0.88	2,121,380	75,730	3.57	1,748,350	40,910	2.34
28.11.80	5,590,800	407,370	7.29	1,676,190	295,810	17.65	30,270	230	0.76	2,127,270	71,290	3.35	1,757,070	40,270	2.29
30.06.81	5,674,060	438,810	7.73	1,729,530	329,010	19.02	45,260	180	0.40	2,143,730	69,780	3.26	1,755,540	40,020	2.28
31.05.82	5,761,550	490,690	8.52	1,805,320	385,480	21.35	73,310	330	0.45	2,140,400	66,660	3.11	1,742,520	38,550	2.21
31.03.83	5,830,760	547,530	9.39	1,883,400	443,400	23.54	103,520	960	0.93	2,133,060	64,370	3.02	1,710,780	39,760	2.32
31.03.84	5,913,380	626,280	10.59	1,987,760	526,590	26.49	140,430	820	0.58	2,121,170	59,330	2.80	1,664,020	40,360	2.43
31.03.85	5,966,010	659,080	11.05	2,034,650	547,980	26.93	183,700	1,010	0.55	2,104,820	70,970	3.37	1,642,840	40,130	2.44
31.03.86	6,036,480	687,300	11.39	2,098,850	583,640	27.81	265,870	1,510	0.57	2,079,320	65,910	3.17	1,592,440	37,750	2.37
30.09.87	6,074,680	680,850	11.21	2,142,850	589,230	27.50	368,360	1,910	0.52	2,035,060	53,830	2.65	1,528,410	37,790	2.47
31.03.88	6,066,410	682,570	11.25	2,152,390	591,120	27.46	396,060	1,950	0.49	2,015,980	53,100	2.63	1,501,980	38,350	2.55
31.03.89	6,062,620	681,660	11.24	2,173,730	591,780	27.22	447,250	2,210	0.49	1,985,330	51,420	2.59	1,456,310	38,460	2.64
30.09.90	6,107,570	709,320	11.61	2,241,070	620,100	27.67	525,320	2,790	0.53	1,926,850	50,040	2.60	1,414,330	39,180	2.77
31.03.91	6,096,910	716,090	11.75	2,252,250	627,420	27.86	546,330	2,800	0.51	1,908,660	48,990	2.57	1,389,670	39,680	2.86
31.03.92	6,122,330	740,270	12.09	2,295,740	646,780	28.17	589,640	2,770	0.47	1,873,880	50,810	2.71	1,363,070	42,680	3.13
31.03.93	6,130,820	764,210	12.47	2,336,620	666,780	28.54	628,490	2,930	0.47	1,834,970	51,640	2.81	1,330,740	45,790	3.44
31.03.94	6,114,590	782,760	12.80	2,370,040	682,870	28.81	664,110	2,910	0.44	1,788,700	52,090	2.91	1,291,740	47,800	3.70

Notes:

(a) Paid to widows on the basis of the late husbands' contributions—excludes pensions paid at a reduced rate on the basis of age at widowhood.

(b) Full rate Category B(L) and A/B(L) paid to married women is equal to approximately 60 per cent. of the full Category B pension.

(c) Category A/B(L) is based on a combination of the woman's own contributions and those of her husband was introduced with effect from 6 April 1979.

(d) Figures include a small number of pensions paid to persons overseas.

(e) Figures not available.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent assessment he has made of the age profile of those pensioners eligible for, but not claiming, income support or housing benefit.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Reliable information on the age profile of pensioners eligible for, but not claiming, income support or housing benefit is not available.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown of the 1993 data showing the age profile of retirement pensioners drawing *(a)* income support, *(b)* income support and housing benefit and *(c)* housing benefit only.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The available information is in the table.

	Retirement Pension cases with Income Support[1]	*Retirement Pension cases with Income Support and Housing Benefit*[2]	*Housing Benefit and Retirement Pension*[3]
All cases	1,386	712	952
60–64	62	39	46
65–69	154	95	189
70–74	216	124	294
75–79	283	161	218
80 and over	671	293	206

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

[1] Includes all income support claimants in receipt of a state retirement pension, whether or not receiving housing benefit.

[2] Represents only those recipients in column 1 also in receipt of housing benefit.

[3] Includes all housing benefit claimants in receipt of a state retirement pension but not in receipt of income support.

Sources:

Income support annual statistical inquiry—May 1993, 5 per cent. sample; housing benefit management information system, 1 per cent. sample.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reduced earnings allowance claims are outstanding for the benefits offices of Phoenix house, Dunn house, Houghton-le-Spring and South Shields.

Mr. Hague: Information is not available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons the £2,500 threshold limit for the compensation recovery unit has not been adjusted to take account of inflation; and what plans he has to increase the threshold.

Mr. Roger Evans: Frequent adjustments to the limit could create a disproportionate administrative burden and raise costs. Consequently, we have no immediate plans to increase it.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of successful claims for statutory sick pay for each year since the scheme's inception; and if he will classify the data according to the rate of benefit paid.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. For the available information, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *203-10*. Further information is in the table.

Estimated proportion of GB labour force eligible for standard rate SSP compared with proportion eligible for higher rate SSP 1987–88 to 1993–94

	1987–88	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Average weekly earnings cut off lower rate: standard rate	£76.50	£79.50	£84	£125	£185	£190	£195
Proportion eligible for lower rate	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.3
Proportion eligible for higher rate	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.7

Notes:
1. Information is not available for years prior to 1987.
2. Proportions have been rounded.
3. Proportions apply to GB employees as a whole eligible for SSP on earnings grounds only, not to SSP recipients.
4. To apply the proportions to actual SSP recipients would require the assumption of a constant distribution of sickness across earnings bands.
5. Most SSP recipients receive occupational sick pay in addition to SSP when they are sick. In many cases this brings the total payment received up to full pay.

Source:
Government Actuary's Department estimates.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to continue collecting data on the number of claims for statutory sick pay.

Mr. Hague: We have recently received a report of a joint DSS—employers' working group, which has considered changes and improvements to the administration of the statutory sick pay scheme, including the amount of mandatory records which employers are required to keep for SSP purposes. We are currently considering the group's report, but no changes will be made without consultation with both sides of industry.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people annually gain national insurance credits; and what estimate he has made of the cost of these credits if taxpayers contributed the sums which such individuals would have paid into the national insurance scheme from their own employer's contributions if they were on *(a)* two thirds and *(b)* average earnings.

Mr. Arbuthnot: In 1992–93, the most recent year for which information is available, some 4.5 million people were awarded an average of 47 national insurance contribution credits. If these individuals were receiving earnings and paid employees' national insurance contributions at current rates, those on two thirds of average earnings would have paid £932.48 and those on average earnings would have paid £1,505.88 in contributions.

Notes:

(a) Calculations based on weekly male average earnings of £366—new earnings survey April 1994.

(b) Calculations assume that contributions were paid at the not contracted out rate of 2 per cent. + 10 per cent.

National Insurance

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many exemptions from class 2 national insurance contributions from self-employed people have been granted on grounds of low earnings in each of the last five years.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The administration of national insurance is a matter for Mr. George Bertram, the acting chief executive of the Contributions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from George Bertram to Mr. John Home Robertson, dated 13 February 1995:

As Acting Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for answering questions about operational matters relating to the National Insurance scheme. I have been asked to reply to your question asking how many exemptions from Class 2 National Insurance contributions from self-employed people have been granted on grounds of low earnings in each of the last five years.

Small Earnings Exceptions have been granted as follows:

1989–90: 93,300
1990–91: 80,400
1991–92: 82,900
1992–93: 99,800
1993–94: 73,100

A sample statistical interrogation of the National Insurance Recording System was used to extrapolate these figures.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Hague: The Department of Social Security did not exist independently prior to August 1988.

Advertising costs in 1994 prices on behalf of the Department and including its agencies for each of the following years is as follows:

Year	*£*
1989–90	8,532,000
1990–91	5,298,000
1991–92	6,333,000
1992–93	4,748,000
1993–94	4,824,000

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the unemployed have failed to qualify for the unemployment benefit due to them exhausting their right to 12 months' benefit in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of trends in the proportion of the unemployed who failed to qualify for national insurance unemployment benefit; if he will list the main reasons for the failure for claimants to have a full contributory record; what significant changes over time he has identified in the causes for failure to gain full contribution records; and if he will divide these data into information about men and women claimants.

Mr. Roger Evans: Statistics covering the reasons why men and women fail to qualify for unemployment benefit due to a lack of national insurance contributions are not kept. The main reasons for an insufficient contribution record in the relevant tax years include: non-payment of class 1 contributions due to long-term unemployment and/or sickness; self-employment; and periods spent outside the labour market.

Family Credit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *428*, if he will list by benefit office areas and by region how much family credit, expressed in both cash terms and as a percentage of total expenditure on family credit, has been given to families with *(a)* one child, *(b)* two children, *(c)* three children, *(d)* four children and *(e)* five or more children, breaking the information down into occupational groupings.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The precise information is not available. Information on a pro rata basis for each of the five years given in my answer of 27 January to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), *Official Report*, column *428*, has been placed in the Library. Information by benefit office and for larger families is not reliable at this level of disaggregation. The tables, therefore, show spending by region and combine spending on families with three or more children.

DEFENCE

Defence Sales

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contributions his Department made to the Export Credits Guarantee Department in respect of credit arrangements for defence sales in each year since 1981.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1986–87, the Ministry of Defence has made contributions to the Export Credits Guarantee Department to provide interest rate support for the Jordan defence package. These contributions, which have been reported in the Defence appropriation accounts each year, are as follows.

Year	*Expenditure £000*
1986–87	894
1987–88	972
1988–89	1,118
1989–90	993
1990–91	1,058
1991–92	1,356
1992–93	1,054
1993–94	852

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal powers he used to set up the International Military Services Ltd. export finance house; when the finance house was set up; and what external legal advice from which source he received before it was being set up.

Mr. Freeman: International Military Services Ltd. set up its export finance house, with MOD agreement, in 1985. This business initiative was judged to fall within the financial guidelines laid down for the company by the Ministry. No external legal advice on the scheme was considered necessary.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the total liabilities and assets of International Military Services Ltd. at the time it ceased trading activity; and what they are now.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the company's annual reports and accounts filed at Companies House.

Royal Marines

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has *(a)* to purchase and *(b)* to review the purchase of additional armoured vehicles for the Royal Marines; and at what date an order is likely to be placed.

Mr. Freeman: Options for procuring armoured vehicles for the Royal Marines in the United Kingdom landing force are currently under review.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *105*, who authorised the passes made over Her Majesty's prison, Stocken.

Mr. Soames: The passes made over the prison on 27 September 1994 were made at the request of Her Majesty's Prison Service, and were authorised by the Officer Commanding RAF Cottesmore.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of maintaining British armed forces on the Falkland Islands in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 6 February, *Official Report*, columns *37–39*.

Regimental Silver

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of purchasing and restoring regimental silver in each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames: Army regimental silver is maintained by the relevant regiment or corps using money from mess funds or other non-public funds. In the case of the Navy, it is referred to as "naval silver" and the cost of maintenance is borne by a registered charity through donations, and hire charges levied on ships and establishments for the loan of items. In common with the Army, Royal Air Force silver is purchased and restored using mess funds and other non-public funds. In the light of this, I can confirm that there is no cost to the public purse for the purchase or restoration of regimental silver, naval silver or silver belonging to the Royal Air Force.

Eurofighter 2000

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *744*, if he will list the production costs of the Eurofighter 2000 for each of the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: No production costs have been incurred.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *744*, whether his Department has agreed fixed price contracts for the Eurofighter 2000 project.

Mr. Freeman: The existing main development contracts for Eurofighter 2000 are not generally on a fixed price basis. As part of the reorientation of the project agreed by the Defence Ministers of the partner nations in December 1992, revised fixed price contracts are being negotiated with industry; these contracts are due to be placed shortly. It is the intention of the partner nations to agree with industry fixed or firm price contracts for the production investment and production phases of the project.

Expenditure (Germany)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of his Department's current defence expenditure arises from the United Kingdom's military presence and responsibilities in Germany.

Mr. Soames: The planned costs for 1994–95 of the two primary budgets in Germany, United Kingdom Support Command (Germany) and RAFSTC 2 Group Germany, are identified in table 1.3 of "UK Defence Statistics" 1994 edition as £1,233,800,000 and £262,100,000 respectively, representing 6.57 per cent. of the Defence budget.

Vehicle Blinde Modulaire Programme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much the British contribution to the Franco-German vehicule blinde modulaire programme is expected to be *(a)* as a percentage of the total projected programme cost and *(b)* in financial terms;

(2) what is his Department's policy towards the Franco-German vehicule blinde modulaire programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Government are considering whether the Franco-German vehicule blinde modulaire/ gepanzerte transport-kraftfahrzeuge programme offers the basis for trilateral collaboration in meeting our future requirement for armoured utility vehicles. No decisions have been made.

European Communications Satellite

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards the new generation European communications satellite; and how much the British contribution will be *(a)* as a percentage of the total projected programme cost and *(b)* in financial terms.

Mr. Freeman: Feasibility studies are currently under way to examine how the United Kingdom's military satellite communications requirement, after 2000, could be met. Various collaborative options are being examined as part of these studies. No decision on the way forward is expected to be made before 1996.

Phoenix Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the Phoenix UAV; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Phoenix project is currently under review.

French-British Co-operation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many procurement programmes are currently being developed through co-operation between his Department and the French Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the "Statement of Defence Estimates (SDE) 1994", table 8, which lists collaborative projects involving the United Kingdom.

Increases in the cost of developing and producing modern high technology equipment, coupled with budgetary constraints make armaments co-operation with other nations a vital component in meeting our future defence needs. We shall therefore pursue co-operation where this makes military and economic sense and we would expect France to be an important partner.

Farnborough Airfield

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *160*, what financial commitment his Department will make for Farnborough airfield after it becomes surplus to requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My Department will make available sufficient funds to meet its commitments at Farnborough airfield between now and the end of the century.

WE177 Bomb

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the WE177 bomb; and in what year they will be withdrawn from service.

Mr. Soames: We envisage that the WE177 will continue to contribute to our sub-strategic nuclear capability for a number of years.

Dockyard Consultants

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* those external consultants who have been hired to assist on the privatisation of the dockyards at Rosyth and Devonport, *(b)* the specific functions that they were asked to perform and *(c)* the latest total cost of the consultants.

Mr. Freeman: For the names and functions of the consultants advising on the proposed privatisation of Devonport dockyard and Rosyth dockyard, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on 5 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *110*. As to the costs involved, for the period between 18 October 1993 and 31 October 1994 I refer the hon. Member to the second answer I gave to the hon. Member for Devonport on 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *621;* payments made or outstanding for the period from 1 November 1994 to 31 January 1995 totalled £700,000.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally and could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 14 February 1995

ENVIRONMENT

World Wide Web

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make available on departmental pages established by his Department on the Government's world wide web server, "www.open.gov.uk" *(a)* the Audit Commission's reports entitled "Paying the Piper" and "Calling the Tune" and *(b)* other reports of the Audit Commission.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: No. Distribution of Audit Commission reports is a matter for the commission.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the *(a)* population, *(b)* number of employees, *(c)* number of employees per 1,000 population and *(d)* political party in control in each local authority; and if he will post the answer on his Department's pages on the Government's world wide web server, "www.open.gov.uk.".

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today placed the information requested in the Library of the House. No firm decision has yet been taken by the Department on the use of the Internet.

County Hall

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the current policy of the London residuary body towards the ownership and development of County hall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Under the Local Government Act 1985, the London residuary body has a duty to dispose of surplus property for the best price reasonably obtainable; pursuant to this duty the LRB exchanged contracts on 14 October 1994 with Frogmore Estates plc in association with Galliard Homes for the sale of the remainder of the County hall site, and the sale is due to be completed by 29 March 1995.

Construction Industry Board

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made in the establishment of a construction industry board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend, my noble Friend the Minister of State and I met with representatives of the construction industry and their clients on 7 February and agreed to set up a new construction industry board. The board will take forward the reform proposals in Sir Michael Latham's report "Constructing the Team". The board will be chaired by Sir Michael Latham and will include representatives from the construction industry and its clients.

Dog Fouling

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Luton, South (Sir G. Bright) of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *664*, when he proposes to give powers to local authorities to tackle dog fouling; how the designated areas will be determined; and when he expects to bring forward the necessary legislative proposals to effect these changes.

Mr. Atkins: The Dogs (Fouling of Land) Bill, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and received its Second Reading on 10 February, would give local authorities the necessary powers. The Bill proposes that local authorities may designate land which is open to the air and to which the public have access.

Ministerial Discussions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Norway, and what plans he has for discussions on the damage done to the environment by the lack of fully operated coal desulphurisation plant at power stations.

Mr. Atkins: The Secretary of State has had no recent bilateral discussions with his Norwegian counterpart on sulphur emissions from UK power stations. The UK is, however, on target to meet fully its commitments to reduce sulphur emissions under the EC large combustion plants directive. Both the United Kingdom and Norwegian Governments signed last year the UNECE protocol on further reductions in sulphur emissions.

Civil Servants

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the policy on allowing departmental civil servants to work for, or be seconded to, local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department strongly encourages interchange with local government. Since 1993, 12 DOE staff have been on secondment to local authorities, and 18 local government staff have had secondments to DOE.

Westminster City Council

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines have been issued to local authorities since the district auditor's interim report on Westminster city council's designated sales policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Files of general correspondence are normally destroyed after a five-year period, and we have been unable to locate the response to which the hon. Member refers.

Private Hostels

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what standards his Department requires of private hostels used by persons on social security benefits.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Private hostels will usually fall within the definition of a house in multiple occupation contained in part XI of the Housing Act 1985. Under these provisions, local authorities have extensive powers to ensure that houses in multiple occupation are fit for the number of occupants. The Department's circular 12/92 sets out guidance to local authorities on the standards of fitness they might wish to impose in such cases.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new initiatives he is taking to encourage the construction of affordable housing.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government continue to promote efficiency, value for money and use of private finance in the provision of affordable housing. In this way we aim to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from the public resources available.

Emissions

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what studies he has conducted into which substances are emitted when secondary liquid fuel is burned;

(2) what monitoring has taken place of the emissions from the Rugby Cement works at Barrington.

Mr. Atkins: Studies have been made on the emissions to air for particulate matter, oxides of nitrogen, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, hydrochloric acid, hydrofluoric acid, oxygen, total organic carbon, dioxins, and heavy metals. The dioxins and heavy metal content of solid waste discharges and the chlorine, heavy metals, sulphur and PCB content of secondary liquid fuels has also been studied.

Rugby cement works at Barrington has monitored all the above parameters.

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines his Department gives to local authorities with regard to the use of moneys in the housing revenue account.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The items of expenditure and income falling within the Housing Revenue Account are defined in schedule 4 to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment, also issues an annual determination setting out the sums to be debited and credited to the account under items 8 of parts I and II of schedule 4. The Department will shortly be issuing a circular providing further guidance on local authority expenditure and income which should be accounted for in the housing revenue account.

Local Government Finance, Shropshire

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the aggregate financial balances, excluding schools, held by Shropshire at the latest available date and for the corresponding date in 1994 and 1993.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer Monday 13 February 1994]:* The latest available estimates of the level of reserves, excluding schools is as follows. These estimates are subject to amendments as authorities finalise their accounts. Compatible data on the use of balances in 1994–95 which would be needed to derive an estimate of the level of reserves as a date later than 1 April 1994 are not yet available.

Estimated Level of Reserves: Shropshire[1]

Date	*£*
1st April 1993[2]	8,002,000
1st April 1994[3]	-557,000

Notes:

[1] These reserves include those which may not be available to the Council for general use.

[2] Source: Level of reserves (outturn) at 1st April 1993 (RS return for 1993–94).

[3] Source: Level of reserves (outturn) at 1st April 1993 +/- appropriations to/withdrawals from reserves during 1993–94 (RS return for 1993–94). The estimated levels of schools reserves at 1st April 1994 is £7,789,000.

Local Government, North Yorkshire

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the population of the proposed north riding of Yorkshire is from areas that, prior to local government reorganisation in 1974, were in the administrative areas of the *(a)* north riding, *(b)* west riding and *(c)* east riding of Yorkshire.

Mr. Robert B Jones *[holding answer Monday 13 February 1995]:* We no longer propose to create a county of the north riding of Yorkshire.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those who made representations to him requesting that the name of North Yorkshire county council should be changed.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer Monday 13 February 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has concluded that the county's name should not be changed.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies House (Sickness)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to institute an occupational health assessment of the sickness at Companies House.

Mr. Heseltine: As this is an operational matter for Companies House executive agency, I have asked David Durham, the chief executive, to respond directly to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 14 February 1995:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question about assessment of sickness at Companies House. The President has informed you that I have been asked to reply as Chief Executive of the Agency as this is an operational matter for Companies House.

Measurement of sickness absence poses a number of statistical problems, and comparisons between different kinds of organisation should be treated with caution, particularly if there are wide differences in, for example, the proportion of part time staff. The figures for the Department as a whole published in the recent Parliamentary Answer given to Mr. David Chidgey MP (Question 187) use a standard, civil service wide definition. We do not use this definition for management purposes at Companies House (CH) because we find it produces anomalous results when applied to part time staff.

CH employs an unusually large number of part time staff (333, or 29 per cent. of our workforce). We count absence for management control purposes in line with normal practice in the private sector. This takes account of the very different working patterns that may occur in production environments such as that predominating at CH. Under this definition, CH has had a sickness absence rate for 1994–95 which for 9 month period to the end of December stood at 4.8 per cent. We understand that this is comparable to that achieved by other similar organisations.

In the light of this, I do not believe that any special assessment of sickness absence is necessary.

Nuclear Levy

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to *(a)* end, *(b)* raise and *(c)* extend the nuclear levy.

Mr. Eggar: The future of the fossil fuel levy is being considered as part of the review of nuclear power currently being undertaken by the Government and I cannot pre-judge the outcome.

Opencast Mining Sites

Mr. Hood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will seek to amend the Coal Industry Act 1994 to give local planning authorities the power to protect the local communities from the liability of restoration of opencast mining sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have no proposals to amend the existing provisions of the Act in respect of the responsibilities of planning authorities.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his changes in the INsolvency Service affect the powers *(a)* to prosecute for fraud, *(b)* to disqualify directors and *(c)* to prosecute in situations of bankruptcy; and if he will make a statement on the rights of private contractors to initiate prosecution and disqualifications.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No decision to contract out the functions of official receivers has been taken. When considering that decision, Ministers will take into account such factors as value for money and enabling official receivers to concentrate resources on their investigative role. The latter would improve the Insolvency Service's ability to take disqualification proceedings against directors.

The power to prosecute in personal bankruptcies and in cases of fraud in company liquidations rests with the investigations division of the Department of Trade and Industry and this situation will not be affected by any decision to contract out official receivers' functions.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the present size of the Insolvency Service employment *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each region and nation; and if he will estimate the effects on such employment of his proposals to change the status of the service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Figures for the Insolvency Service staff in post as at 1 January 1995, in total and broken down by offices, are as follows.

Offices	*Permanent staff*	*'OGD loanees etc.*	*Casual staff*	*Total staff*
Midland Region				
Birmingham	71.5	5	11.5	88
Norwich	23	4	3	30
Ipswich	16.5	2	3	21.5
Nottingham	25	2	8	35
Leicester	21.5	1.5	2	25
Northampton	23	0.5	0.5	24
Cambridge	15	1	4	20
Stoke	18	1	3.5	22.5
Chester	19	1.5	3.5	24
Regional Total	232.5	18.5	39	290
South East Region				
Croydon	71.5	6	17.5	95
Brighton	37.5	1	13.5	52
Canterbury	17.5	3	4	24.5
Rochester	21.5	2	4	27.5
Reading	35.5	8	16	59.5
St. Albans	34.5	3	11.5	49
Southend	33.5	2	8	43.5
Regional Total	251.5	25	74.5	351
South West Region				
Bristol	28	3	11	42
Gloucester	20	1	5.5	26.5
Cardiff	26.5	3	3	32.5

Offices	Permanent staff	[1]OGD loanees etc.	Casual staff	Total staff
Plymouth	33	4	9	46
Exeter	21	3	10.5	34.5
Southampton	25.5	1	10.5	37
Bournemouth	19	2	10.5	31.5
Swansea	22	1	4	27
Regional Total	195	18	64	277
Northern Region				
Manchester	59	11	69	139
Hull	21.5	2	1	24.5
Leeds	37	5	4.5	46.5
Liverpool	23.5	2	1	26.5
Newcastle	25	2	7	34
Stockton	15	3	1	19
St. Annes	30	1	1.5	32.5
Sheffield	22	2	1	25
Regional Total	233	28	86	347
Or London				
London	147.5	14	34	195.5
PORLU	35	0	1	36
LSU	63	0	30	93
London Total	245.5	14	65	324.5
Headquarters	301	17	36	354
National Total	1,458.5	120.5	364.5	1,943.5

[1] OGD loanees includes short term appointees and staff on loan from other Government Departments and the private sector.

Consultations have been engaged by the service to consider the implications of any decisions to contract out but at this stage it is too early to say what impact such a decision would have on levels of staffing.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cases have been dealt with and how many staff employed by the Insolvency Service in each year since 1988; and if he will express these figures in index form with 1988 as the base.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The figures for the number of cases dealt with by the Insolvency Service each year since 1988, together with the number of staff employed in the same period, are as follows:

New Cases

Financial Year	Bankruptcy	Company	Total	Index
1988–1989	7,595	3,550	11,145	100
1989–1990	8,679	4,431	13,110	118
1990–1991	14,359	6,777	21,136	190
1991–1992	26,186	8,911	35,097	315
1992–1993	33,152	9,540	42,692	383
1993–1994	28,996	7,623	36,619	329
1994–1995[1]	24,400	6,100	30,500	274

[1] Based on actual figures for Quarters 1-3 and projected figure for Quarter 4.

Cases Completed

Financial Year	Bankruptcy	Company	Total	Index
1988–1989	7,928	4,871	12,799	100
1989–1990	8,048	3,875	11,923	93
1990–1991	10,881	4,900	15,781	123
1991–1992	15,516	5,900	21,416	167
1992–1993	16,169	4,957	21,126	165

Cases Completed

Financial Year	Bankruptcy	Company	Total	Index
1993–1994	26,243	7,746	33,989	266
1994–1995[1]	42,500	10,500	53,000	414

[1] Based on projected figures for year.

Average staff in post

Financial year	Permanent	Casual	Total	Index
1988–89	1,393	16	1,409	100
1989–90	1,386	20	1,406	100
1990–91	1,431	24	1,455	103
1991–92	1,499	85	1,584	112
1992–93	1,531	158	1,689	120
1993–94	1,537	281	1,818	129
1994–95[1]	1,491	399	1,890	134

[1] Based on average staff in post for 1 April 1994–31 December 1994.

Companies House

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the full cost of the consultancy work carried out by SRU Ltd. on *(a)* the privatisation of Companies House and *(b)* the contracting out of work carried out in Companies House.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The fee paid to SRU Ltd. in connection with the review of Companies House is £189,000.

Euratom Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the facilities operated by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority have had sanctions

imposed for infringement of article 83 of the Euratom treaty since 1988; if he will specify the infringements that occurred; and what has been done in each case to rectify the situation.

Mr. Eggar: Sanctions have been imposed on the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority under article 83 of the Euratom Treaty on only one occasion. That was at the least severe level—a "warning"—on 4 March 1992 concerning a facility at Dounreay. I refer the hon. Member to the European Communities Commission decision C(92) 476 final—OJ L88 of 3 April 1992—a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. To rectify the situation, modifications were made to the plant and to management procedures, and improvements were made to the accounting and records systems.

Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *335*, on the imports and exports of uranium, what factors led to the figures for certain years being classed as commercial in confidence.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy to the hon. Member for Newcastle Upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), on 7 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *142*.

Saddlery

Sir David Steel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the prospects of the saddlery trade; and what measures he proposes to promote this industry in rural areas.

Mr. Eggar: The Department has initiated discussions with representatives of the industry about its prospects and the issues which influence its competitiveness both in the United Kingdom and overseas.

If the right hon. Member has particular concerns in this context I would be pleased to consider them.

Auction Houses

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what restrictions apply in France to British auction houses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: In France, all auctioneering or individual sales of works of art must be undertaken by "commissaries priseurs", who are personally appointed by the state and restricted in number. As a result, British auction houses are not able to operate in France as corporate entities or to levy commission at rates comparable to those levied in the United Kingdom. The Government will continue to press the European Commission and the French authorities to secure the removal of this barrier to trade.

Lloyd's

Mr. John Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the extent to which the solvency rate for Lloyd's of London for each year since 1987 took account of statistics made available to his Department with particular reference to non-marine all other business.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Lloyd's statutory solvency requirements, which are aimed at ensuring that there are sufficient funds to pay policyholders' valid claims, do not include a solvency rate.

Lloyd's is subject to two solvency requirements, the first determined in accordance with section 84 of the Insurance Companies Act 1982, requires the members of Lloyd's taken together to maintain a margin of solvency as prescribed by the Act and relevant regulations. Since 1987, the margin of solvency—the extent to which the value of the declared assets of the members taken together exceeds the required minimum—has varied between 11.5 and 2.25 the required minimum, and for the year ended December 1993 was three times the required minimum. For this test, the required minimum is calculated—in conformity with domestic and European law applying to all insurers—by reference to premium received or claims notified. The "settlement statistics" made available to the Department about particular classes of business—of which the non-marine all other is one—do not have a direct impact on this margin of solvency.

The settlement statistics are however one of the elements used to determine the basis for calculating the liabilities considered in the second solvency requirement. In accordance with section 83 of the Act, the value of each underwriter's assets must meet his/her liabilities—the liabilities, for general business, within which the non-marine all other category falls being calculated on a basis approved by the Secretary of State. Where appropriate, an underwriter's assets may be supported by the central fund and other assets held centrally by the society. For these purposes a name's liability on each syndicate is his/her share of the syndicate's liabilities, which in turn is the greater of

(i) the product of the syndicate's premium income and a percentage approved by the Secretary of State, and

(ii) the reserves regarded as necessary by the underwriting agent, and confirmed by syndicates' auditors.

In deciding which percentages to approve, the Secretary of State has regard to all available relevant information, of which the settlement statistics are an important part. Since the percentages determine the minimum reserves applicable to all syndicates, and are not averages to be applied to the totality of business, and the settlement statistics are in respect of the aggregate of business in a particular audit class, the percentages are not directly dependent upon the settlement statistics. It would be inappropriate to impose a level of percentages based upon the average of all syndicates, as that would cause some to be materially over-reserved. It is accordingly expected that a number of syndicates' liabilities will be determined on the basis (ii) above. Thus the achievement of this solvency requirement—which has been met every year since 1987, and every year prior to that—is not directly dependent on the settlement statistics.

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the British companies which were given licences to attend the Eurohied and Intertech exhibitions held in Baghdad in November.

Mr. Needham: It has been the practice of successive administrations not to disclose such information unless the public interest outweighs the requirements of confidentiality.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *760*, on what occasions Ministers or officials in his Department have met any representatives of the Iraqi British interests group, and for what purposes, since sanctions began.

Mr. Needham: Although Ministers and officials may for a variety of reasons have met representatives of the companies involved in the Iraq British interests group, there have been no meetings with the Iraq British interests group's organisers since its formation.

TRANSPORT

Crash Tests

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the potential annual casualty reduction in respect of deaths and injuries which would arise from the implementation of the proposed European Union crash test legislation in relation to *(a)* frontal impacts (i) stage 1 angled barrier and (ii) stage 2 offset deformable barrier and *(b)* side impacts (iii) with ground clearance of 260 mm and (iv) with ground clearance of 300 mm.

Mr. Norris: Estimates made by the Department and the Transport Research Laboratory are as follows:

(i) There is insufficient research to make a precise estimate but the overall effect on the numbers of casualties is likely to be small.

(ii) Up to 65,000 deaths and serious injuries per annum in the European Union—for which some 10 per cent. in the UK.

(iii) This has not been estimated. Any reduction in the height of the lower edge of the barrier below 300 mm makes the test less effective at reducing casualties in side impact accidents.

(iv) Up to 25,000 deaths and serious injuries per annum in the European Union—of which some 10 per cent. in the UK.

Public Transport

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new initiatives he has to promote the use of public transport.

Mr. Norris: We announced on 15 December the allocation of £79 million in 1995–96 for 37 local authority transport packages covering bus priority measures and park and ride schemes. In 1995–96 the package approach to local transport investment becomes the norm, particularly in urban areas. In addition, I have reconstituted the bus working group with representatives from the Confederation of Passenger Transport, local authority associations and the National Federation of Bus Users, to see what further measures can be taken to improve bus services within the deregulated framework.

Road Construction

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment is made of the risk of sediment from soil disturbance entering water courses prior to commencing road construction.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 14 February 1995:

The Minister for Roads and Railways has passed to me your request on what assessments are made of the risk of sediment from soil disturbance entering watercourses, prior to commencing road construction. This is an operational matter for which the Highways Agency is responsible.

All schemed in the National Road Programme are subject to Environmental Assessment at key stages in their development. The Assessment permits consideration of the likely environmental effects and allows Statutory Bodies like the National Rivers Authority (who are responsible for maintaining and conserving water quality) to comment on our proposals.

There are a number of ways in which a road scheme may affect watercourses. The Environmental Assessment will record the existing quality of these watercourses and the areas which are vulnerable to change. The assessment and subsequent mitigation will be discussed with the National Rivers Authority throughout the development of a road scheme. Prior to any contract for road construction being awarded, the Highways Agency would include the National Rivers Authority specific requirements in the contract documents to safeguard any watercourses.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the tonnage of road stone which will be required in the next 10 years of projected road building.

Mr. Watts: I regret this information is not available because it depends on the statutory progress of individual schemes in the current programme and on the availability of funds to take them forward. Furthermore, as scheme design evolves so their detailed requirements are refined.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what priority is given to environmental impact studies within the decision-making process for the development of new roads.

Mr. Watts: Environmental assessment has formed part of the Department's procedures for road schemes for many years. Trunk road proposals are the Government's responsibility and we give full weight to environmental aspects alongside economic, engineering and safety considerations in the decision-making process. Assessment takes place throughout the development of a trunk road scheme and informs the decision-making process at all stages. The current requirements are laid down in volume 11 of the design manual for roads and bridges. The final stage of the assessment is in accordance with directive 85/337/EEC. A formal environmental statement is published, where the scheme is likely to have a significant environmental effect, with the draft orders. This statement, together with representations about it, must be formally considered by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport in reaching their decision on whether or not to go ahead with the scheme. Schemes promoted by local highway authorities require planning permission and are also, where they are likely to have a significant effect on the environment, subject to formal environmental assessment in accordance with the directive. The planning authority must have regard to all material considerations including, where required, the environmental information.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, if his inquiry into breaches of the Air Navigation Order of flights containing calves from Coventry airport in

November and December 1994 deals specifically with the airline involved.

Mr. Norris: The purpose of the current inquiry is to seek to determine whether there have been any breaches of the Air Navigation Order. The inquiry will consider all relevant matters including the actions of the airlines involved in the operation of the flights.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the road worthiness of lorries used to export animals through the port of Shoreham.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 13 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding the roadworthiness of lorries used to export animals through the port of Shoreham.

Lorries used for all forms of transport have an annual statutory roadworthiness examination and are also subject to roadside checks conducted by the Vehicle Inspectorate regardless of the nature of the transport operation.

In the financial year 1993/94 the Vehicle Inspectorate conducted a total of 672,780 annual checks on motor vehicles and trailers, and 120,335 roadworthiness spot check inspections (with a further 13,931 special checks on lorry lights and exhaust emissions). We do not have details on inspection of vehicles specifically used for the transportation of animals.

If you have any further queries about the Inspectorate's enforcement activities, please contact me at the above address.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what fee his Department paid for services relating to rail privatisation to *(a)* Hambros, *(b)* Price Waterhouse, *(c)* Ernst and Young, *(d)* KPMG, *(e)* SG Warburgs, *(f)* Samuel Montagu, *(g)* Shandwick, *(h)* Linklaters and Paines, *(i)* Freshfields and *(j)* Greshams.

Mr. Watts: Information about fees paid by the Department to individual contractors is commercially confidential. Total payments to date to these contractors amount to £17.1 million.

Hong Kong

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Dr. Mawhinney: None at present.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Parsonages

Mr. Redmond: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners (1) if he will list, for each year of the last 10 years, and by location new parsonages that the Church Commissioners have *(a)* had built and *(b)* bought, and the relative costs involved;

(2) for each of the last 10 years, and by location, the parsonages that the Commissioners have sold; and what revenue has been raised from the sale of each.

Mr. Alison: The initiative for the sale, purchase and construction of parsonages rests with the diocesan parsonages boards although each transaction requires the consent of the Church Commissioners. Over the 10 year period 1985-1994, 563 parsonages have been built, 550 purchased and 1,486 sold. The following table gives details including location by diocese and sums raised or expended.

Parsonages built 1985–1994

	1985		*1986*		*1987*		*1988*		*1989*	
Diocese	*No.*	*Average £*	*No.*	*Average £*	*No.*	*Average £*	*No.*	*Average £*	*No.*	*Average £*
Bath and Wells	1	98,970	—	—	—	—	1	139,000	1	154,211
Birmingham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blackburn	1	65,000	3	86,792	2	80,830	2	29,677	2	169,677
Bradford	2	90,577	3	86,192	—	—	2	119,092	1	153,141
Bristol	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	95,000
Canterbury	3	98,119	—	—	1	132,210	1	93,395	1	156,000
Carlisle	2	95,849	2	95,192	9	111,915	4	107,283	5	118,896
Chelmsford	3	97,670	1	94,311	1	135,000	1	135,000	3	163,373
Chester	3	82,576	1	95,000	1	123,080	3	100,525	4	177,068
Chichester	—	—	1	100,047	3	129,514	4	138,636	2	158,412
Coventry	1	70,735	—	—	3	89,990	—	—	1	115,000
Derby	3	99,233	3	94,702	1	108,000	1	109,292	—	—
Durham	3	89,189	2	83,796	6	99,789	1	102,564	6	116,971
Ely	3	78,039	2	84,005	1	87,301	1	108,640	—	—
Exeter	3	85,848	3	97,001	4	97,874	3	105,633	1	121,301
Gloucester	—	—	1	83,992	—	—	—	—	—	—
Guildford	2	107,357	3	108,636	1	108,762	—	—	2	136,796
Hereford	1	86,165	2	82,974	1	107,350	3	102,001	1	166,018
Leicester	—	—	1	81,744	3	93,055	1	89,622	3	109,675
Lichfield	3	75,182	5	89,419	2	107,129	3	103,146	2	101,845
Lincoln	3	84,179	4	84,619	4	78,728	2	80,738	1	114,245
Liverpool	3	78,000	1	92,016	3	86,503	2	119,701	5	135,690
London	2	116,504	3	117,672	1	172,989	3	143,521	2	159,444
Manchester	8	82,901	1	81,231	8	93,299	7	109,469	3	137,021
Newcastle	3	76,328	1	91,372	2	104,587	4	96,209	—	—
Norwich	6	83,243	1	84,705	3	102,488	—	—	1	119,000
Oxford	2	99,999	5	101,336	4	114,356	3	124,596	2	129,115
Peterborough	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	196,531
Portsmouth	—	—	1	135,211	—	—	2	140,099	1	153,640
Ripon	—	—	—	—	4	88,918	1	110,352	1	126,744
Rochester	2	95,624	1	100,294	—	—	2	141,580	5	164,351
St. Albans	—	—	1	101,115	1	120,000	2	114,906	1	153,424
St. Edmunds and Ipswich	—	—	1	98,011	—	—	1	163,950	2	121,085
Salisbury	1	61,460	—	—	2	125,058	1	111,977	1	179,870
Sheffield	3	79,482	2	74,663	2	87,000	—	—	2	114,800
Sodor and Man	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	120,750	—	—
Southwark	—	—	—	—	2	107,015	1	144,000	—	—
Southwall	1	67,656	—	—	3	84,182	3	91,588	1	112,283
Truro	1	78,230	1	85,214	2	85,408	2	95,845	—	—
Wakefield	5	74,165	5	82,115	6	91,984	4	90,329	7	106,107
Winchester	1	92,880	—	—	1	133,032	—	—	3	154,000
Worcester	—	—	—	—	1	119,673	—	—	—	—
York	1	86,445	1	98,060	—	—	3	106,122	2	93,000
Total	76	85,832	62	92,571	88	101,391	75	112,524	79	135,610

	1990		*1991*		*1992*		*1993*		*1994*		
Diocese	*No.*	*Average £*	*No.*	*Average £*	*No.*	*Average £*	*No.*	*Average £*	*No.*	*Average £*	*Total Number*
Bath and Wells	2	177,030	2	198,441	1	192,312	1	154,100	—	—	9
Birmingham	—	—	1	138,750	—	—	1	150,100	—	—	2
Blackburn	2	146,125	2	160,500	—	—	1	140,000	2	102,642	19
Bradford	1	140,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	192,477	10
Bristol	—	—	—	—	1	190,949	—	—	—	—	2

Diocese	1990 No.	1990 Average £	1991 No.	1991 Average £	1992 No.	1992 Average £	1993 No.	1993 Average £	1994 No.	1994 Average £	Total Number
Canterbury	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6
Carlisle	2	171,845	1	163,763	1	131,100	4	126,229	—	—	30
Chelmsford	1	151,102	1	141,588	1	174,122	—	—	2	142,993	14
Chester	7	161,761	1	302,489	—	—	—	—	—	—	20
Chichester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	130,000	11
Coventry	1	225,346	1	223,153	1	157,585	—	—	—	—	8
Derby	1	145,214	—	—	—	—	2	172,316	—	—	11
Durham	—	—	1	180,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	19
Ely	1	148,000	2	149,000	1	159,430	—	—	2	181,500	13
Exeter	3	147,539	—	—	—	—	1	168,182	—	—	18
Gloucester	1	132,000	2	158,704	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Guildford	—	—	1	165,353	1	183,000	1	303,367	2	188,453	13
Hereford	1	157,050	—	—	—	—	1	133,915	—	—	10
Leicester	1	127,000	—	—	2	145,000	—	—	—	—	11
Lichfield	1	185,300	1	149,419	—	—	—	—	1	190,000	18
Lincoln	1	103,501	5	136,509	3	160,988	2	144,880	2	148,952	27
Liverpool	—	—	—	—	1	91,335	—	—	—	—	15
London	1	249,054	—	—	—	—	1	150,000	—	—	13
Manchester	—	—	7	175,254	1	192,577	1	195,000	1	169,000	37
Newcastle	3	152,256	2	127,446	1	185,000	—	—	—	—	16
Norwich	2	163,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	140,000	14
Oxford	—	—	1	154,440	1	140,000	4	168,071	—	—	22
Peterborough	2	154,339	2	182,337	—	—	1	45,963	—	—	6
Portsmouth	1	140,930	2	163,938	—	—	2	134,736	1	232,000	10
Ripon	—	—	1	158,000	1	167,073	1	143,000	1	100,000	10
Rochester	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	144,748	—	—	11
St. Albans	2	152,696	2	191,188	1	190,000	—	—	2	215,320	12
St. Edmunds and Ipswich	1	145,209	1	202,815	3	210,028	—	—	1	175,000	10
Salisbury	1	163,560	2	189,126	3	134,970	—	—	—	—	11
Sheffield	4	102,785	—	—	4	116,250	—	—	2	123,250	19
Sodor and Man	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Southwark	—	—	2	219,200	—	—	2	222,372	1	178,000	8
Southwall	1	143,914	—	—	—	—	1	120,000	—	—	10
Truro	1	141,315	3	132,028	1	119,137	1	128,966	—	—	12
Wakefield	3	115,113	2	137,156	—	—	1	129,749	—	—	33
Winchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	197,000	1	151,306	7
Worcester	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	139,428	—	—	2
York	1	135,000	—	—	1	140,600	—	—	—	—	9
Total	49	150,036	48	167,492	30	156,239	32	155,291	24	161,000	563

Note:
It should be noted that the costs given are averages, so do not necessarily reflect the value of parsonages across each diocese.

Parsonages purchased 1985–1994

Diocese	1985 No.	1985 Average £	1986 No.	1986 Average £	1987 No.	1987 Average £	1988 No.	1988 Average £	1989 No.	1989 Average £
Bath and Wells	1	80,000	1	105,672	6	121,864	1	130,000	2	192,000
Birmingham	3	72,350	1	84,500	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blackburn	—	—	2	63,903	3	80,871	1	138,000	1	120,000
Bradford	—	—	1	83,274	1	112,500	—	—	1	125,000
Bristol	—	—	2	112,577	2	108,430	2	162,125	—	—
Canterbury	2	92,542	2	98,969	2	115,850	1	188,400	—	—
Carlisle	1	47,950	1	61,775	3	92,119	1	98,000	1	56,100
Chelmsford	4	97,007	2	130,000	4	142,094	5	193,250	5	210,000
Chester	3	89,077	3	125,995	1	123,250	—	—	—	—
Chichester	5	96,325	—	—	2	166,081	2	172,000	4	223,500
Coventry	—	—	—	—	1	76,000	—	—	1	194,000
Derby	1	72,377	—	—	3	72,600	—	—	—	—
Durham	—	—	—	—	1	134,264	1	100,000	—	—
Ely	—	—	—	—	4	84,956	1	132,000	1	202,000
Exeter	2	67,114	3	104,876	4	113,537	2	131,426	4	219,371
Gloucester	—	—	—	—	1	155,000	—	—	4	277,375
Guildford	3	162,701	2	141,344	1	195,055	2	340,500	3	309,394
Hereford	1	61,335	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	140,000
Leicester	1	93,000	1	89,267	—	—	1	160,000	3	166,152
Lichfield	1	42,000	2	69,772	—	—	—	—	1	227,172
Lincoln	2	60,490	1	76,000	3	67,983	2	109,750	9	117,136

Parsonages purchased 1985–1994

Diocese	1985 No.	1985 Average £	1986 No.	1986 Average £	1987 No.	1987 Average £	1988 No.	1988 Average £	1989 No.	1989 Average £
Liverpool	—	—	3	74,705	1	82,950	2	112,000	3	171,167
London	3	106,300	4	213,950	3	434,487	3	299,000	5	316,177
Manchester	—	—	3	77,300	4	83,975	6	91,219	9	130,142
Newcastle	1	80,775	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	168,000
Norwich	2	89,897	2	89,000	1	102,000	1	152,100	—	—
Oxford	2	129,025	2	131,131	2	136,225	3	220,665	4	213,000
Peterborough	1	93,130	2	113,465	—	—	2	132,750	3	162,233
Portsmouth	—	—	4	111,988	3	158,494	1	165,000	1	131,300
Ripon	—	—	—	—	1	94,000	—	—	—	—
Rochester	1	123,500	—	—	—	—	2	265,000	—	—
St. Albans	—	—	2	112,400	1	208,000	1	247,000	2	277,750
St. Edmunds and Ipswich	5	75,749	1	78,540	1	101,997	1	137,500	1	187,000
Salisbury	1	90,398	1	115,010	2	115,036	—	—	—	—
Sheffield	3	57,821	2	66,300	4	75,250	2	61,700	3	136,667
Sodor and Man	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southwark	4	137,352	2	126,550	3	146,438	2	229,300	1	295,000
Southwell	3	72,812	1	80,000	—	—	—	—	2	154,975
Truro	1	69,500	1	65,850	1	74,750	—	—	3	132,217
Wakefield	3	74,077	4	90,725	4	86,327	2	94,350	3	167,725
Winchester	2	109,850	1	164,500	1	155,000	—	—	—	—
Worcester	1	88,228	—	—	—	—	1	132,600	2	164,675
York	5	69,542	2	94,930	—	—	3	103,333	2	140,625
Total	68	89,573	61	106,892	74	123,396	54	162,684	87	186,203

Diocese	1990 No.	1990 Average £	1991 No.	1991 Average £	1992 No.	1992 Average £	1993 No.	1993 Average £	1994 No.	1994 Average £	Total Number
Bath and Wells	3	247,667	1	212,000	4	147,506	1	159,000	3	174,167	23
Birmingham	—	—	1	170,000	1	155,000	1	99,000	1	175,000	8
Blackburn	1	183,225	2	190,700	—	—	—	—	1	244,247	11
Bradford	1	139,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Bristol	—	—	2	168,625	1	200,000	—	—	—	—	9
Canterbury	2	213,750	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9
Carlisle	1	191,773	1	194,500	—	—	—	—	1	67,000	10
Chelmsford	1	133,300	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	172,644	22
Chester	—	—	—	—	1	74,950	1	240,000	1	108,000	10
Chichester	—	—	1	160,000	—	—	2	145,544	4	125,502	20
Coventry	2	157,500	—	—	2	166,750	—	—	—	—	6
Derby	2	112,765	—	—	—	—	1	134,000	—	—	7
Durham	2	61,250	2	122,750	3	128,826	—	—	2	128,374	11
Ely	1	127,500	—	—	1	205,000	1	87,500	2	184,250	11
Exeter	9	201,083	2	192,649	1	169,500	3	144,869	—	—	30
Gloucester	3	186,000	1	202,508	—	—	—	—	—	—	9
Guildford	1	123,000	—	—	—	—	1	272,459	—	—	13
Hereford	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	108,000	1	153,976	5
Leicester	1	152,500	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7
Lichfield	2	165,500	2	113,770	1	135,000	—	—	1	155,000	10
Lincoln	3	99,475	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20
Liverpool	1	115,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	192,641	12
London	2	364,719	1	276,343	—	—	2	285,446	—	—	23
Manchester	5	127,200	4	127,488	1	67,000	2	157,902	—	—	34
Newcastle	2	124,760	1	129,200	1	165,000	1	122,900	—	—	8
Norwich	—	—	1	119,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	7
Oxford	3	218,333	5	199,274	2	210,000	1	180,000	1	199,400	25
Peterborough	1	115,000	—	—	1	268,206	—	—	—	—	10
Portsmouth	1	267,500	1	150,000	1	175,000	1	195,000	—	—	13
Ripon	1	160,217	1	125,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Rochester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	145,612	4
St. Albans	1	160,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	228,000	8
St. Eds and Ips	—	—	8	169,657	2	126,500	1	160,749	2	145,000	22
Salisbury	2	202,250	—	—	1	220,200	—	—	1	128,000	8
Sheffield	3	134,667	2	81,000	1	101,000	—	—	2	104,000	22
Sodor and Man	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Southwark	—	—	2	309,000	—	—	2	230,974	—	—	16

Diocese	1990 No.	1990 Average £	1991 No.	1991 Average £	1992 No.	1992 Average £	1993 No.	1993 Average £	1994 No.	1994 Average £	Total Number
Southwell	1	168,500	—	—	—	—	1	101,000	1	146,000	9
Truro	1	178,450	—	—	—	—	3	118,167	3	107,983	13
Wakefield	—	—	1	112,642	—	—	—	—	3	91,917	20
Winchester	5	216,060	3	234,791	—	—	1	207,500	—	—	13
Worcester	2	174,653	2	195,866	1	217,680	—	—	1	112,938	10
York	1	180,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	126,500	15
Total	67	175,130	47	173,784	26	159,098	28	164,427	38	142,672	550

Note:
It should be noted that the costs given are averages, so do not necessarily reflect the value of parsonages across each diocese.

Parsonage Sale 1985-1994

Diocese	1985 No.	1985 Average £	1986 No.	1986 Average £	1987 No.	1987 Average £	1988 No.	1988 Average £	1989 No.	1989 Average £
Bath and Wells	6	86,916	1	132,000	5	126,650	6	176,754	—	—
Birmingham	2	44,875	2	100,000	2	58,500	—	—	1	180,000
Blackburn	6	64,333	6	57,492	6	85,033	2	78,750	4	45,738
Bradford	3	65,500	1	50,000	4	59,250	—	—	1	165,000
Bristol	2	83,059	4	89,625	3	109,167	3	114,585	1	250,710
Canterbury	9	62,444	8	96,904	2	152,000	2	136,300	2	173,750
Carlisle	10	61,350	6	47,917	6	65,500	8	80,525	7	154,479
Chelmsford	8	87,381	10	195,247	7	203,193	7	210,997	2	123,000
Chester	1	60,000	6	81,000	2	122,500	2	91,750	—	—
Chichester	8	130,164	5	101,900	3	230,167	5	193,600	3	206,333
Coventry	1	101,500	2	75,825	—	—	—	—	2	173,317
Derby	6	68,333	3	70,000	3	94,385	2	91,000	5	152,132
Durham	10	51,102	4	69,125	3	31,894	6	49,283	2	147,061
Ely	8	70,705	5	154,430	8	97,260	5	172,400	2	215,055
Exeter	9	67,722	7	87,000	11	121,318	13	169,154	6	208,367
Gloucester	4	101,935	—	—	2	199,626	—	—	4	158,250
Guildford	3	118,666	5	173,010	6	196,917	4	169,625	1	131,992
Hereford	1	43,500	4	75,775	2	96,250	2	175,500	2	200,500
Leicester	9	79,094	3	87,667	2	99,700	1	100,000	2	225,000
Lichfield	13	54,923	5	74,000	8	59,800	4	88,500	1	65,000
Lincoln	1	52,000	8	56,094	9	75,458	9	107,253	—	—
Liverpool	5	41,700	7	41,107	8	52,167	7	39,640	3	92,050
London	3	108,000	8	155,014	7	356,257	3	686,167	2	209,750
Manchester	5	53,700	2	32,000	4	50,663	6	53,250	13	109,258
Newcastle	5	57,770	5	59,210	5	47,800	2	86,125	3	110,091
Norwich	10	72,219	8	86,500	9	95,500	4	111,125	—	—
Oxford	11	128,923	15	153,090	10	164,272	6	225,167	7	227,429
Peterborough	4	107,659	4	105,675	2	140,250	3	137,653	1	170,000
Portsmouth	1	153,000	—	—	4	215,578	2	167,500	2	281,000
Ripon	4	88,625	1	39,000	2	80,000	1	113,500	—	—
Rochester	2	98,000	—	—	2	181,125	2	470,000	2	262,350
St. Albans	7	97,651	—	—	2	107,475	5	274,200	3	471,032
St. Edmunds and Ipswich	12	83,759	7	86,165	3	128,167	5	201,663	—	—
Salisbury	4	77,750	1	99,000	4	163,088	3	136,383	3	222,000
Sheffield	4	50,359	5	45,700	3	58,250	6	70,361	2	76,500
Sodor and Man	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southwark	6	138,076	6	187,854	4	152,190	3	330,000	—	—
Southwell	7	61,788	5	51,400	5	73,665	1	65,000	1	140,000
Truro	1	75,000	3	49,683	7	78,568	2	473,000	1	180,000
Wakefield	10	40,025	6	67,500	12	58,612	10	64,455	4	107,125
Winchester	8	140,285	2	185,000	—	—	3	170,410	1	331,011
Worcester	2	57,739	2	84,675	1	240,000	2	228,760	1	270,000
York	9	58,889	9	53,144	5	123,996	2	54,950	5	190,490
Total	240	78,624	191	97,329	193	115,950	159	153,382	102	175,061

Diocese	1990 No.	1990 Average £	1991 No.	1991 Average £	1992 No.	1992 Average £	1993 No.	1993 Average £	1994 No.	1994 Average £	Total Number
Bath and Wells	5	249,700	2	155,500	4	194,519	3	150,000	1	130,000	33
Birmingham	1	80,500	1	272,000	—	—	1	80,000	—	—	10
Blackburn	2	150,000	3	72,000	3	90,158	4	109,500	2	176,750	38
Bradford	1	282,600	1	162,000	1	67,500	2	94,000	2	87,500	16
Bristol	1	266,000	2	124,000	1	217,000	1	235,000	1	100,000	19
Canterbury	3	164,750	2	184,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	28
Carlisle	8	179,296	4	90,250	4	117,750	4	141,500	4	119,375	61
Chelmsford	5	142,500	5	190,000	5	155,400	6	143,140	3	99,983	58
Chester	4	148,750	5	190,250	3	122,333	4	84,750	6	139,917	33
Chichester	9	186,619	1	210,000	—	—	2	176,750	4	142,476	40
Coventry	3	196,667	—	—	1	250,000	3	124,333	2	143,500	14
Derby	1	185,000	—	—	1	185,000	1	129,000	3	187,000	25
Durham	1	64,000	4	79,150	3	118,000	3	77,000	2	110,000	38
Ely	1	135,950	2	252,500	1	120,000	9	133,513	1	298,000	42
Exeter	6	208,167	6	159,417	3	127,500	3	107,000	4	95,000	68
Gloucester	1	175,000	2	208,250	4	182,000	—	—	2	127,250	19
Guildford	3	230,750	4	302,500	1	130,000	2	197,250	1	330,000	30
Hereford	2	154,500	1	103,000	2	167,500	1	128,000	4	146,128	21
Leicester	3	189,333	4	133,850	1	122,500	1	262,000	—	—	26
Lichfield	5	131,107	1	75,500	3	138,833	3	97,833	1	55,000	44
Lincoln	7	119,114	8	110,363	5	123,300	9	130,183	12	100,083	68
Liverpool	5	102,000	5	76,600	—	—	—	—	4	191,125	44
London	4	334,000	2	310,000	2	370,000	—	—	—	—	31
Manchester	10	88,200	11	106,527	10	93,603	6	83,167	7	97,429	74
Newcastle	4	175,374	5	123,300	4	91,500	3	197,333	1	79,000	37
Norwich	2	128,250	—	—	5	93,100	—	—	3	174,583	41
Oxford	6	202,875	4	183,375	9	191,667	7	146,464	5	186,800	80
Peterborough	2	243,250	3	160,333	3	225,858	—	—	—	—	22
Portsmouth	2	193,750	2	182,500	4	339,680	1	85,000	3	215,000	21
Ripon	1	80,000	2	153,331	1	134,000	1	230,000	—	—	13
Rochester	2	158,750	—	—	—	—	1	110,000	—	—	11
St. Albans	6	181,875	—	—	5	185,290	—	—	2	249,750	30
St. Eds and Ips	3	175,333	5	131,900	2	122,500	9	133,696	7	127,107	53
Salisbury	2	136,500	2	213,000	3	226,333	2	169,000	3	140,867	27
Sheffield	4	105,625	7	95,057	3	90,083	6	105,750	1	49,750	41
Sodor and Man	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Southwark	—	—	1	240,000	3	250,167	7	146,150	3	216,500	33
Southwell	5	115,800	—	—	—	—	1	59,950	—	—	25
Truro	4	127,113	2	95,000	1	120,000	4	78,254	4	119,250	29
Wakefield	13	129,892	2	64,000	1	96,000	2	122,850	3	91,667	63
Winchester	3	202,851	5	168,200	1	115,000	2	183,750	2	163,625	27
Worcester	1	138,000	—	—	3	141,000	1	320,000	1	265,000	14
York	3	119,369	2	80,500	1	79,000	—	—	3	133,000	39
Total	154	161,812	118	144,395	107	156,058	115	130,955	107	140,177	1,486

Note:
It should be noted that the costs given are averages, so do not necessarily reflect the value of parsonages across each diocese.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what action Her Majesty's Government have taken in relation to Lockerbie and Libyan sanctions since the Adjournment debate on 1 February.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has written to two hon. Members on matters which arose during the Adjournment debate on 1 February. Discussions about Lockerbie and UTA 772 with our closest partners have continued. The Government's policy towards Libya is kept under constant consideration, but it is only the Libyan Government who can bring about the lifting of sanctions by complying in full with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the statutory instruments which each Government Department has sponsored in the last 12

months; and what statutory instruments each Department proposes to introduce during the current year.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee if he will make a statement on the current progress and the likely timetable to when hon. Members on the parliamentary data and video network will be able to have House of Commons e-mail addresses accessible to their constituents and the general public through the Internet.

Mr. Waller: The Information Committee has recommended, subject to endorsement by the Finance and Services Committee of the necessary expenditure, that connection to the Internet should be made available, as an experiment, to those Members who are users of the parliamentary data and video network and who request it. It is hoped that connection to the Internet will be possible by May of this year. The experiment will be assessed in due course.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Contagious Agalactia

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of contagious agalactia have occurred in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: There have been no cases of contagious agalactia in Northern Ireland.

Rape and Child Abuse

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about the provision in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, in respect of the removal of a defendant's right to anonymity prior to conviction and sentencing in cases of alleged rape and alleged child abuse.

Sir John Wheeler: Following publication of the proposal for a draft order in 1993, two representations were received expressing concern that the removal of a defendant's right to anonymity in a rape case might lead to the identification of the complainant. One of them also expressed concern that a defendant in a rape case whose name had been published might be subject to harassment. The right to anonymity had not extended at any time to defendants in other types of cases, including child abuse.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what redress is open to defendants for detrimental publicity in cases of alleged rape and alleged child abuse where the defendant's right to anonymity is removed but where the defendant is not proved guilty of an offence.

Sir John Wheeler: The law does not make specific provisions in this matter. A defendant acquitted of a charge in proceedings which may be freely reported must decide for himself whether to seek redress under criminal or civil law if he believes publicity of the case was detrimental to him.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to protect teachers from false accusations of rape and child abuse.

Sir John Wheeler: None. It is impossible to protect any person from having a false accusation laid against them.

TREASURY

Inland Revenue

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of Inland Revenue collection staff employed in each year since 1979, broken down to show those employed in ensuring the collection of *(a)* PAYE, *(b)* capital gains tax, *(c)* corporation tax, *(d)* schedule D tax and *(e)* national insurance contributions.

Sir George Young: Excluding staff employed on central administration, the table sets out the total numbers of Inland Revenue staff engaged on the collection of tax within the Department's accounts offices, local office network, and the enforcement officers for each year since 1978–79 and how many were working in the areas of *(a)* PAYE, *(b)* capital gains tax, *(c)* corporation tax and *(d)* schedule D tax. Under *(a)* the figures include staff used in collecting PAYE from employers and a relatively small number of schedule E tax assessments. As resource usage on national insurance contribution work is incidental to mainstream tax collection, it is not separately recorded.

Year	*Total*	*PAYE*	*Capital gains tax*	*Corporation tax*	*Schedule D tax*
1978–79	11,041	4,473	135	560	5,873
1979–80	10,648	4,215	148	584	5,701
1980–81	10,222	3,953	143	597	5,529
1981–82	10,124	3,842	126	409	5,747
1982–83	10,221	4,042	116	390	5,673
1983–84	10,171	4,094	113	394	5,570
1984–85	9,339	4,016	92	557	4,674
1985–86	8,443	3,196	92	559	4,596
1986–87	7,989	2,902	85	530	4,472
1987–88	7,795	2,902	105	538	4,250
1988–89	7,866	2,931	121	571	4,243
1989–90	7,879	2,974	92	570	4,243
1990–91	7,846	2,808	79	549	4,410
1991–92	8,187	3,209	70	532	4,376
1992–93	8,410	3,119	69	492	4,730
1993–94	8,173	2,945	68	465	4,695

The number of staff employed on collection and enforcement work has decreased since 1979. The greater proportion of the reduction arose through automation but other decreases resulted from administrative and efficiency measures and the transfer of work to other parts of the Department. Conversely, extra work loads attracted staff increases but the net overall reduction in permanent staff is around 2,860.

Monetary Union

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions United Kingdom Ministers or officials have had concerning technical aspects of introducing notes and coins for the single European currency, with *(a)* the expert group reporting to Commissioner Christopherson and *(b)* other bodies; what representation the United Kingdom has on this group; and when it is anticipated that technical aspects of monetary union will be settled to enable the change over to a single currency to take place.

Mr. Nelson: United Kingdom ministers and officials have had no discussions concerning technical aspects of introducing notes and coins for a single currency with the expert group on the changeover to the single currency. This is an independent group and neither the United Kingdom nor the other member states are formally represented. The group is likely to seek opinions from relevant United Kingdom bodies.

Article 109f(3) of the EC treaty provides that the European Monetary Institute shall supervise the technical preparation of ecu bank notes. The EMI has set up a group of national central bank experts to undertake a detailed study, the EMI working group on printing and issuing a European banknote.

A working group of mint directors from EU member states has been formed to address the technical implications of single European coinage, with the aim of providing advice to the European Commission on the options available.

Technical preparations which would be necessary for monetary union are at a very early stage, and it is not yet possible to give a date for their completion.

The UK opt-out under the Maastricht treaty means that no decision to proceed to monetary union would be made without the agreement of Parliament.

Fraud

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of fraud have been reported in *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* non-departmental public bodies; and what has been their value in each of the last five years.

Sir George Young: The data are submitted by Departments in line with the requirements of 37.1.4 of Government accounting and cover frauds and suspected frauds committed by departmental and agency staff, including cases where staff have colluded with outsiders. The data include NDPB staff frauds where these have been reported by Departments. However, complete data on frauds in NDPBs are not held centrally.

The values are not a completely accurate indicator of actual losses resulting from fraud since in some cases the amounts involved are estimates, and in others, some or all of the sums have been recovered.

The number and value of fraud cases within Departments, agencies and NDPBs reported to the Treasury in the last five years are:

Year	*Number of cases*	*Total value £*
1989–90	221	1,496,700
1990–91	196	2,302,900
1991–92	287	1,536,900
1992–93	302	2,108,900
1993–94	352	1,688,500

Bank Notes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current value of *(a)* £5, *(b)* £10, *(c)* £20 and *(d)* £50 notes in circulation; and what is the estimated current face value of forged notes.

Mr. Nelson: The total value of Bank of England banknotes in circulation is published weekly in the bank return. The value of individual denominations was, at Wednesday 25 January 1995, £1,069 million for the £5; £5,362 million for the £10; £7,677 million for the £20; and £2,869 million for the £50.

The Bank of England, in common with most note-issuing authorities, does not publish details of the counterfeit notes it receives. However, despite an increase in counterfeiting over the last few years, counterfeit notes detected still represent only a small fraction of 1 per cent. of the total notes in circulation

Bus Fuel Duty

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the difference between the bus fuel duty rebate which has been paid and what would have been paid had the rebate not been frozen for each year from November 30 1993 to date.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Information for the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95 is as follows.

	1993–94	*1994–95*
Cost of rebate	220	[1]225
Estimated cost without freeze in rebate announced 30 November 1993	227	257

[1]Indicates forecast outturn.

Business Statistics Service

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the implications for confidentiality and impartiality in a contracted out statutory collection of business statistics service under the Contracting Out (Statistics of Trade) Order 1995.

Mr. Nelson: The order referred to exists in draft form only and has not been laid before Parliament. An independent assessment into the attitudes of business to the contracting out of statistical inquiry work was made in October 1993, and the results of the study were placed in the Library. Should an appropriate contracting out order laid under section 77 (2) of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 be approved by Parliament, any

subsequent market testing or contracting out of statistical inquiry work would take the results of this research into account.

Reinvestment Relief

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if investment in those companies listed under stock exchange rule 4.2 are eligible for reinvestment relief.

Mr. George Young: Yes. Capital gains tax reinvestment relief is available for investment in shares in qualifying unquoted trading companies. Companies listed under stock exchange rule 4.2 are unquoted companies for this purpose.

Hong Kong

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no plans to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Public Works Loan Board

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the quotas for lending to local authorities by the Public Works Loan Board.

Mr. Nelson: The Public Works Loan Commissioners have issued a circular today notifying local authorities that there will be no change in the formula for calculating quotas for 1995–96.

Copies of the circular have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Expenditure Review

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement about the likely effect on staff numbers in his Department of the fundamental review of expenditure;

(2) what savings to his Department's budget in the next three financial years he expects as a result of the Treasury's fundamental expenditure review.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The FER report identified savings of 25 posts at grade 5 and above—round 25 per cent. of the total. The saving in direct staff costs attributable to this will amount to about £1.8 million in a full year. The implications of the FER for the number of staff employed by the Treasury in these and other grades and for other expenditure for next year and beyond is being considered in the work currently in hand and to set budgets for 1995–96.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Link Projects

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library a full list of all 500 LINK research and development projects supported by Government to date, indicating the annual Government contribution for each of the last five years.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have today placed in the Library a full list of the 571–343 active and 228 completed LINK projects supported by the Government since the start of the LINK initiative in 1986, together with details of Government expenditure on LINK for the last five years.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Office and its agencies for each year since its establishment, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Expenditure on all forms of advertising by the Office of Public Service and Science, including its agencies, for each year since 1992–93, when the office was established, was as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £	*[1]1994–95* £
OPSS	695,400	1259,200	477,500

[1]To end-January.

	1992 £	*1993* £	*1994* £
HMSO	537,100	1,471,700	1,745,800

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Public Library Service

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to respond to the report commissioned by his Department from the consultants ASLIB on the public library service.

Mr. Sproat: I expect to receive the final report from the review consultants within the next month. I intend then to make a statement on the report as soon as possible thereafter.

Sports Council

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to announce the results of his Department's consultation on proposals to restructure the Sports Council.

Mr. Sproat: I am currently considering responses to the consultation on the Government's proposals set out in my 8 July statement. To assist me in this, I have asked the Great Britain Sports Council to provide me with its own view of how its current functions and staffing might be realigned to take account of those proposals. I shall be taking final policy decisions in the light of my analysis and this further work, which will be completed shortly.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) when the decision was taken to remove the words "sport for all" from the Sports Council's letterhead;

(2) what consultations he has had with the Sports Council about the removal of the words "sport for all" from the Sports Council's letterhead;

(3) how many sheets of letterheads were discarded by the Sports Council following the recent removal of the words "sport for all" from the design;

(4) what costs have been incurred in the alteration of the Sports Council's letterhead by the removal of the words "sport for all".

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council decided to remove "sport for all" in redesigning its letterhead on the appointment of its new chairman and vice-chairman. This was a matter for the Sports Council and therefore Ministers and officials were neither consulted nor informed. I am advised by the Sports Council that because of the level of stocks held at any one time, the costs were negligible.

Children's Play (Funding)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made on the present arrangements for funding children's play.

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle under Lyme (Mrs. Golding) on 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *300-01*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Languages, EEC

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many working languages were used in the EEC *(a)* in 1970, *(b)* in 1980, *(c)* in 1990 and *(d)* at the latest date for which figures are available; what is the estimated cost of translation services in 1995; and what was the cost in each of the previous years.

Mr. David Davis: The European Community had four official and working languages in 1970, six in 1980, nine in 1990 and has had 11 since the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden in January this year. There is no separate line in the EC budget covering the cost of translation services. Estimates could therefore be calculated only at disproportionate cost.

Copenhagen Summit

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what priority Her Majesty's Government attach to the United Nations social summit to be held in March in Copenhagen; and who will represent Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are committed to achieving a successful summit and have participated actively in the preparations. Our principle priority is to improve the focus of the international debate around the issues of development.

A final decision on attendance at the summit will be taken near the date.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *19*, which of the functions of the EU monitors in Bosnia duplicate similar functions performed by UNPROFOR and UNHCR; and if he will make it his policy to avoid such duplication and to ensure that EU funds are used more efficiently in Bosnia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are satisfied that there exists no duplication of effort between UNPROFOR's and UNHCR's roles and that of the EU monitoring mission.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those resolutions on nuclear arms control, nuclear disarmament, nuclear testing and nuclear materials production freeze voted upon at the most recent session of the United Nations General Assembly, indicating the vote taken on each resolution, how the United Kingdom voted, and the reasons in each case for the way the United Kingdom voted.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I shall write to the hon. Member with the information he has requested shortly.

Piracy

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the numbers and locations of acts of piracy committed against British shipping worldwide since 1987; and what action his Department has taken in response to these *(a)* unilaterally, *(b)* bilaterally and *(c)* multilaterally.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This information will take some time to compile. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available.

Work Permits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the eligibility of United Kingdom citizens to apply for work permits into the United States of America.

Mr. Baldry: British citizens are eligible to apply to the United States immigration authorities for a United States work permit. Applications are generally based on a specific offer of employment from a United States employer.

Colombia

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the appointment of a special rapporteur in Colombia by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Mr. David Davis: President Samper has pledged to give human rights the highest priority. He has discussed them constructively with UN human rights bodies, foreign Governments and NGOs. We do not believe the appointment of a special rapporteur is needed.

Islamic Fundamentalism

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has raised the issue of Islamic fundamentalism at NATO meetings.

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Potential threats to security and stability in the Mediterranean region are discussed from time to time in NATO meetings. These threats include acts of violence carried out by extremist groups, some but not all of which act under the guise of fundamentalist movements.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he has given to the possible threat from Islamic fundamentalism; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* We do not consider Islam, or Islamic revival, to be a threat. However a number of countries in the middle east face problems of violent extremism under the guise of Islamic movements. These are clearly a threat to the stability of the region.

Security Co-operation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy concerning the establishment of military links between NATO and *(a)* north African and *(b)* middle eastern countries; what consideration his Department has given to the establishment of wider security co-operation with these countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* NATO has no plans to establish military links with either north African or middle eastern countries. The Mediterranean initiative announced by the NATO Secretary-General on 7 February is political in nature and reflects the alliance's wish to contribute to the strengthening of regional stability, to foster better understanding of mutual concerns, and to correct any misunderstandings of the NATO's purpose that could lead to perceptions of a threat. It also seeks to complement OSCE and WEU dialogues with certain countries in the region.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the oral answer by the Leader of the House of 2 February, *Official Report*, column 1231, and Madam Speaker's statement of 2 February, *Official Report*, column 1231, what considerations underlay his decision to hold a press conference on the issue of exported live animals for slaughter rather than make a statement to the House.

Mr. Waldergrave: I believed that it was extremely important to inject into the wider public debate a point which I hope is reasonably well understood in the House—since the Government have made it clear both to hon. Members and in another place namely that, legally, it is not open to the United Kingdom to introduce a unilateral ban on exports of live animals. My statement to the press on 1 February merely confirmed that position. A letter sent to all Members of the House earlier that day set out the legal position in detail, as did answers given on 2 February to parliamentary questions from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), *Official Report*, columns *846–47*. I believe that misunderstanding on this point fuels some of the frustration of many of those demonstrating against the trade and diverts attention from the necessity of securing improvements in European law.

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the legal arguments put forward by Compassion in World Farming rebutting his contention that it would be illegal for the United Kingdom to impose a ban on the export from the United Kingdom of live animals for slaughter.

Mrs. Browning: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 2 February to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), *Official Report*, columns *846–47*, about the legality under Community law of measures banning or restricting calf exports. Similar considerations would apply to a ban on the export of live animals for slaughter.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *851*, what information he now has on how many of the exporters of livestock currently using Brightlingsea have convictions and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: I have nothing to add to that reply.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle over six months of age were loaded on the MV Caroline at Brightlingsea on 1 February; where they came from; what was their destination; where they were lairaged prior to transportation; what were the nationalities of the haulage firms prior to lairage and after lairage; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* A total of 32 heifers and bullocks from premises in County Meath, Republic of Ireland were loaded on the MV Caroline on that day. According to the health documents and journey plan accompanying the animals their destination was premises in Vitre, France and they were to be rested, fed and watered at premises in Northampton and Nieuwpoort, Belgium. The animals were transported by a British haulage firm.

Contagious Epididymitis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the cases of contagious epididymitis in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning: No cases of contagious epididymitis have been recorded since it was made notifiable on 1 January 1993. Official records are not available before that date.

Contagious Agalactia

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of contagious agalactia have occurred in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning: No cases of contagious agalactia have been recorded in England since it was made notifiable on 1 January 1993. Official records are not available before January 1993.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in each of the last five years, the amount of compensation paid out to farmers whose animals have been slaughtered as BSE carriers.

Mrs. Browning: Compensation is paid when animals suspected to be affected with BSE are compulsory slaughtered. Details of compensation paid in the last five years are as follows:

Year	*Compensation £*
1990	9,030,752
1991	15,741,463
1992	28,205,613
1993	36,290,273
1994	22,546,902

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughterhouses have closed and what killing capacity by species has been taken out of commission in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning: Our records indicate the numbers of licensed red meat slaughterhouses in England in each year since 1984 were:

1984: 861
1985: 852
1986: 815
1987: 793
1988: 782
1989: 689
1990: 643
1991: 593
1992: 455
1993: 434
1994: 424

The Department does not hold figures on the total capacity of slaughterhouses.

Sheep Pox

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of sheep pox have been reported in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning: No cases of sheep pox have been recorded in England since 1985.

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made as to which Ministry work currently carried out under various memoranda of understanding will be transferred to a privatised ADAS.

Mr. Waldegrave: No decisions have yet been taken on the extent of the work which might be transferred to the private sector.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest available figures for the number of sheep farmers authorised under the certification scheme to purchase organophosphorous dip products in Wales, Scotland and each of his Department's regions in England; and what, in each case, was the total estimated number of sheep farmers.

Mrs. Browning: The certification scheme is run by the National Proficiency Tests Council. There are 90,000 registered sheep farmers in the United Kingdom. The number of farmers who have applied for certification in each NPTC region by 10 February 1995 is set out in the following table. The information is not available by MAFF regions.

By 10 February, 11,151 sheep farmers had enrolled for certification. A total of 4,746 certificates had also been issued by that date. None of this data are available on a corresponding regional basis.

The decision on whether or not to apply for certification is a matter for the individual sheep farmer, bearing in mind their judgment on the possible need to purchase OP sheep dips for the treatment of sheep in the coming year.

Applications for sheep dipping certificates received by 10 February 1995

Counties	*Numbers registered*
Northumberland	
Durham	
Tyne and Wear	
Cumbria	1,448
Lancashire	
Cheshire	
Merseyside	
Great Manchester	
Yorkshire	596
Cleveland	596
Humberside	190
Lincolnshire	190
Derbyshire	
Leicestershire	407
Northamptonshire	
Nottinghamshire	
Shropshire	268
Staffordshire	268
Hereford and Worcester	
Gloucester and North Avon	434
Warwickshire	
West Midlands	
Cambridgeshire	
Norfolk	122
Suffolk	
Essex	
Hertfordshire	62
London (North of Thames)	
Bedfordshire	
Berkshire	155
Buckinghamshire	
Oxfordshire	
Kent	
Sussex—East	218
London (South of Thames)	
Surrey	73
Sussex—West	73
Hampshire	100
Isle of Wight	100
Dorset	
Somerset	
South Avon	614
Devon	
Cornwall	
Wiltshire	
Clwyd	756
Gwynedd	756
Powys	551
Dyfed	602
Glamorgan	213
Gwent	213

Applications for sheep dipping certificates received by 10 February 1995

Counties	*Numbers registered*
Scotland	1,230
Northern Ireland	300
ATB Landbase	2,812
Total as known	11,151

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether payments under the 1995 hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme will all be made within the payments timetable set out in his Department's latest commitment to service document.

Mr. Waldegrave: The 1995 HLCA scheme opened for applications on 15 November 1994. The Council regulation which extended the agri-monetary system on which HLCA rates are dependent was not published in the *Official Journal* until 31 December 1994. The statutory instrument allowing payments to be made was laid in the House on 19 January 1995. Most claimants should receive their payments within three months of receipt of their claim as provided for in the Ministry's regional service standard "Commitment to Service". However, some of the claims submitted early in the claim period are unlikely to be processed in time to meet the target. We will keep any delays to a minimum.

Guide Dogs

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to seek exemption for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and guide dog owners from the Restrictions on the Administration of Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994, SI 2987, in order to allow veterinary surgeons to prescribe generic alternatives to specialist veterinary prescriptions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 February 1995]:* None. It is in the interests of animals to treat them with medicines which have been fully assessed for safety, quality and efficacy in the species concerned. The regulations encourage good practice in both areas by reinforcing the code of practice introduced by the British Veterinary Association in 1991. The provisions have therefore established good veterinary practice in the United Kingdom, but which now have statutory backing. Where no authorised product exists for a particular condition in a particular species the veterinary surgeon is able to exercise his or her clinical judgment to consider alternatives in accordance with the regulations.

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Jack *[pursuant to his reply, 25 January 1995, c. 214–16]:* The information given for 1994 was incorrect, the correct information is as follows:

	1991			*1992*			*1993*			*1994*		
Grade	*Women*	*Total staff*	*Per cent. of total*	*Women*	*Total staff*	*Per cent. of total*	*Women*	*Total staff*	*Per cent. of total*	*Women*	*Total staff*	*Per cent. of total*
3	1	25	4.0	1	24	4.2	1	25	4.0	0	23	0.0
7	130	957	13.6	134	924	14.5	150	920	16.3	161	919	17.5
EO	773	1,721	44.9	786	1,731	45.4	965	1,946	49.6	878	1,910	45.9
AO	1,365	2,064	66.1	1,377	2,057	66.9	1,541	2,274	67.8	1,584	2,335	67.8
AA	1,499	2,056	72.9	1,576	2,086	75.6	1,541	2,065	74.6	1,466	1,993	73.5

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ernest Saunders

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons for granting Ernest Saunders parole in 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Mr. Saunders was released on licence in 1991, when he become eligible for parole, following a recommendation to that effect from the Parole Board, an independent body.

Data Protection Directive

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give an undertaking that he or his representative will vote against the draft data protection directive in the relevant forthcoming Council of Ministers' meeting unless it has been amended to reflect the criticisms made of it by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), in European Standing Committee B.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The draft directive in its original form was unacceptable to the United Kingdom. By the time of the Standing Committee debate on 7 December 1994, a number of improvements had been made, for example in relation to the use of data for research and statistical purposes and for health administration. However, a number of concerns remained. Intensive negotiations continued until political agreement was reached on the directive at the Foreign Affairs Council on 6 February. By then, significant progress had been made towards meeting UK concerns. In particular there is now more flexibility in applying the directive to existing records held in paper filing systems; a safeguard for the effective supervision of City financial institutions; and freedom to continue political canvassing. The UK indicated that it would be abstaining when the matter is put to a formal vote, probably later this month. The

decision to abstain was conditional upon the improvements which have been secured.

Disclosure Requirements

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a duty on courts not to reveal the identity and addresses of people who allow the police to use their property for surveillance purposes.

Mr. Maclean: I am looking into this point as part of my consideration of the issues raised by the current disclosure requirements generally.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the application by Cleethorpes borough council for a closed circuit television installation under the CCTV challenge competition 1994–95.

Mr. Maclean: The bid from Cleethorpes borough council for funding for its proposed CCTV installation is at present under consideration, along with the other bids received. The winners will be announced in early March.

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the amendments made to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Three amendments have been made:

1. The definition of protected animal in section 1(1) has been extended to include any invertebrate of the species Octopus vulgaris from the stage of its development when it becomes capable of independent feeding. The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act (Amendment) Order 1993: SI 1993/2103.

2. Any bird of the species Coturnix coturnix—quail—has been added to schedule 2—animals to be obtained only from designated breeding or supplying establishments. The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act (Amendment) Order 1993: SI 1993/2103.

3. Section 10(3) has been extended to exclude the use—except in exceptional circumstances— of species of animals listed in appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora. The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act (Amendment) Regulations 1993: SI 1993/2102

Crime Statistics

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish details of recorded crimes for each year since 1992 in *(a)* supermarket car parks, *(b)* out of town shopping centres and *(c)* town centre shopping malls; and if he will indicate the percentage involving (i) assaults on women, (ii) assaults on men, (iii) car crime and (iv) other crimes.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Police National Computer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the conversion of the national collection of criminal records into digital form for entry on the police national computer; and what steps he is taking to ensure that technical staff who have access to the computer do not have criminal connections.

Mr. Maclean: The contract for the back record conversion of criminal records, for eventual entry on the police national computer, was awarded to PCL Group Ltd. on 5 July 1994. Work began in October and is expected to take 18 months. It is being carried out, under conditions of the strictest security, in three locations in the United Kingdom.

PCL Group operators do not have direct access to the police national computer but key portions of records on to magnetic tape from electronic images supplied by the national identification service at New Scotland Yard. The procedures for conversion make it impossible for workers to associate a subject's name with details of his or her convictions, since the different sections of each criminal record are separately streamed and only reassembled at New Scotland Yard on return of the magnetic tapes. After quality control has taken place, the converted data will be passed, again on tape, to Home Office civil servants at the Hendon Data Centre for entry on the police national computer.

All the workers keying in records have been subject to a criminal record check, as have all Home Office staff involved in this work.

Police Forces (Budgets)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the budget adjustment made by his Department in respect of each police force for 1995–96.

Mr. Maclean: The setting of budgets is a matter for police authorities. Grant allocations to police authorities for 1995–96 were announced in the reply given on 30 January to a question from the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), *Official Report,* column *516.*

Methcathinone

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to add methcathinone to the prohibited substances list.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Methcathinone is a synthetic stimulant. The World Health Organisation has recently recommended that it should be brought under the controls of the United Nations convention on psychotropic substances, 1971. The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs will shortly be considering the recommendation.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, which has a duty to keep under review drug misuse in the United Kingdom, is to consider whether to recommend bringing methcathinone under the controls of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Mr. and Mrs. Walker, Toxteth

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Liverpool police force has agreed compensation to be paid out to Mr. and Mrs. Walker of Toxteth following a raid on their house by mistake; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: This is a matter for the chief constable of Merseyside police. I am told, though, that a claim has been received and is being assessed.

Special Constabulary

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulations govern members of the special constabulary; and who negotiates members of the special constabulary's conditions of service.

Mr. Maclean: The main regulations which apply to members of the special constabulary are as follows:

The Special Constables Regulations 1965
The Special Constables (Amendment) Regulations 1968
The Special Constables (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1992
The Special Constables (Amendment) Regulations 1992
The Special Constables (Pensions) Regulations 1971 (revoked by SI 1973/431, except in relation to pensions awarded before 1 April 1972)
The Special Constables (Pensions) Regulations 1973
The Special Constables (Pensions) Regulations 1980
The Special Constables (Injury Benefit) Regulations 1987

By virtue of section 34(1) of the Police Act 1964, the Secretary of State may make regulations as to the government, administration and conditions of service of special constables. As a matter of practice, the Department consults representatives of the police staff associations, the special constabulary, and other interested parties before laying any such regulations.

Police Officers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of police officers per 100,000 population each year since 1979 for *(a)* the Metropolitan police, *(b)* Hampshire, *(c)* Manchester and *(d)* Essex.

Mr. Maclean: Information on ratios of police officers to population levels are contained in the appendices to the annual reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, copies of which are in the Library.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), on 16 January, *Official Report*, column *333*, if he will list the nature of offence for which they were convicted and the date of their sentence in respect of each of the 15 individuals serving mandatory and discretionary life sentences who have been informed that previous Ministers set a whole life tariff in their case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: All 15 prisoners were convicted of murder. The convictions were in May 1966, July 1976, November 1978, November 1983, September 1984, October 1986 (two), December 1986, July 1987, February 1988, November 1988, February 1990, July 1991, September 1991, and October 1991.

Police Officers (Severance Arrangements)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce voluntary and compulsory severance arrangements for police officers.

Mr. Howard: The Metropolitan police service is running a limited voluntary retirement scheme which will come to an end of 31 March 1995. This was introduced to assist the force to restructure its middle management. All other Home Departments' forces expect to be able to carry out any such restructuring without voluntary or compulsory severance arrangements. The Government do not therefore intend to introduce legislative provision for such arrangements.

Prison Escapes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *810*, for what reason information on escapes from Greater London prisons is not available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 14 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question, pursuant to his Answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *810*, for what reason information on escapes from Greater London prisons is not available.

Information about escapes has only been recorded centrally since 20 June 1988. Before this date, all relevant information was held at establishments, or regional offices, for inclusion in the Annual Report on the work of the Prison Department.

The data for 1979 is contained in the Prison Department Annual Report for 1979. It details only escapes from specific establishments for male adult and young prisoners. It does not record the establishment from which borstal trainees or detention centre trainees escaped. The same Report details one escaper from Brixton prison and three escapers from Latchmere House remand centre within the Greater London area.

The Prison Department Annual Report for 1984–85 records three escapers from Ashford remand centre and one escaper from Latchmere House remand centre. It does not record the establishment from which young offenders or females escaped.

The Prison Department Annual Report for 1985–86 records four escapers from Ashford remand centre, five escapers from Brixton prison, four escapers from Pentonville prison and one escaper from Wormwood Scrubs prison. There are no details of the prisons from which the young offenders or females escaped.

During the year ending 31 March 1994 there were eleven escapers from establishments within the Greater London area, namely:

Six escapers from Downview prison

Three escapers from Feltham young offenders institution

One escaper from Highdown prison

One escaper from Pentonville prison

These figures do not include those prisoners who escaped from escort from Greater London prisons.

Tiger Products

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what tiger products were seized by the Metropolitan police in their raids on Chinese medicine shops in London on 7 February.

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner that several hundred items were seized in raids on four premises in central London on 7 February. These included articles believed to be tiger bones, and medicinal powder and pill products believed to contain ingredients derived from tigers and other endangered species.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what tiger products were seized in raids on Chinese medicine shops on 7 February outside the metropolitan area.

Mr. Maclean: The Greater Manchester police and the West Midlands police seized hundreds of products in raids at eight premises on 7 February. These included articles believed to be tiger bone and products derived from tigers and other endangered species.

EDUCATION

Spending

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will give the total amount spent or to be spent *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* in 1995 prices on education in (i) 1978–79, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table includes expenditure by central Government and English local authorities in 1978–79 and 1994–95. The 1994–95 figures are based on estimated outturn. Figures for local authority budgeted expenditure on education in 1995–96 are not yet available. Central Government's own expenditure for 1995–96 will total some £10,949 million. Figures include expenditure on mandatory student awards in Wales and for 1978–79 expenditure on universities in Great Britain, but otherwise are for England only.

	£ million	
	1978–79	*1994–95*
Cash	7,459	28,262
Real terms[1]	21,801	28,262

[1] Cash figures adjusted to 1994–95 levels using November 1994 GDP deflator.

Budget Deficits

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what information she has as to budget deficits in Wycombe West school, Buckinghamshire; Langham secondary school, Haringey; King David's school, Manchester; Southridge first school, North Tyneside; and Bramingham JMI school, Bedfordshire; and under what provisions of their respective local authorities' schemes for local management of schools such deficits have been authorised.

Mr. Robin Squire: At 31 March 1994, the budget deficits at the schools as recorded on the outturn statements produced by the respective local education authorities were as follows:

	£
Wycombe West school	114,000
Langham secondary school	143,667
Kind David high school	344,344
Southridge first school	68,585
Bramingham JMI school	47,000

I shall write to the hon. Member with the other information which has been requested; a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

Education Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what formula is used to calculate education standard spending assessments per pupil.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is contained in the "Local Government Finance Report (England) 1995–96," a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The SSA system does not set out to provide the same sum of money per pupil, but to provide funding for a common standard of service across the country.

Class Sizes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will amend the parents charter on maximum pupil numbers per class.

Mr. Robin Squire: No.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the research carried out by her Department into the effect of class sizes on pupil progress and attainment levels.

Mr. Forth: As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) on 24 January, *Official Report*, column *166*, the Department has not undertaken such research itself, but monitors work generally in this field.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will state by school the classroom sizes in schools designated as seriously below standard in the report from Her Majesty's inspector of schools for 1993–94 on standards in schools.

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Schools, Hampshire

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education by what sum the Government's contribution to the Hampshire local education authority has changed for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96; and what information he has concerning the cash balances held by schools in Hampshire.

Mr. Robin Squire: Allowing for the reform of inter-authority recoupment, Hampshire's education standard spending assessment for 1995–96 will rise by £2.3 million over the comparable 1994–95 figure.

For the financial year ending in March 1994, the outturn statement prepared by the county council for that year under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988 showed that total balances held by schools in Hampshire were £25.542 million.

Aggregated Schools Budget

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will list the proportion of the ASB retained by the local education authorities of the metropolitan cities for each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement;

(2) how much each metropolitan city retained on the non-schools section of their aggregated schools budget for 1995–96; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The aggregated schools budget represents, by definition, that part of a local education

authority's general schools budget which is distributed to the schools themselves.

Information on the percentage of the general schools budget, and the potential schools budget; retained centrally by each local education authority for 1994–95 and previous years is contained in the answer which I gave on 17 October 1994 to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) *Official Report*, columns *27–36*. No corresponding information in relation to 1995–96 is yet available.

Surplus Places

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the latest figure for surplus places for each local education authority of the metropolitan cities; and what representations she has received from Sheffield local education authority on its proposed reduction.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on Friday 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *410–14*. Sheffield is implementing approved reorganisation proposals which have reduced the primary figure and will reduce the secondary figure by July.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school places surplus to requirements currently exist in (i) Ealing, (ii) other London boroughs and (iii) the remaining local education authorities of the country; what costs are involved in each case; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on Friday 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *410–14*. The average premises-related cost of maintaining a surplus place is estimated to be £182 a year for a primary school and £303 a year for a secondary school at 1995–96 prices. The actual cost and scope for realising savings from removal of surplus places in practice will depend on local circumstances.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will arrange an early meeting with local education authorities.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend meets local authority associations and officials from local education authorities in the normal course of business.

Teachers

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will estimate the total loss of jobs among teachers and school support staffs which is currently expected in 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: Under the arrangements for local management, decisions about school staffing levels are made by school governors on the basis of a variety of local factors. No central estimate is made.

School Closures

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many proposals for school closure and reorganisation and from which local education authority have been awaiting a decision from her for *(a)* up to three months, *(b)* three to six months, *(c)* six to nine months, *(d)* nine to 12 months and *(e)* more than 12 months.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table lists proposals under consideration by the Department as at 10 February 1995 for the closure, alteration or establishment of county and voluntary schools and the length of time the proposals have been under consideration. Following the publication of proposals, there is a statutory two-month period during which objections may be submitted. Where objections are submitted to the LEA there is a further one-month period within which the objections must be forwarded to the Secretary of State.

	Proposals under consideration for:-				
LEA	*(a) Up to 3 months*	*(b) 3–6 months*	*(c) 6–9 months*	*(d) 9—2 months*	*(e) In excess of 12 months*
Avon	—	1	3	—	1
Barnet	—	—	—	1	—
Bedfordshire	—	1	1	—	—
Berkshire	—	3	5	—	—
Birmingham	5	—	—	—	1
Bradford	1	—	—	1	—
Buckinghamshire	3	1	—	—	2
Cambridgeshire	1	—	—	—	—
Cheshire	4	6	1	—	—
Croydon	1	—	—	1	—
Cumbria	6	—	—	—	—
Devon	—	1	—	—	—
Doncaster	—	29	8	—	—
Durham	—	1	—	—	—
Ealing	1	—	—	—	—
East Sussex	2	1	—	—	—
Essex	—	7	4	—	—
Gloucestershire	1	—	—	—	—
Greenwich	—	1	—	—	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	2	—	—	—
Hampshire	4	3	1	—	—
Haringey	—	1	—	—	—
Harrow	—	—	—	—	1
Hillingdon	1	—	—	—	—

LEA	Proposals under consideration for:- (a) Up to 3 months	(b) 3–6 months	(c) 6–9 months	(d) 9—2 months	(e) In excess of 12 months
Humberside	1	—	—	—	—
Islington	—	1	—	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea	1	—	—	—	—
Kent	3	6	—	4	—
Knowsley	3	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	1	3	—	—	—
Leeds	1	1	1	—	—
Leicestershire	—	—	1	—	—
Lewisham	—	1	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	1	11	—	—	—
Liverpool	1	1	—	—	—
Manchester	—	1	—	—	—
Norfolk	2	—	1	—	—
North Tyneside	—	1	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	—	1	—	—	1
Northamptonshire	—	3	—	—	—
Northumberland	3	1	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	1	5	2	—	—
Oldham	2	—	—	—	—
Oxfordshire	1	1	—	—	—
Redbridge	2	—	—	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	—	—	—	—	1
Sandwell	—	1	—	—	—
Sefton	—	1	—	—	—
Shropshire	—	1	—	—	—
Solihull	2	—	—	—	—
Somerset	1	4	—	—	—
Staffordshire	—	1	—	—	—
Stockport	2	2	—	—	—
Suffolk	3	—	—	—	—
Surrey	1	—	—	—	—
Sutton	—	—	1	—	—
Tameside	3	—	—	—	—
Tower Hamlets	1	—	—	—	—
Trafford	—	3	—	—	—
Wakefield	1	—	—	—	—
Walsall	1	—	—	—	—
Waltham Forest	1	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	—	33	—	—	1
West Sussex	—	1	—	—	—
Wiltshire	1	2	—	—	—
Wirral	3	—	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	1	—	—	—	—
Total	74	144	29	7	8

St. Philip's College, Birmingham

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she will announce her response to the recommendations of the Further Education Funding Council for England concerning St. Philip's Roman Catholic sixth form college, Birmingham; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Following the publication of the FEFC's report on the college and its recommendations last November, I have received a number of representations from the trustees, from present and former governors and others connected with the college. After considering these most carefully, I am satisfied that there was mismanagement of the college.

The recommendation from the Further Education Funding Council was that I should remove and replace all the members of the governing body in order, the Council advised, to provide a fresh start and a complete break from the past. However, the hon. Member will be aware that it is possible that the college will close at the end of the 1995–96 academic year. This is a matter in which the relevant legislation gives me no say. In the current circumstances, I have decided that it would not be expedient for me to replace the remaining governors. A number of governors have already resigned. Those who remain have all been in post for a very short time and are now, I believe, doing their best to ensure good governance of the college and, in particular, to secure that the education of the students remains the first priority.

The funding council also made recommendations concerning amending the instrument of government and the provision of a statutory procedure to govern the closure of designated colleges in the further education sector. We shall be considering these recommendations in consultation with those concerned with St. Philip's and other designated colleges.

I am very grateful to the funding council for investigating the circumstances at the college and for the action it is taking to disseminate the lessons to be learnt. A copy of the official response to the funding council is

being placed in the Library. It is clear that these difficulties are not typical of the further education sector as a whole. It is using its new freedoms responsibly, and has already made impressive progress. I hope that I shall not be required to exercise my powers again, but I shall not hesitate to do so if I consider it warranted.

Derby Tertiary College

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she will announce her response to the recommendations of the Further Education Funding Council for England concerning Derby tertiary college, Wilmorton; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Following the publication of the FEFC's report on the college and its recommendations last November, I have received a number of representations from present and former governors and others connected with the college. After considering these most carefully, I am satisfied that mismanagement took place for which the governing body bears a collective responsibility.

I intend therefore to exercise my power under section 57 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to remove the remaining members of the governing body. I am excluding two governors from this action, whom I judge were not responsible for the mismanagement that took place. I intend to appoint seven new governors both as replacements and in order to restore a quorum to the governing body. I hope that all those connected with the college can now put these events behind them and work together in the interests of its students.

I am very grateful to the Further Education Funding Council for investigating the circumstances at the college and for the action it is taking to disseminate the lessons to be learnt from this episode. A copy of the official response to the funding council is being placed in the Library. It is clear that these difficulties are not typical of the further education sector as a whole. It is using its new freedoms responsibly and has already made impressive progress. I hope that I shall not be required to exercise my powers again, but I shall not hesitate to do so if it warranted.

Office for Standards in Education

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* full-time employees and *(b)* part-time employees were in Ofsted for each of the years since it commenced operation.

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Agency

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many full-time medical advisers are employed by the Benefits Agency at Arden house, Newcastle;

(2) how many cases have been handled by Dr. Roger Bowmer and Dr. Sheila Hunter at Arden house, Newcastle medical centre for *(a)* all categories and *(b)* PD4 cases;

(3) what is the civil service salary grade payable to full-time medical advisers employed by the Benefits Agency medical section.

Mr. Hague: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Michael Bichard the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Bill Etherington, dated 13 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the number of Medical Advisers employed by the Benefits Agency at Arden House, Newcastle; the Civil Service salary grade payable to full time Medical Advisers employed by the Benefits Agency Services (BAMS); the number of cases handled by Dr. Roger Bowmer and Dr. Sheila Hunter for all categories and for PD D4.

In the BAMS at Arden House, Newcastle there are ten full-time Medical Advisers.

The salary scale payable to full time Medical Advisers in BAMS in the North East is between £28,213 (minimum) and £41,039 (maximum).

Information is not available relating specifically to the number of PD D4 cases handled by Dr. Bowmer and Dr. Hunter. However I have provided information relating to all categories at Annex A. Records relating to the number of cases handled are collated over differing periods.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A

	Dr. Hunter	*Dr. Bowmer*
1 March 1994—31 January 1995 Medical advice on files relating to all prescribed diseases cases	410	250
1 March 1994—31 January 1995 Advice on files relating to all other benefits for which medical advice is requested (excluding invalidity benefit)	3,914	1,279
1 January 1994—31 January 1995 Examination sessions to give medical opinions on incapacity in claims for invalidity benefit (maximum—7 examinations per session)	41	74
1 October 1994—31 January 1995 Medical advice on files relating to claims for invalidity benefit	5,377	4,633

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many reduced earnings allowance awards for PD4 were made in each year since 1989 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* at Dunn house, *(c)* at Phoenix house and *(d)* at South Shields;

(2) what is the average time taken to process a PD4 claim *(a)* at the disability benefit centre, Arden house and *(b)* nationally;

(3) what was the total number of reduced earnings allowance awards in each year since 1989 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* at Dunn house, Sunderland, *(c)* at Phoenix house, Sunderland, *(d)* in South Shields and *(e)* in Houghton-le-Spring.

Mr. Hague: The administration of reduced earnings allowance is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Bill Etherington, dated 13 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about awards of reduced earnings allowance since 1989 both nationally and at various Benefits Agency offices.

Information is not available in respect of new awards of reduced earnings allowance from 1989; the collection of such data did not begin until October 1991. In addition, information is not available separately for Dunn House and Pheonix House in Sunderland and for South Shields and Houghton-le-Spring. Those offices comprise the Benefits Agency's Wearside District and data is collated at District level. The information that is available is attached at Annex A.

Information in respect of the number of reduced earnings allowance awards for PD4 is also collated at District level and the collection of such data did not commence until June 1992. I have provided at Annex B the information that is available relating to Wearside District and national figures.

Information is not available in respect of the average time taken to process a PD4 claim at the Newcastle Disability Benefits Centre (DBC). The Benefits Agency Medical Services do not hold information separately for PD D4 or other prescribed diseases. However statistics are held for clearance times of all Industrial Injury Disablement Benefit claims which includes prescribed diseases. The average national clearance time for the year ending 31 January 1995 was 32.6 days. The average clearance time in Newcastle DBC was 29.6 days.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A
New awards of reduced earnings allowance

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Wearside	235	950	482	642
National	2,895	6,077	3,514	3,593

Awards of reduced earning allowance in respect of PD D4

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Wearside	Nil	6	17
National	933	701	702

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many sufferers from asbestos-related diseases have had to pay back benefits to the compensation recovery unit during the current financial year; and what were the sums of money that were clawed back;

(2) what is the largest sum of money that has ever been clawed back by the compensation recovery unit; and what was the type of sickness, accident or illness involved in this case;

(3) what is the distribution by size of the amounts of money clawed back by the compensation recovery unit.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 13 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the number of sufferers from asbestos related diseases who have had to pay back benefits to the Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU); the largest sum of money recovered by the CRU and the distribution by size of the amounts recovered.

The CRU's computer system records cases involving victims of asbestosis rather then asbestos related diseases. In the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995 there were 121 recoveries made in relation to asbestosis totalling £893,937.82. The individual amounts are shown on the attached schedule at Annex A.

The full range of information you requested in respect of a breakdown or recoveries by size is not available. This is because data prior to April 1994 is no longer held on the computer system and to obtain such information n would be at a disproportionate cost. However, the information that is available from 1 April 1994 to 31 December 1994, has been provided at Annex B.

The largest amount recovered to date is £84,630.01. This was from an award for a back/spinal injury.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A
Schedule of 121 cases referred to in PQ 0873 showing amounts recovered

	£
1.	18.64
2.	18.64
3.	42.00
4.	55.92
5.	68.34
6.	89.90
7.	126.00
8.	173.70
9.	223.68
10.	337.95
11.	433.50
12.	484.64
13.	605.29
14.	621.20
15.	672.20
16.	706.28
17.	862.93
18.	1,032.31
19.	1,105.13
20.	1,176.00
21.	1,208.80
22.	1,219.80
23.	1,329.95
24.	1,582.87
25.	1,692.18
26.	1,693.30
27.	1,738.24
28.	1,747.37
29.	1,773.16
30.	1,798.56
31.	1,853.68
32.	1,927.64
33.	1,937.45

Annex A
Schedule of 121 cases referred to in PQ 0873 showing amounts recovered

	£
34.	2,069.31
35.	2,135.36
36.	2,147.76
37.	2,270.16
38.	2,298.58
39.	2,375.28
40.	2,414.16
41.	2,454.00
42.	2,547.84
43.	2,572.01
44.	2,579.18
45.	2,629.67
46.	2,655.15
47.	2,676.40
48.	2,768.28
49.	2,815.44
50.	3,002.10
51.	3,061.41
52.	3,125.32
53.	3,270.80
54.	3,416.08
55.	3,422.72
56.	3,662.04
57.	4,038.28
58.	4,039.11
59.	4,119.04
60.	4,135.12
61.	4,165.87
62.	4,279.80
63.	4,297.84
64.	4,406.56
65.	4,582.56
66.	4,626.08
67.	4,763.04
68.	4,814.80
69.	4,873.36
70.	5,059.80
71.	5,263.56
72.	5,298.16
73.	5,442.85
74.	5,527.24
75.	5,527.34
76.	5,909.44
77.	6,000.72
78.	6,274.02
79.	6,304.15
80.	6,559.10
81.	6,582.70
82.	6,603.92
83.	6,668.43
84.	6,689.10
85.	6,691.50
86.	6,946.10
87.	6,973.50
88.	7,609.51
89.	7,758.84
90.	8,029.77
91.	8,082.43
92.	8,969.48
93.	9,076.00
94.	9,314.79
95.	9,533.69
96.	10,170.90
97.	10,367.62
98.	10,917.52
99.	10,947.30
100.	11,062.90
101.	11,725.80
102.	12,796.04
103.	14,946.17
104.	15,862.47

Annex A
Schedule of 121 cases referred to in PQ 0873 showing amounts recovered

	£
105.	16,832.00
106.	17,136.67
107.	17,140.01
108.	19,027.45
109.	19,749.98
110.	23,719.15
111.	24,395.44
112.	25,294.82
113.	25,355.18
114.	27,518.62
115.	28,421.77
116.	28,855.99
117.	31,153.19
118.	32,203.62
119.	35,220.65
120.	36,558.38
121.	47,994.18

Annex B

£	*Percentage*
To 5,000.01	31.5
5,000.01 to 10,000.00	17.8
10,000.01 to 15,000.00	15.4
15,000.01 to 20,000.00	12,0
20,000.01 to 25,000.00	8.4
25,000.01	14.9

Income-related Benefits

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make an estimate of how many individuals *(a)* receive means-tested benefits, *(b)* receive means-tested benefits and pay income tax, *(c)* receive means-tested benefits and pay national insurance contributions; how many individuals would cease to be eligible for means-tested benefits if they no longer paid income tax or national insurance contributions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: It is estimated that 8.53 million people were in receipt of an income-related benefit at May 1993, the latest date for which figures are available for all benefits.

An adjustment has been made to take account of the fact that individuals may be in receipt of more than one income-related benefit at the same time. Such adjustment does, however, not produce reliable estimates of the number who also pay tax and national insurance contributions or whose eligibility would cease if no tax or national insurance contributions were paid. The table therefore provides this information separately for each income-related benefit.

Income-related benefit recipients paying tax and National Insurance

	Recipients paying tax (000s)[3]	*Recipients paying National Insurance (000s)*[3]	*Recipients who cease to be eligible if tax and NI not payable (000s)*[4]
Income support	20	10	0
Family credit	340	455	80
Housing benefit	580	355	160
Council tax benefit	520	225	85
Disability working allowance	*	5	—

Notes:
[1]*All estimates are on a benefit unit basis.*
[2] Estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000 (* indicates a figure less than 2,500).
[3] Estimates for Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are based on data from the 1990, 1991 and 1992 Family Expenditure Surveys, uprated to 1994–95 benefit levels and prices. Estimates for Family Credit are based on the 1994 Family Credit Enquiry. Estimates for Disability Working Allowance are based on the 1994 Disability Working Allowance Enquiry.
[4]All estimates are based on data from the 1990, 1991 and 1992 Family Expenditure Surveys, uprated to 1994–95 benefit levels and prices. Insufficient information is available on Disability Working Allowance for an estimate to be made.
[5] Columns cannot be totalled because of the various overlaps between the benefits.

Invalidity Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many male claimants of invalidity benefit have had working wives in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. The available information is in the table.

Percentage of all invalidity benefit recipients who are male with working wives

Years	*Percentage*
1987–89	19
1990–92	20

Notes:
1. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.
Source:
Family Expenditure Survey.

National Insurance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women have opted for the reduced national insurance liability in each year since 1965.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Reliable figures prior to 1978 are not available. The married woman's option was abolished from April 1977 but women who had the right to pay reduced-rate contributions at this time were allowed to continue to do so provided that certain conditions were satisfied. The numbers of women who paid reduced national insurance contributions in each year since 1978 are as follows:

Year	*Number (thousands)*
1978–79	1,917
1979–80	1,875
1980–81	1,754
1981–82	1,544
1982–83	1,371
1983-84	1,237
1984-85	1,139
1985–86	1,075
1986–87	1,031
1987–88	1,013
1988–89	1,016
1989–90	1,016
1990–91	992
1991–92	915
1992–93	845
1993–94	*763

* Figures for 1993–94 may not yet be complete.

Fraud

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money his Department estimates was lost through social security fraud in each year from 1990 to the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The following table details the estimated value of fraud losses prevented by Benefits Agency investigators in the four financial years since 1990–91:

Year	*Savings (£million)*
1990–91	341
1991–92	427
1992–93	558
1993–94	654

Although the full extent of social security fraud is not known, we are examining ways of producing a reliable estimate of the sum which might be involved.

Benefits

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of benefits paid in each year since 1990–91 to the unemployed in *(a)* all benefits, *(b)* unemployment benefit *(c)* income support, *(d)* housing benefit and *(e)* council tax and other benefits; what are

the average costs of benefits for persons unemployed; and what is the corresponding information for people unemployed for more than (i) one year and (ii) two years.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the tables.

Information relating to the proportioning of housing benefit, council tax benefit and community charge benefit according to the length of time that people are unemployed is not kept.

Expenditure on the unemployed 1990–1994

Benefit	*Years beginning April* 1990–1991 £ millions	1991–1992 £ millions	1992–1993 £ millions	1993–1994 £ millions
All benefits	5,300	7,560	8,970	9,720
Unemployment benefit	870	1,600	1,760	1,740
Income support	2,950	4,230	5,380	5,720
Housing benefit	1,120	1,340	1,420	1,910
Community charge benefit	330	350	380	310
Social fund	20	30	30	30

Notes:
[1]The figures are rounded to the nearest £10 million
[2] Totals may not sum due to rounding
[3] *Sources:* The 1994 departmental annual report

Average weekly payments (£) of benefits for the unemployed 1990–94

Years[1]	*1990–91*	*1991—92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Unemployment benefit—All	40.20	44.64	46.19	47.38
Income support—All	44.69	49.69	53.20	55.01
Income support—1–2 years	48.36	53.36	58.24	59.59
Income support—2 years or over	49.31	53.62	55.89	59.51
Housing benefit—All	26.39	30.42	35.94	39.74
Community charge benefit—All	6.76	3.85	4.70	—
Council tax benefit—All	—	—	—	7.33

[1] The figures are as at May each year.[2] The figures for 1993–94 are estimated outturns.
[3] Amounts are rounded to the nearest penny.
Sources:
[4] Unemployment benefit: the half-yearly analysis of unemployed claimants (5 per cent. sample).
Income Support: the income support annual statistical enquiry (1 per cent. sample).

Unemployment

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, how many people are claiming income support who are actively seeking work; and if such persons are included in the official unemployment figures.

Mr. Roger Evans: As at 11 August 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 1.89 million people claiming income support who were both available for and actively seeking work. They were included in the claimant unemployment count.

Invalidity Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole have appealed to a social security appeal tribunal concerning a decision that they are fit for work, or work within limits; what percentage of these people were successful; and if he will give the figures for those who were represented and those who were not with the corresponding success rates.

Mr. Hague: Figures are available only on appeals against all decisions on invalidity benefit and for Scotland as a whole. Information on the last available full year is as follows.

Appeals on Invalidity Benefit in the Scottish Region Year ending 1993

Appeals	
Lodged	4,101
Heard and Decided	1,595
In Appellant's Favour	50 per cent.
Representative and/or Representative and Appellant Present	758
In Appellant's Favour	65 per cent.
No Representative Present	837
In Appellant's Favour	37 per cent.

Source:
The annual social security appeal tribunal statistics 1993 produced by the Government Statistical Service.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what action he is taking in respect of the payment of housing benefit to prisoners; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the provision of housing benefit to the tenant of Mr. and Mrs. Shelston of 123 Southland Park road, in the light of previous representations from the hon. Member for South Hams.

Mr. Roger Evans: We are consulting the Social Security Advisory Committee and local authority associations about proposals for restricting the payment of housing benefit to prisoners to 13 weeks, and their reports are expected shortly. Subject to their views and the approval of Parliament, we intend to bring the amended regulations into effect from 1 April 1995.

Housing benefit is available in the normal way to the tenant of Mr. and Mrs. Shelston although, for reasons of confidentiality, no details can be provided.

Incapacity Allowance

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are expected to be in receipt of incapacity allowance for the years ending April 1996, 1997 and 1998; and how many of those will be *(a)* single, *(b)* claimants with partners and *(c)* claimants with dependant children.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer Friday 27 January 1995]:* The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is in the table.

Estimated number of claimants in receipt of incapacity benefit

thousand

	1996	1997	1998
Total	1,800	1,685	1,635
Total with adult dependency increase	410	345	300
Total with child dependency increase	120	115	115

Notes:

1. Estimates are provisional and as such will be subject to revision at a later stage.
2. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Figures take account of the estimated effect of the new medical test.

Pensions Bill

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, on the basis of information in Cm. 2714 on the Pensions Bill, he will estimate the percentage of women retiring in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2010–11, *(c)* 2020–21, *(d)* 2030–31 and *(e)* 2040–41 who will retire with entitlement to a full basic pension (i) under the existing scheme and (ii) after proposed changes in the Pensions Bill.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government Actuary advises that there is little difference between proportions of women who will receive a full basic pension under the current scheme and with the new state pension age. By 2025, almost all women, on reaching age 65, will retire with a basic pension in their own right: the average entitlement being over 90 per cent. Approximate, rounded, percentages of those who will retire with a full basic pension, based on estimates of the projected average level of pension, are contained in the table.

Year	*Percentage of women retiring in year with full basic pension percentage*
2000–01	25
2010–11	50
2020–21	65
2030–31	65
2040–41	65

WALES

Dental Services, Gwynedd

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how may dental practices in Gwynedd were represented at the meetings between Welsh Office officials and dentists in Gwynedd; how many of these indicated that they would be prepared to recommence taking patients on the NHS if the Government were to make policy changes; and what were the policy changes requested.

Mr. Richards: The information is not available in the form requested.

Following the publication of the Green Paper "Improving NHS Dentistry", Welsh Office officials held a series of consultation meetings in each of the eight counties in Wales. Some 30 dentists attended the meeting in Gwynedd.

The purpose of the meeting was to seek dentist views' on the contents of the Green Paper. The intention of individual dentists was not addressed.

Pre-school Playgroup Association

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amounts of cash he has given to the Pre-school Playgroup Association Wales for each of the last five years.

Mr. Richards: Wales PPA has received funding from the "Support for Child and Family Services" grant scheme and the details are as follows:

	1990–91 £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £
Core costs	143,657	143,657	158,023	161,970	164,400
Equipment	—	4,032.50	—	—	—
Children Act training	—	5,700	6,950	—	—
Powys development officer	—	4,778	3,756	3,850	2,260
Review	—	—	13,400	—	—
Total	143,657	158,167.50	182,129	165,820	166,660

In addition to the above, a grant of £92,269 was awarded in respect of a joint Wales PPA/MYM venture, for the development of a special needs training pack.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes further to help Pre-school Playgroup Association Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Along with other voluntary organisation and bodies, Wales PPA has applied to the Welsh Office for funding in 1995–96 under the "Support for Child and Family Services" grant scheme. The applications are currently under consideration and an announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Sheep Diseases

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of contagious agalactia have occurred in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No cases of contagious agalactia have occurred in Wales since 1 January 1993. This disease became notifiable only on that date and official records prior to that were not collected.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of sheep pox have been reported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No cases of sheep pox have occurred in Wales since 1985.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has attended the Council of Ministers meetings in Brussels since he took office; what were the dates of the visits; and what were the subjects discussed.

Mr. Redwood: I have not yet attended a meeting of the Council of the European Community as Secretary of State for Wales. I was a regular attender as a UK Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Flooding

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have found themselves with no recourse to compensation following serious flooding incidents in Wales over the past 18 months; and what evaluation there has been of the permissive drainage powers of district and borough councils.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on numbers of people who have found themselves with no recourse to compensation is not held by the Welsh Office. The permissive drainage powers of district councils were reviewed when the National Rivers Authority was created by the Water Act 1989 and no reason was found to change existing arrangements.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average wage of workers in Wales in each year since 1989.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees in Wales from 1989 to 1994 is set out in table X5 of part A of the "New Earnings Survey", published annually by the Employment Department.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has made to the European Commission on the subject of the export of live animals from Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food conducts negotiations and discussions on behalf of the United Kingdom Agriculture Departments on the issue of live animals exports, and the Welsh Office is in regular contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about this subject. The United Kingdom continues to press the EC to resolve the issue quickly, and has asked the French presidency to place welfare discussions amongst its priorities. The question of welfare standards during transport was raised by the UK at the Agriculture Council on 23 January 1995 and the Commission and the presidency have agreed to search for an early solution to the matter.

Fishermen

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time fishermen there were in Wales in each year since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The latest available information is published in table 2.6 of "UK Sea Fisheries Statistics 1993", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. No separate information is available on the number of full-time fishermen in Wales.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what accumulated balances are currently held by each of the grant-maintained schools in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The accumulate balances, shown in the latest audited accounts for each grant maintained school, are as follows:

	£
Bryn Elian, Clwyd	77,480
Derwen, Clwyd	30,054
Eirias, Clwyd	214,357
Emrys ap Iwan, Clwyd	111,062
Maelor, Clwyd	34,670
Pen-y-Bryn, Clwyd	1,546
Brynmawr, Gwent	6,918
Cwmcarn, Gwent	18,510
Our Lady and St. Michaels, Gwent	272
St. Albans, Gwent	35,095
Caergeiliog, Gwynedd	36,729
Llanerfyl, Powys	30,213
St. Cyres, South Glamorgan	100,993
Stanwell, South Glamorgan	118,129
Bishop Vaughan West Glamorgan	69,542

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the termination payments made to chief executives and general and senior managers in each NHS trust since its inception, indicating the size and number of individual payments.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* This information is not available for payments made before 1 April 1994. NHS trusts have notified the

Department of the following termination payments to chief executives and general and senior managers this financial year.

	Number of payments	Amount £
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	2	37,883
Glan Clwyd NHS Trust	1	20,718
Clwydian Community Care	1	45,000

Education

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on matters relating to education in the last four months.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* I have received many representations on a wide range of education matters over the last four months.

DEFENCE

Defence Cost Study

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions he has taken regarding defence cost study number 10.

Mr. Soames: Proposals recommending the rationalisation of naval stores depots were announced on 14 July 1994 and set out in detail in a consultative document promulgated on 19 August 1994. Representations were made by trade unions, a number of local authorities and Members of Parliament. The most detailed and careful consideration was given to all of the representations received on these proposals. Having reviewed all of this work, I am satisfied that the basis for the rationalisation of naval stores depots in order to provide an improved and more cost-effective system of stock distribution to the Royal Navy is sound.

I have therefore decided to proceed with the rationalisation under which depots at Eaglescliffe, Wrangaton and Exeter will close by April 1997, part of the latter site will be retained at least in the short term to support naval engineering tasks, pending further study. Naval stores depots at Devonport and Rosyth will be reduced, in the same time frame, although new waterfront storage facilities at the former will be provided to improve local support arrangements for the vessels base ported there. Naval stores facilities at Portsmouth will be enhanced by April 1997 to provide a central storage and distribution facility for a major part of the naval stores inventory. Facilities at Faslane will also be improved to meet the requirements of logistic support to the Fleet in Scotland.

These measures will result in significant savings of some £174 million over 10 years and some £24 million a year thereafter. Regrettably, there will also be significant reductions in civilian posts at the depots affected; approximately 1,170 posts will no longer be required. It is anticipated that many of these will need to involve redundancy. However, my Department will make every effort to keep redundancies to a minimum and will ensure that anyone made redundant will be offered a comprehensive resettlement package and assistance with training. We will of course continue to consult staff and the trades unions about the detailed implementation of this programme. In addition, by liaising with other Government Departments, local authorities and training and enterprise councils, my Department will do everything it can to assist in finding alternative employment.

Colombian Military Students

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will stop the training of Colombian military students until political killings in Colombia have ceased; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: British military personnel have been providing training to the Colombian authorities to help counter the illicit production and trafficking of drugs since 1989. Although details of the assistance provided are confidential between the two Governments, I can assure the hon. Member that the training is dedicated to the fight against drugs.

Submarines (Fishing Vessels)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what signals are communicated to a Royal Navy submarine or a submarine belonging to a NATO power when that vessel is perceived to be posing a danger to fishing vessels.

Mr. Soames: The conduct of dived Royal Navy submarines, and of dived foreign submarines in United Kingdom waters, is governed by the code of practice, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Compliance with the code, together with the "SUBFACTS" system of providing information about dived submarine movements, and a number of other safety measures agreed after extensive consultation with the fishing industry, ensures that dived submarines and fishing vessels are able to co-exist safely.

In addition, we have recently agreed with the fishing industry that, when a submarine is exercising with a number of warships, one of the surface vessels participating in the exercise would, in addition to its exercise role, be designated the fishing vessel safety vessel. This vessel would have responsibility for confirming the position of any fishing vessel in the vicinity.

Eurofighter 2000

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what topics were discussed at the meeting on 6 February in Munich of representatives of the nations participating in the Eurofighter 2000 project.

Mr. Freeman: As part of our regular programme of contacts with our Eurofighter 2000 partners, I met my counterparts from the other nations in Munich on 6 February to review progress in the reorientation of the project as agreed by the four Defence Ministers in December 1992, and to discuss a number of matters relating to planning for future phases.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the date for the commencement of the production phase of the Eurofighter 2000; and if he will make a statement on the future of the project.

Mr. Freeman: On current plans, we expect to reach decisions on entering the production phase of the project by the end of this year.

We remain committed to the development of the Eurofighter 2000 which will provide the cornerstone of the RAF's future air combat capability.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary Refits

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is this policy concerning the placing of contracts for Royal Fleet Auxiliary refits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: RFA refits are part of the unallocated ship refit programme, contracts for which are placed following competition. I am pleased to confirm our intention that RFA ships remain in the unallocated programme.

HMS Andromeda

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the value for money achieved by the sale of HMS Andromeda.

Mr. Freeman: HMS Andromeda has not yet been sold. Once the decision has been taken to dispose of a ship, the sale price we would aim to achieve would not be below the value of recoverable and re-usable on-board stores and equipment plus the scrap value of the remainder of the ship.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the efficiency with which HMS Andromeda was refitted.

Mr. Freeman: The refit was carried out under the normal price negotiation, contract oversight and post-costing mechanisms for commercial refitting. These were reviewed following completion of the refit and were found to be well within accepted limits for commercial refitting.

Air House, Rheindahlen

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on maintenance, furniture, fittings and refurbishment at the official service residence, Air house, at Rheindahlen, Germany, for each year since 1985; which officers lived in the residence from 1985; who authorised the expenditure; and when the property was sold and for how much.

Mr. Soames: Air house, Rheindahlen was the property of the Federal German Government and was returned to them on 30 June 1993. The occupants since 1985 were as follows:

Occupants	*Year*
Air Marshal Sir David Parry-Evans	1985–87
Air Marshal Sir Anthony Skingsley	1987–89
Air Marshal Roger Palin	1989–91
Air Marshal Sir Andrew Wilson	1991–93

Details of expenditure on the residence from 1991 are contained in annex C to my Department's paper on official services residences which is in the Library of the House.

Figures for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Since the reorganisation of the MOD budgetary system in 1991, ultimate responsibility for expenditure within each top level budget has rested with the relevant budget holder, who in this case was the Air Officer Commanding in Chief Germany. A significant portion of the expenditure shown reflected decisions on security made earlier.

Footpaths

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures were used to effect the stopping up of a public footpath on each occasion in the last 10 years, to date, where the power under section 16 of the Defence Act 1842 was exercised to stop up a public footpath.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer Monday 6 February 1995]:* During the last 10 years, the power conferred under section 16 of the Defence Act 1842 has been exercised to stop up a public footpath on two occasions. As far as can be ascertained from the available records, the procedures used were as follows:

Footpath No. 43 (Darley) at Menwith Hill station, North Yorkshire. This footpath had apparently been out of general use from 1955 when the station was established; indeed, the station was unaware of its existence, and a building has been constructed across the route, which in any case ran through the secure area of the base. In the early 1980s the Ramblers Association became interested in re-establishing the right of way, and in view of the situation it was thought appropriate to re-provide the footpath across the north-west corner of the site, a short distance from the original route, but outside the secure fencing. The agreement of the local highway authority was obtained that the new route was reasonable.

Footpath No. 31 at HMS Cambridge, Wembury, Devon. The stopping up of this footpath took place at a time when there was increased concern about the security risk to military establishments from the terrorist threat. The original line of the footpath ran through the establishment's administrative and accommodation area, around which a security fence had been established and the continuing threat to security from the footpath was deemed to be unacceptable. As at Menwith Hill, the new route was in fact slightly shorter than the original. Informal discussions were held with Devon county council footpath officers prior to the closure action being taken.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last 10 years, to date, the power conferred under section 16 of the Defence Act 1842 to stop up public or private footpaths or bridle roads has been exercised; on each such occasion if he expressly authorised the stopping order to be made; on each such occasion who signed the stopping up order; what was the exact geographical location of the footpath or bridle road in question; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer Monday 6 February 1995]:* During the last 10 years, the power conferred under section 16 of the Defence Act 1842 to stop up public or private footpaths or bridle roads has been exercised on five occasions. Although, due to the passage of time, file records are now incomplete, ministerial approval is normally sought on each occasion and the orders are signed by the head of what is now the Defence

Lands Service. The information specific to each case is as follows:

At RAF Molesworth, Cambridgeshire, on 5 February 1985. The route in question was part of bridleway number 28 in the parish of Brington and Molesworth, between GR50702 27665 and GR50680 27779.

At Menwith Hill station, North Yorkshire, on 1 October 1985. The route in question was part of footpath number 43 in the parish of Darley, between GR42005 and 45776 and GR41996 45719.

At RAF Molesworth, Cambridgeshire, on 18 November 1985. The route in question was part of bridleway number 27 in the parish of Brington and Molesworth, between GR50858 27694 and GR50868 27710.

At RAF Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire, on 30 July 1990. The route in question was part of the Portway (bridleway number 1) in the parish of Upper Heyford, between GR45050 22647 and GR45051 22669.

At HMS Cambridge, Wembury, Devon, on 3 December 1991. The route in question was part of footpath number 31 in the parish of Wembury, between GR24987 04873 and GR25022 04882.

Consultants

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1166*, where details of contracts awarded by his Department's central contracts branch are held; and what consideration he has given to collecting these details centrally.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer Tuesday 10 January 1995]:* Financial and management responsibility for all goods and services purchased by my Department, including consultancy work, rests with individual budget holders. Large and valuable contracts are, however, placed by the appropriate central contracts branch in order to ensure an additional degree of oversight in entering into such important commitments. Although records are kept, for a time, of the value of, and parties to, such contracts, there is no requirement for the relevant contracts branch including the central contracts branch to maintain a full description of the purpose for which each contract was let; that remains the responsibility of the budgetary area concerned. There is no need for contracts branches to keep detailed information after the work is finished; and there are no Defence management reasons for collecting or maintaining details centrally. Finally, consultancy, in whatever form, routinely constitutes but one element in larger contracts and is often not separately identified or costed in such records as are held.

EMPLOYMENT

National Vocational Qualifications

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of young people who complete a youth training course obtain NVQs at *(a)* level 2 and *(b)* level 3.

Mr. Paice: Of those who completed their youth training between April and August 1993, 31 per cent. gained an NVQ or equivalent at level 2 and 13 per cent. at level 3.

Careers Provision

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the difference in bids to provide careers provision in Stockport between the consortium including Stockport metropolitan borough council and the bid by Nord Anglia plc; and what factors led to the awarding of the contract to Nord Anglia plc.

Mr. Paice: Bids were assessed against the criteria published in the careers service prospectus. These included: effective quality assurance arrangements; financial viability and value for money for the taxpayer. In each case the preferred bidder has more closely met the criteria than competing bids. As yet, contracts have not been signed in any area. Negotiations with preferred bidders continue.

Training

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of those leaving adult training schemes who progress to *(a)* full-time work, *(b)* part-time work, *(c)* self-employment, *(d)* further education or training and *(e)* unemployment in each training and council area in England and Wales for the past four years and for (i) those unemployed for six to 12 months, (ii) those unemployed for 12 to 24 months, and (iii) those unemployed for more than 24 months.

Mr. Paice: As this information is contained in a large number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much the running of the training for work programme cost in the financial year 1993–94; and what is the projected cost for the scheme for 1994–95.

Mr. Paice: In 1993–94, £760.2 million was spent on training for work in England. The estimated expenditure for 1994–95 is £693.3 million. These figures exclude administration and running costs.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of people who took part in schemes run under the auspices of employment training and employment action went on to further education as a result of their training scheme in the years 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Paice: Of those leaving employment training in Great Britain in 1991–92, 3 per cent. went into full-time education/training courses. For 1992–93 leavers, the figure was 4 per cent.

The only full year for which data are available for employment action is 1992–93. Of those leaving EA in Great Britain in that year, 2 per cent. went into full-time education/training courses.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have taken part in training for work programmes since the scheme started in April 1993.

Mr. Paice: In the period April 1993 to October 1994, there were 515,000 starts on training for work in Great Britain.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those people who have taken part in training for work programmes since April 1993 have proceeded on to further education as a result of their training.

Mr. Paice: Of those leaving training for work in Great Britain in 1993–94, 4 per cent. went into full-time education/training courses.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of people who took part in schemes run under the auspices of employment training and employment action *(a)* successfully completed their programme and *(b)* attained a recognised qualification in the years 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Paice: Of those leaving employment training in Great Britain in 1991–92, 55 per cent. had completed their agreed course of training and 35 per cent. had gained a qualification or credit towards one. Of those leaving in 1992–93, 59 per cent. had completed their agreed course of training and 38 per cent. had gained a qualification or credit towards one.

No figures are available on completion and qualification rates from employment action.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those people who have taken part in training for work programmes since April 1993 have successfully managed, on completion of their course, to get full or part-time employment as a result of their training.

Mr. Paice: Of those completing Training for Work in England and Wales in 1993–94, 38 per cent. went into full or part-time employment or self-employment.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much the running of the combined employment training and employment action cost his Department in the years 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Paice: Total expenditure for employment training and employment action is given in the following table:

	ET	*EA*	*Total £ million*
1991–92	737.4	16.3	753.7
1992–93	629.5	137.3	766.8

Notes:
1. ET figures for 1991–92 are for England and Wales. EA figures for 1991–92 are for England, Scotland and Wales.
2. ET figures for 1992–93 are for England only. EA figures for 1992–93 are for England and Scotland.
3. Excludes administration and running costs.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those people who have taken part in training for work programmes since April 1993 have *(a)* completed their course and *(b)* successfully attained the goals set out in their individual participation plans.

Mr. Paice: Of those leaving training for work in England and Wales in 1993–94, 60 per cent. completed their agreed course of training. In the same year, 51 per cent. of leavers fulfilled their individual participation plans.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people took part in schemes run under the auspices of employment training and employment action during the years 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Paice: In 1991–92, there were 293,000 starts on employment training in Great Britain. In 1992–93, the figure was 291,000. Employment action began in October 1991; in the remaining part of 1991–92, there were 22,000 starts in Great Britain. In 1992–93, there were 67,000 starts on EA.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those people who have taken part in training for work programmes since April 1993 have proceeded on to further training as a result of their course.

Mr. Paice: Of those leaving training for work in Great Britain in 1993–94, 3 per cent. went into another Government training programme.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of people who took part in schemes run under the auspices of employment training and employment action went on to part or full-time employment as a result of their training scheme in the years 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Paice: Of those leaving employment training in Great Britain 1991–92, 31 per cent. went into full or part-time employment or self-employment. For 1992–93 leavers, the figure was 35 per cent.

The only full year for which data are available for employment action is 1992–93. Of those leaving EA in Great Britain in that year 17 per cent. went into full or part-time employment or self-employment.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are awaiting a YT place; and what is the figure as defined in the careers service management returns supplement.

Mr. Paice: On 31 January 1995, in England, 35 young people covered by the youth training guarantee had been waiting for the offer of a YT place for eight weeks or longer as provided in the monthly returns from careers services.

Benefits Appeals

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action he is taking in response to the chief adjudication officer's report on the number of *(a)* decisions in 1993–94 which were unsatisfactory and *(b)* decisions regarding appeals against benefit disqualification in the past year which did not follow the prescribed procedures.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to the Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 14 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the action being taken in response to the Chief Adjudication Officers's (CAO) Annual Report on Adjudication Standards for 1993–94.

The fact that a monitoring comment has been raised by the CAO's adjudication monitors does not necessarily mean that the adjudication decision is incorrect, but rather that the adjudication process was not correctly followed in one or more respects. Similarly, where a comment is raised on a written appeal submission, it is an indication that some aspect of the information included in it was either deficient or incomplete. The type of shortcomings identified by the CAO are unlikely to affect the outcome of appeals.

The CAO recognises that some of the deficiencies in the adjudication process identified by his monitoring are more significant than others. One of the principal concerns must be whether the claimant received the correct amount of benefit but, until the current operational year, the monitoring procedures did not

assess this factor. When the CAO's monitoring for the current year (1994–95) is completed this information will be available for the first time and will enable him to focus his findings more closely on our service to claimants in the quality of decision making, as well as on deficiencies in aspects of the adjudication process.

I responded positively to the findings and recommendations made by the CAO in his 1992–93 report, which was published on 24 November 1993. My people introduced a package of measures aimed at improving the overall quality of our adjudication function.

This package includes a statistically valid system of quality monitoring; a review of all forms and procedures; and the creation of a permanent Quality Working Group. In his 1993–94 report, the CAO confirms that he expects these measures to lead to improved standards, and that their effect will be reflected in future reports by the CAO.

Two out of six recommendations in the CAO's 1993–94 report focused on the quality of adjudication within the Employment Service. They related to review and overpayment decisions and the standard of written appeal submissions respectively. These recommendations are currently being addressed by our Quality Working Group.

I hope this is helpful.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the annual expenditure per capita of the Equal Opportunities Commission in Great Britain in each of the last three years.

Miss Widdecombe: The Equal Opportunities Commission's grant in aid for the last three years has been £5.949 million, 1994–95; £5.794 million, 1993–94; and £5.282 million, 1992–93. This works out at approximately 10p per person in the population.

Youth Training Guarantees

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people in the London boroughs of Lewisham, Lambeth, Greenwich and Southwark he expects to be in receipt of youth training guarantees on 1 April.

Mr. Paice: I am unable to estimate the number of young people who will be on youth training in these boroughs on 1 April. The current figure at accounting period 10—5 December 1994 to 1 January 1995—shows that 2,643 young people were on YT in the four South Thames training and enterprise council boroughs.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many youth training guarantees were made in 1994 to young people in the area covered by South Thames training and enterprise council; how many youth training guarantees had been met by South Thames TEC as at 21 December 1994; and how many youth training guarantees he expects will have been met by 31 March 1995 in the area covered by South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: Some 2,979 young people covered by the youth training guarantee started on a YT scheme in the South Thames training and enterprise council area between April 1994 and 1 January 1995. As at 31 December 1994, when the careers service returns were made for December, there were no young people for whom the YT guarantee had not been met. I am unable to estimate the position for 31 March 1995.

Training and Enterprise Councils, London

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what contingency plans he is making to deliver training to the London boroughs of Lewisham, Lambeth, Southwark and Greenwich if SOLOTEC and CENTEC are unable to provide sufficient contracts to meet the needs of the unemployed.

Mr. Paice: In putting forward the proposals for the four boroughs in the South Thames training and enterprise council area, CENTEC and SOLOTEC will have to satisfy me that they can provide adequately for the demand and range of training provision required. If they are unable to do so, the Department will put in place other measures to ensure that adequate training provision is maintained in the area.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if information relating to contracts and performance by individual training providers contracted to South Thames TEC will be made available to SOLOTEC or CENTEC if the same training providers apply to either TEC for a contract from 1 April onwards.

Mr. Paice: Information will be made available provided all parties involved agree.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many contracts for training for work and youth training he expects to be issued by SOLOTEC and CENTEC at 1 April to training providers formerly contracted to South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: I am unable to estimate the number of contracts likely to be issued. This is a matter for SOLOTEC and CENTEC which are best placed to decide who they should contract with.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many contracts were issued by South Thames TEC in the financial year 1994–95 to provide training for people with special needs.

Mr. Paice: A total of 81 contracts under youth training and training for work were issued by South Thames training and enterprise council in 1994–95. Nine of the YT contracts and three of the TfW contracts are exclusively for people with special training needs. However, all the 81 contracts encourage training providers to recruit trainees with special needs by paying them premium rates to do so.

SCOTLAND

Medical Negligence

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many cases of medical negligence were settled, and what was the total cost of damages awarded together with legal costs, in each year since 1990–91, by district;

(2) how many cases of medical negligence were settled, and what was the total cost of damages awarded together with legal costs, in each year since 1990–91, by region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In Scotland the regional and district functions of the NHS are administered by health boards. Given the small number of cases in certain health boards, it is not appropriate on the ground of confidentiality to publish the information in the form requested. The total amount of damages awarded, including legal costs, for all health boards and NHS trusts in Scotland for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94 is given.

Total amount of compensation (including legal costs)

Year	£
1990–91	949,603
1991–92	998,367
1992–93	1,091,489
1993–94	946,038

Agricultural Arbitration

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report,* column *575,* what plans he has to reassess the costs associated with agricultural arbitration cases; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The rate of remuneration for agricultural arbiters appointed by the Secretary of State is normally reviewed annually. The current hourly rate was set in August 1989 and stands at £42. There are no plans at present to adjust the rate.

Other costs are a matter for the arbiter and the parties concerned in the arbitration.

Prisoners

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, (1) if he will give the number of persons convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment in the last year for which figures are available and the number of those who were unmarried or single as defined in Department of Social Security regulations;

(2) how many single or unmarried prisoners served sentences between 26 weeks and two years as a result of the non-payment of fines, in the last year for which figures are available.

(3) if he will give the number of single or unmarried prisoners who were sentenced to 26 weeks but not more than two years in prison in Scotland, broken down by gender, in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: I have asked the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to reply.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 14 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your 3 Questions relating to the number of unmarried or single prisoners sentenced to a term of imprisonment in Scotland.

At present information on the marital status or household composition of prisoners is not collected centrally.

Contagious Epididymitis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the cases of contagious epididymitis in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro: No cases of contagious epididymitis have been recorded since the disease was made notifiable on 1 January 1993. Official records are not available for the period before that date.

Population Statistics

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* population, *(b)* number of employees, *(c)* number of employees per 1,000 population and *(d)* political party in control of each local authority; and if he will post the answer on his Department's pages on the Government's world wide web server, "www.open.gov.uk".

Mr. Kynoch: The following table list for each Scottish local authority *(a)* its population as at June 1993, *(b)* its total number of employees—full time plus part time—and *(c)* the number of employees per thousand population as at September 1994. These are the most up-to-date figures available. The information relating to the political party in control of each local authority is as at May 1994. I have today placed the information requested in the Library of the House. No firm decision has yet been taken by the Scottish Office on the use of the Internet.

Local authority	*Population (thousands)*	*Number of employees*	*Number of employees per thousand population*	*Political party in control*
Borders	105.3	3,979	37.8	[1]NOC
Berwickshire	19.4	127	6.6	Con.
Ettrick and Lauderdale	35.0	269	7.7	Ind.
Roxburgh	35.4	320	9.1	[1]NOC
Tweeddale	15.6	128	8.2	Ind.
Central	272.9	13,270	48.6	Lab.
Clackmannan	48.7	810	16.6	Lab.
Falkirk	142.6	1,700	11.9	[1]NOC
Stirling	81.6	1,319	16.2	Con.
Dumfries and Galloway	147.9	7,521	50.9	[1]NOC
Annandale and Eskdale	37.1	329	8.9	Lib. Dem.
Nithsdale	57.2	512	8.9	[1]NOC
Stewartry	23.7	197	8.3	Ind.
Wigtown	29.9	336	11.3	Ind.
Fife	351.2	16,760	47.7	Lab.
Dunfermline	130.2	1,614	12.4	Lab.
Kirkcaldy	148.6	1,756	11.8	Lab.
North East Fife	72.4	791	10.9	Lib. Dem.

Local authority	Population (thousands)	Number of employees	Number of employees per thousand population	Political party in control
Grampian	528.1	23,516	44.5	[1]NOC
City of Aberdeen	218.1	3,212	14.7	Lab.
Banff and Buchan	88.0	1,077	12.2	Ind.
Gordon	79.7	511	6.4	Ind.
Kincardine and Deeside	56.0	376	6.7	[1]NOC
Moray	86.3	911	10.6	[1]NOC
Highland	206.9	10,938	52.9	Ind.
Badenoch and Strathspey	11.1	86	7.7	Ind.
Caithness	26.4	234	8.9	Ind.
Inverness	63.9	608	9.5	[1]NOC
Lochaber	19.4	201	10.4	Ind.
Nairn	10.9	104	9.6	Ind.
Ross and Cromarty	50.3	565	11.2	Ind.
Skye and Lochalsh	11.9	114	9.6	Ind.
Sutherland	13.2	136	10.3	Ind.
Lothian	753.9	33,136	44.0	Lab.
East Lothian	85.6	1,054	12,3	Lab.
City of Edinburgh	441.6	5,566	12.6	[1]NOC
Midlothian	79.9	840	10.5	Lab.
West Lothian	146.7	1,456	9.9	[1]NOC
Strathclyde	2,286.8	104,208	45.6	Lab.
Argyll and Bute	63.3	840	13.3	Ind.
Bearsden and Milngavie	41.1	363	8.8	[1]NOC
Clydebank	46.6	592	12.7	Lab.
Clydesdale	58.3	711	12.2	[1]NOC
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	63.9	652	10.2	Lab.
Cumnock and Doon Valley	42.8	640	14.9	Lab.
Cunninghame	139.0	1,721	12.4	Lab.
Dumbarton	78.5	1,110	14.1	Lab.
East Kilbride	85.4	777	9.1	Lab.
Eastwood	60.9	323	5.3	Con.
City of Glasgow	681.5	12,945	19.0	Lab.
Hamilton	107.5	1,276	11.9	Lab.
Inverclyde	90.0	1,390	15.4	Lab.
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	81.0	1,032	12.7	[1]NOC
Kyle and Carrick	114.0	1,504	13.2	Con.
Monksland	102.6	1,518	14.8	Lab.
Motherwell	143.7	2,062	14.3	Lab.
Renfrew	201.2	2,686	13.4	Lab.
Strathkelvin	85.7	928	10.8	Lab.
Tayside	395.2	18,763	47.5	[1]NOC
Angus	97.4	965	9.9	SNP
City of Dundee	170.1	3,160	18.6	Lab.
Perth and Kinross	127.7	1,170	9.2	Con.
Orkney Islands	19.8	1,816	91.9	Ind.
Shetland Islands	22.8	2,745	120.2	Ind.
Western Isles	29.4	2,256	76.7	Ind.

[1] No party in overall control.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the political balance among justices of the peace in Dumbarton district; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table shows the political affiliations declared at the time of their appointment by the 57 justices of the peace for the Dumbarton commission area:

	Number
Conservative	20
Labour	21
Liberal Democrat	2
Independent	1
SNP	1
No particular views/none declared	12

JPs are appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland on the basis of nominations by local authorities for

ex-efficio appointment of elected members or on the recommendation of local advisory committees. JPs are not paid and are not compelled to declare their political views. The primary consideration in the appointment of a JP is the individual's personal suitability for the office.

NHS Trusts

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the external financing limit for each of the NHS trusts in Strathclyde.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

NHS Trust	*1994–95 (£000s)*
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare	2,113
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University	(2,459)
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services	(3,470)
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals	(759)
Inverclyde Royal	(1,089)
Law Hospital	1,317
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals	1,276
North Ayrshire and Arran	(364)
Renfrewshire Healthcare	(1,658)
Royal Alexandra Hospital	(1,818)
South Ayrshire Hospitals	850
Southern General Hospital	2,749
Stobhill	(1,520)
Victoria Infirmary	116
West Glasgow Hospitals University	3,052
Yorkhill	1,379

Note:
Those figures in brackets mean a negative limit. In essence, this means the trust's agreed capital expediture is less that its surplus.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the termination payments made to chief executives and general and senior managers in each NHS trust since its inception, indicating the size and number of individual payments.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* This information is not held centrally. Consideration is being given to the collection of data on termination payments in Scotland.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those NHS trusts which have received either *(a)* a loan from his Department or *(b)* an overdraft guarantee in each year since their creation, indicating (i) the amount involved and (ii) the reason for its allocation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is detailed in the tables:

Loans issued to NHS Trusts in Scotland

Trust name	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	500,00	3,530,000	2,466,000
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	—	1,533,000	—
Caithness and Sunderland NHS Trust	—	736,000	250,000
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	—	8,381,000	—
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	—	9,705,000	7,993,000
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	—	2,946,000	—
Royal Scottish National Hospital and Community NHS Trust	—	251,000	—
Southern General Hospitals NHS Trust	—	870,000	—
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	—	199,000	1,620,000
Yorkhill NHS Trust	—	1,120,000	1,700,000
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	400,000	—	—
Total	900,000	29,271,000	14,029,000

Overdraft guarantees issued to NHS Trusts in Scotland

Trust name	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Monklands and Bellshill NHS Trust	—	—	500,000
Law Hospital NHS Trust	—	—	250,000
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	—	—	500,000
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	—	—	750,000
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	—	300,000	300,000
Dundee Healthcare	—	—	750,000
Royal Scottish National Hospital NHS Trust[1]	—	—	250,000
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	—	—	1,000,000
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	—	200,000	200,000
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	—	—	500,000
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	—	200,000	—
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	—	—	1,000,000
Total	0	700,000	6,000,000

Note:
[1] This trust has now merged with Forth Valley Healthcare.

Trusts borrow principally to support their capital investment activities, but may also borrow to cover working capital requirements. All the borrowing detailed was within agreed limits. Trusts use overdrafts to cover very short-term working capital requirements. The purpose of overdraft guarantees is to reduce the cost of this borrowing from the trusts' bankers.

Remedial Care

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of children and young persons who are currently providing a substantial amount of remedial care to sick, elderly and disabled relatives in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The only information available comes from the 1991 census of population and relates to "dependants". A dependant is defined as a person aged zero to 15, or a person aged 16 to 18 who

has never married, is in full-time education and economically inactive, or a person with a limiting long-term illness whose economic activity is "permanently sick" or "retired". The table shows the number of households where all residents were dependants and the youngest was aged five to 18 and the oldest 19 or over. However, the figures give no indication as to whether the child(ren) in such households actually provide a substantial amount of care for the adult dependant(s). Households which contain a 16 to 18-year-old non-dependant and one or more older dependants are not included.

Number of households

Area	
Inverclyde	78
Strathclyde	2,241
Scotland	3,369

Dentists

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dentists in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole have ceased to treat NHS patients in each year since 1992.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In order to provide NHS dental services a dentist must join a health board dental list. The table shows the number of individual principal dentists on health board lists in each of the four health board areas within Strathclyde region and Scotland as a whole; the number of new list numbers allocated; and list numbers cancelled. Information for individual local government districts and regional areas is not available. It is not possible to identify from these figures the number of individual dentists who may have withdrawn from providing NHS treatment as dentists who surrender one number may hold other numbers.

Dentists and dental list numbers in Scotland

	Financial year					
	1992–1993			*1993–1994*		
Health board	*Dentists[1] on HB lists*	*Dental[2] list number commencements*	*Dental[2] list number withdrawals*	*Dentists[1] on HB lists*	*Dental[2] list number commencements*	*Dental[2] list number withdrawals*
Argyll and Clyde	211	41	16	205	28	30
Ayrshire and Arran	134	13	4	139	21	17
Greater Glasgow	417	63	19	428	79	70
Lanarkshire	189	18	14	193	22	16
Scotland—Total	1,745	310	132	1,792	339	306

[1] Total number of individual dentists who practised during the financial year in each of the health boards. Dentists contracted to more than one health board are counted more than once. The total number of dentists shown in Scotland is the number of individual dentists with no double-counting.

[2] A dentist may hold one or more list number. The table shows a count of the list numbers that commenced or were surrendered in the given period, not dentists. Dentists may surrender health board list number for a variety of reasons—including moving to another health board area, practice reorganisation, or retirement.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dentists in *(a)* Inverclyde and *(b)* Strathclyde have closed NHS registers to new patients in each year since 1992.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available. General dental practitioners on health board NHS dental lists are free to decide in each case whether to provide NHS treatment to an individual patient.

	Average gross weekly earnings	
	1990 £	*1994* £
Full-time male employees aged 16 to under 65	271.4	331.5
Full-time female employees aged 16 to under 60	184.4	242.0

Source:
Employment Department New Earnings Survey.

Earnings

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the average earnings per capita for *(a)* men aged 16 to 65 years and *(b)* women aged 16 to 60 years in full-time work for (i) 1990 and (ii) the latest available date.

Mr. Kynoch: The information in the table gives average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees in Scotland.

Prison Damage

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of repairing and renovating prisons as a result of damage caused by prisoners acting unlawfully in each year since 1976.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Scottish Prison Service under the chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman dated 14 February 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the cost of repairing and renovating prisons as a result of damage caused by prisoners' unlawful activity.

Such activity ranges from minor incidents such as breaking light bulbs to serious riot damage. Damage of a minor nature caused by vandalism would normally be repaired as part of the ongoing maintenance programme and the cost would not therefore be separately identified.

Information on the cost of prisoner damage from major incidents is not available prior to 1986 but the annual cost each year since then is set out in the table below.

Year	*Cost (£)*
1986–87	1,099,437
1987–88	258,926
1988–89	379,790
1989–90	12,805
1990–91	56,595
1991–92	71,556
1992–93	4,865
1993–94	210,413
1994–95	[1] 22,204

[1] Provisional.

Emergency and Accident Facilities

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospitals in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland have had emergency and accident facilities in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table:

Number of accident and emergency departments[1] in Scotland and Strathclyde; years ending 31 March

Year	*Scotland*	*[2]Strathclyde*
1985	102	31
1986	104	32
1987	106	32
1988	103	29
1989	101	29
1990	100	29
1991	100	29
1992	101	31
1993	101	29
1994	101	29

[1] Hospitals with at least 100 accident and emergency attendances in each year.

[2] Comprises Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire Health Board areas.

Prison Escapes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of escapes from prison in each year since 1983 stating *(a)* the prison concerned, *(b)* what offence the prisoner had been convicted for and *(c)* how long each prisoner remained at large.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 14 February 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about escapes from Scottish prisons.

Information on the number of escapes from 1983 from Scottish Prisons is included in Reports "Prisons in Scotland" and from 1991–92 "Scottish Prison Service".

The remaining information you requested relating to escapes is not held centrally. Details of the relevant Annual Reports are as follows:

Year	*Command number*	*Number of escapes*	
[1]1987	551	Appendix 4	Page 22
1988–89	998	Appendix 4	Page 21
1989–90	1,499	Appendix 4	Page 17
1990–91	1,663	Appendix 4	Page 10
1991–92	2,143	Appendix 9	—
1992–93	2,323	Appendix 9	Page 61
1993–94	515	Appendix 8	Page 59

[1] This report contains the number of escapes from 1983–87.

Gynaecology Units

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many gynaecology units have been provided in hospitals in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHSIS—numbers of hospitals with gynaecology units[1]; Scotland and Strathclyde; years ending 31 March

Year	*Scotland*	*[2]Strathclyde*
1985	46	19
1986	44	19
1987	45	20
1988	41	17
1989	41	16
1990	40	16
1991	37	16
1992	34	16
1993	32	13
1994	32	13

[1] Hospitals with two or more staffed gynaecology beds on average in the year.

[2] Comprises Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Greater Glasgow, Lanarkshire health board areas.

Schools (First Aid)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines are issued to regional and island authorities concerning the subject of first aid cover in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No guidelines are issued to regional and islands authorities specifically on first aid cover in schools. It is for authorities to make appropriate arrangements for first-aid cover, having regard to their responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and to the guidance in the revised approved code of practice published in February 1990 by the Health and Safety Commission in respect of the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981.

Fort William Rail Services

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Highlands and Islands Enterprise in respect of the future of Fort William sleeper services and the Fort William and Inverness motorail service; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Highlands and Islands Enterprise wrote to my officials about future rail service levels, and in particular sleeper services, in October 1994. My right hon. Friend and I will continue to take a close interest in this matter.

Objective 1 Funding

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications his Department received, and how many had been agreed, for objective 1 FEOGA funding by 30 September 1994.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Three applications for the first tranche of awards under the FEOGA processing and marketing grant scheme were received by my Department from applicants in the objective 1 region of the highlands and islands. All were received by 30 September 1994.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what considerations were taken into account by his Department when it was decided to extend the time limit for submission of applications for the first tranche of objective 1 FEOGA funding in 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The time limit of 30 September 1994 for submission of applications for the first tranche of FEOGA processing and marketing scheme awards was not extended.

Sexual Abuse

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each sheriffdom the number of cases of sexual abuse of children which have been reported to procurators fiscal since January 1990; how many of those were *(a)* referred to court under summary procedure, *(b)* referred to court under indictment and *(c)* cases in which the accused was found guilty; and what were the sentences given in cases when the accused was found guilty.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* It is not possible to identify all cases of child abuse proceeded against in Scottish courts because the Scottish Office Home and Health Department's classification of crimes and offences does not contain information on the victims of crime. The table sets out the available information for those sexual offences within the classification which, by definition, involve abuse of children.

Persons called to Sheriff Courts and those with a charge proved where the main charge was sexual abuse of children[1] in each Sheriffdom in Scotland, 1990–93

			Persons with charge proved by main penalty					
Sheriffdom	*Persons called to court*	*Persons with charge proved*	*Custody*	*Community service order*	*Probation*	*Fine*	*Caution or admonition*	*Other*
1990								
Grampian, Highland and Islands	63	54	10	5	10	22	4	3
Tayside, Central and Fife	88	74	17	6	18	26	6	1
Lothian and Borders	41	34	9	6	5	9	4	1
Glasgow and Strathkelvin	35	26	5	3	10	2	6	—
North Strathclyde	38	30	6	3	4	9	7	1
South Strathclyde and Dumfries and Galloway	42	35	6	7	6	9	7	—
Total	307	253	53	30	53	77	34	6
1991								
Grampian, Highland and Islands	57	51	8	3	12	20	6	2
Tayside, Central and Fife	78	65	11	8	17	18	9	2
Lothian and Borders	53	46	10	5	10	18	3	—
Glasgow and Strathkelvin	27	20	7	—	5	5	3	—
North Strathclyde	26	23	6	—	10	5	1	1
South Strathclyde and Dumfries and Galloway	38	33	8	1	7	7	10	—
Total	279	238	50	17	61	73	32	5
1992								
Grampian, Highland and Islands	45	42	10	4	9	11	6	2
Tayside, Central and Fife	60	51	8	5	21	7	10	—
Lothian and Borders	32	28	8	2	11	4	3	—
Glasgow and Strathkelvin	23	17	4	—	8	2	2	1
North Strathclyde	22	16	4	2	2	2	5	1
South Strathclyde and Dumfries and Galloway	36	29	8	3	11	—	6	1
Total	218	183	42	16	62	26	32	5

Persons called to Sheriff Courts and those with a charge proved where the main charge was sexual abuse of children[1] in each Sheriffdom in Scotland, 1990–93

Sheriffdom	Persons called to court	Persons with charge proved	Persons with charge proved by main penalty: Custody	Community service order	Probation	Fine	Caution or admonition	Other
1993								
Grampian, Highland and Islands	30	27	5	5	9	7	1	—
Tayside, Central and Fife	72	56	10	11	15	10	9	1
Lothian and Borders	34	28	6	2	12	7	1	—
Glasgow and Strathkelvin	29	26	7	—	10	6	3	—
North Strathclyde	18	15	5	1	7	—	1	1
South Strathclyde and Dumfries and Galloway	33	27	2	1	13	4	5	2
Total	216	179	35	20	66	34	20	4

1. Covers lewd and libidinous practices, defilement of girls under 16 and causing the seduction, prostitution etc. of a girl under 16.

Oncologists

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* clinical oncology consultants and *(b)* medical oncology consultants there are currently in Scotland; and how many of each are funded by charities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* There were 31 consultants in clinical oncology—radiotherapy—and 12 consultants in medical oncology in Scotland at 30 September 1994 the latest date for which information is available centrally.

The Pringle report "Management of Non-Surgical Cancer Services in Scotland", 1992, found that five posts in medical oncology were funded by the major cancer charities.

Fish Conservation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any proposals to amend section 4 of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 as recommended by "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas", Cm 2560, HMSO May 1994, paragraph 17.31, page 265; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The Government expect to issue shortly a consultation paper on the standards of fish factory ships.

Rate Appeals

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many rate revaluation appeals are currently outstanding for previous rate revaluations from the borders region.

Mr. Kynoch. *[holding answer 10 February 1995]:* None.

Newton Street Rail Tunnel, Greenock

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects repair work on the Newton street rail tunnel, Greenock, to be completed; if he will estimate when the passenger train service to Gourock will be resumed; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* Responsibility for repairs to the Newton street rail tunnel rests with Railtrack and Strathclyde regional council through the Strathclyde passenger transport executive. I understand, however, that the tunnel is expected to re-open for passenger traffic on 27 March 1995.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what proportion of SVQs achieved on Government training schemes was externally moderated by Scotvec;

(2) to what extent the attainment of SVQs on Government training schemes is dependent on internal assessment by the training provider.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* Questions about Scottish vocational qualifications achieved on Government training schemes are an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about how and to what extent the income of training providers on Government training schemes is dependent on the achievement of vocational qualifications.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* For youth and adult training programmes, between 25 and 40 per cent of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise funding to local enterprise companies is payable on the achievement of positive outcomes, including vocational qualifications. The funding of training providers is, however, a commercial contractual matter between them and the local enterprise companies.

Trust Hospitals (Press Officers)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* trust hospitals in Scotland have press officers; what is the cost incurred for their services; and if he will list these authorities and trust hospitals.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Water Schemes

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those private companies which have

expressed an interest in creating build own and operate water schemes in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 8 February 1995]:* Awarding of contracts for build own and operate water and sewerage schemes is a matter for regional and islands councils. My officials are, however, aware of considerable interest by many Scottish, United Kingdom and international companies in the construction, finance and other sectors.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many items he has received from Ian Greer in each week of the last month.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 8 February 1995]:* None.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* There were no such occasions on 26 January when officials from my Department met representatives of Ian Greer Associates.

Hunterston Terminal

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last received a report, as required under sub-paragraph (2) of the Clyde Port Authority (Hunterston Terminal) Order Confirmation Act 1973; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* The last report under the requirements of the Clyde Port Authority (Hunterston Terminal) Order Confirmation Act 1973 was received in 1976. However, throughout the subsequent period there has been monthly environmental monitoring at Hunterston by Clydeport plc, overseen by Cunninghame district council and, until imports of ore and coking coal ceased, Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the duty to make annual reports under sub-paragraph 10(2) of the Clyde Port Authority (Hunterston Terminal) Order Confirmation Act 1973 now applies to Clydeport Ltd. as owners of the terminal.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* This duty has passed to Clydeport plc as successors to the Clyde port authority.

Local Government and Housing Act 1989

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sections of the local Government and Housing Act 1989 have not been brought into force; for what reasons they have not been brought into force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 relates to England, Wales and Scotland but only the following sections, together with associated schedules, extend to Scotland:

Sections 1-32
Section 36(9)
Sections 140-145
Sections 150-153
Section 155
Section 157
Section 159
Section 161
Section 168
Sections 170-171
Sections 176-182
Section 185
Section 190
Section 192
Section 194(1) and (4)
Section 195

A number of these sections were commenced at royal assent and further commencements were made by commencement order under section 195(2). The following Scottish provisions have not been fully commenced:

Section 9 (Assistants for political groups)
Section 14 (Voting rights of members of certain committees)
Section 15 (Duty to allocate seats to political groups)
Section 16 (Duty to give effect to allocations)
Section 17 (Exceptions to and extensions of political balance requirements)

These sections are commenced only for the limited purpose of giving the Secretary of State regulation-making powers and substantive commencement. The making of regulations on these sections is still under consideration.

Section 140-commenced for the year 1990/91
Section 141-not commenced

Both these sections have been repealed and are replaced by section 10 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, which introduced new sections 7A and 7B to the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1975 making provision as to the setting of non-domestic rates.

Section 142
Section 145

These sections were commenced for the years 1990–91 onwards and are now obsolete following the abolition of the community charge.

Local Authority Members (Payments)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is reviewing the levels of payment which can be made by local authorities to the authorities' senior elected members.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* I refer the hon. member to the answer given by the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) to myself on 19 January, which covered allowances for all councillors.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of operations for breast cancer in 1993–94 was performed in hospitals where more than 150 such operations took place.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table:

Estimated number of discharges from Scottish NHS hospitals following an operation for breast cancer (year ending March 1994)

	Frequency	Per cent. of total cases
Female breast cancer		
Hospitals with frequency over 150 cases	3,743	71
Male breast cancer		
Hospitals with frequency over 150 cases	0	0

[1] Data for 1994 are provisional

HEALTH

Clinical Services (Market Testing)

14. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all clinical services that have been market tested since April 1991; and if she will list all those that will be market tested in 1994–95.

Mr. Sackville: Since April 1991, some 22 clinical and clinical support services have been market tested by one or more national health service units.

For 1994–95, we have been advised of local plans to market test some 20 clinical and clinical support services.

Prescription Charges

15. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to alter the cost of prescriptions.

Mr. Malone: Judgments have to be made each year about how finite health resources can best be targeted for maximum health gain so that year on year the national health service can continue to treat more patients than ever before. Prescription charges are but one aspect of these considerations. Any announcement will be made at the appropriate time.

Waiting Lists

16. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been waiting for more than 12 months for hospital treatment in Tameside and Glossop; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: At 30 September 1994, of a total waiting list of 1,800 at the Tameside and Glossop acute services national health service trust, only 11 people—0.6 per cent—had been waiting for more than a year as opposed to a national average of 5.8 per cent. None had been waiting for more than two years.

Smoking and Diet Targets

17. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the achievements of the targets on *(a)* smoking and *(b)* diet set out in the White Paper, "The Health of the Nation".

Mr. Sackville: Adult smoking prevalence, smoking in pregnancy and total cigarette consumption are continuing to fall. However smoking amongst 11 to 15-year-olds remains broadly unchanged.

Trends over time indicate that the proportion of energy intake derived from total fats has remained comparatively steady while that from saturated fatty acids has been declining.

In 1994 the Government published "Smoke Free for Health" and "Eat Well!" setting out action plans for achieving the smoking and diet targets respectively. Each document sets out the range of measures being taken.

General Practitioners

19. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes there have been in the number of general practitioners in the past decade; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The number of general medical practitioners in England rose from 23,640 at 1 October 1984 to 26,387 at 1 April 1994, an increase of 12 per cent.

Community Care

20. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she next expects to meet disability organisations to discuss the implications for disabled persons of the Government's community care policy.

Mr. Bowis: I meet disability organisations on a regular basis and discuss a range of issues including community care. I also meet the national user and carer group every six months. The group is made up of users from a wide range of community care client groups and carers and provides information on the progress being made with the community care reforms by local and health authorities from a user's and carer's perspective.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which local authorities have not submitted audited returns detailing community care spending in 1993–94.

Mr. Bowis: Audited returns detailing community care spending in 1993–94 for 29 local authorities have not yet been received by the Department. The outstanding returns are being followed up through the Audit Commission. A list of the relevant authorities is as shown.

List of local authorities whose audited returns have not yet been received by the Department of Health.

Metropolitan Authorities

Birmingham
Bolton
Bury
Coventry
Manchester
Rochdale
Sheffield
Wirral

County Councils

Berkshire
Cheshire
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Hereford and Worcester
Hertfordshire
North Yorkshire
Northamptonshire

Northumberland
Nottinghamshire
London Boroughs
Bexley
Brent
Ealing
Greenwich
Hackney
Haringey
Hillingdon
Islington
Kensington
Richmond Upon Thames
Sutton

Winter Illnesses

21. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the adequacy of NHS resources to cope with flu and flu-type illnesses this winter.

Mr. Sackville: Every year the Department runs an immunisation campaign aimed at people who are at particular risk of serious illness or death.

At the first sign of an impending epidemic, the Department alerts health authorities and trusts so that local contingency plans can be made.

The national health service reimburses general practitioners for the purchase of influenza vaccine. The cost of vaccine purchased during 1993–94 was about £27 to £28 million. Year-on-year increases in uptake are expected.

GP Fundholders

22. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population is currently served by a GP fundholder; and what proportion she expects this to be from April.

Mr. Malone: Some 35 per cent. of the population in England is currently served by a fundholding general practitioner. Final figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the amount of general practitioner fundholders' budgets which is being spent on medical services outside the NHS in the last 12 months.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary gave the hon. member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 9 December 1994 *Official Report,* column *401.*

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has given the health commissions in respect of those general practitioner fundholders who have overspent their budget.

Mr. Malone: Guidance on financial matters relevant to the general practice funding scheme was issued to health authorities in EL(91)36 and covered by the general practitioner fundholders' manual of accounts, 1993, copies of which are in the Library.

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

23. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what savings she expects to result from the abolition of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Malone: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) earlier today.

Community Care

24. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she next expects to meet the Association of Directors of Social Services to discuss resources available for the implementation of community care.

Mr. Bowis: We have regular contacts with the association and discuss a wide range of issues, including community care.

Accident and Emergency Departments

25. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital accident and emergency departments have closed since 1979, and since April 1991.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally.

27. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the number of *(a)* beds and *(b)* accident and emergency departments needed in London.

Mr. Sackville: District health authorities are responsible for purchasing hospital and other services for their resident populations, with general practitioner fundholders also purchasing some care for patients on their lists. In addition, districts are responsible for purchasing accident and emergency services for all-comers in their area, and for ensuring that, where major changes to the pattern of local services are proposed, full public consultation takes place.

Consultant Episodes (Private Patients)

26. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage increase in finished consultant episodes on private patients on NHS premises between 1990–91 and the latest available date.

Mr. Sackville: Between 1990–91 and 1992–93 there was an increase in private patient finished consultant episodes in the national health service in England of 21.8 per cent. Private patient episodes in the NHS are about one per cent. of total episodes.

Waiting Times, Essex

28. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the impact of Essex county council's budgetary overspend on social services on waiting times in Essex hospitals.

Mr. Malone: We have made no comprehensive assessment of this impact but recent visits to two otherwise well-run national health service trusts in Essex have made it clear to me that the county council's failure to make arrangements for discharge of patients is having a direct impact on hospitals' ability to admit new patients for elective surgery.

Teenage Pregnancies

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress in meeting

"The Health of the Nation" targets for teenage pregnancies.

Mr. Sackville: The year 1991 saw the first fall in 10 years in the under-16 conception rate. Provisional figures for 1992 are broadly in line with 1991. Concerted effort is necessary if a downward trend is to be maintained.

Minimal Access Surgery

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received regarding the dangers of minimal access surgery; and how many hospital re-admissions occurred in the last year as a result of the failure of that type of surgery.

Mr. Sackville: We have received a number of letters about the risks and benefits of minimal access surgery. Information on readmissions following minimal access surgery, or for any other reason, is not available centrally.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those public bodies for which she retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Sackville: The public bodies for which the Department has responsibility are listed in "Public Bodies 1994". None have been identified as suitable for privatisation. As part of the usual quinquennial review process, the Department critically examines both the need for its public bodies and whether control of their business should reside in the private sector.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to order NHS trusts to stop the practice of NHS trusts soliciting voluntary contributions from persons treated for road accident injuries.

Mr. Sackville: We have no evidence of national health service trusts seeking voluntary contributions. All health service hospitals, including those managed by NHS trusts, are empowered to collect the emergency treatment fee under section 158 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. The fee, which must be covered by motor vehicle insurance policies, is payable by vehicle users in respect of each person given immediate treatment or examination arising from a road traffic accident.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will advise all NHS trusts to finance a patients' friend and arrange that the postholder is accountable only to the appropriate community health council.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for individual trusts.

Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the Government's intentions in regard to the future of the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960.

Mr. Sackville: The Government accept the case for examining how far this legislation provides an adequate framework for professional self-regulation. We intend to commission an independent review of the current operations of the statutory bodies concerned. We shall bring forward for consultation specific proposals for change in the light of the outcome of that review.

Convictions (Disclosure)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to require all organisations tendering for NHS authority or trust business to declare convictions for fraud or professional misconduct.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Care Fees

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the number of people who have had to sell their homes to pay for fees in a residential or nursing home since 1990.

Mr. Bowis: The value of a resident's interest in a property can be taken into account only if he or she has moved permanently to residential accommodation. It must be ignored in certain circumstances, for example if the resident's spouse still lives in it. If it does have to be taken into account, the local authority may put a charge on the property which is not recovered until the property is eventually sold.

Information about the number of properties actually sold in order to meet charges for residential accommodation is not available centrally.

Directors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if chairmen and non-executive directors of health authorities and trusts are informed on appointment of the number of hours per week or month that they would normally be expected to devote to their duties.

Mr. Malone: The matter of the number of hours per week or month which chairmen and non-executive directors of health authorities and national health service trusts will be expected to devote to their duties forms part of a comprehensive discussion between the appropriate regional health authority and prospective nominees before their names are submitted to Ministers, or, in the case of appointments made by regional health authorities, before formal appointment is made.

Club 18-30

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the effect of the current poster advertising campaign of Club 18-30 on "The Health of the Nation" targets for teenage pregnancies and sexual health; and what plans she has to make representations to those responsible for these posters.

Mr. Sackville: None. Club 18-30 is a commercial enterprise. It would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene in the company's choice of advertising material. Complaints about the nature or content are a matter for the Advertising Standards Authority.

Consultants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has issued since the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 on the limitation of NHS consultants' private work sessions, or private

work income; and on what occasions such guidance has later been withdrawn or amended.

Mr. Malone: None.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has issued to NHS consultants on doing private work at the same time as their NHS *(a)* out-patients work, *(a)* surgeries, *(c)* ward rounds and *(d)* other clinical sessions.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 2 February, columns *837-38.*

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department has issued on the maximum time NHS consultants with maximum part-time contracts can spend working in the private sector during their normal working week.

Mr. Malone: Guidance is contained in the national terms and conditions of service for national health service consultants.

Specialties

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to increase the numbers of doctors specialising in neurology and anaesthesiology.

Mr. Malone: Considerable attention is given to medical work force planning. The aim is to provide an adequate supply of appropriately-trained doctors in each specialty. The agreed policy of achieving a balance, introduced in 1987, is overseen by the Advisory Group on Medical Education, Training and Staffing. This policy encourages consultant expansion of at least 2 per cent. per year. Consultant posts are also funded under the new deal and the part-time consultant scheme.

However, the establishment of new consultant posts is a matter for local employing authorities and they should have regard to competing priorities and available resources.

For doctors in higher specialist training, senior registrar and career registrar quotas set by the Joint Planning Advisory Committee are still in operation. It is necessary to ensure an appropriate supply of doctors, and numbers of higher specialist trainees in any specialty must therefore depend on the best available predictions of future consultant opportunities in that specialty.

Liquid Fuels

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what health risks have been identified from the emissions from burning secondary liquid fuel.

Mr. Sackville: The likely health effects of emissions from the burning of fuel cannot be determined unless the specific components of the fuel, and the method and temperature of its combustion, are known.

Doncaster Royal Infirmary Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the names, occupations and qualifications of all persons nominated for appointment as chairman to the Doncaster Royal Infirmary trust; what were the names of those shortlisted; who shortlisted them; and who made the final selection.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *789.* Mr. Raymond Tonkinson, chairman of the Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu Hospital national health service trust, is a company chief executive.

Operation Statistics

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to collect statistics on the number of operations purchased by the private sector, together with their cost.

Mr. Sackville: No.

Dermatology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her policy in relation to dermatology; and what response she has made to the submissions by Professor Rona Mackie of Glasgow university, on behalf of the all-party group on the skin.

Mr. Sackville: The provision of dermatology services and the manner in which they are delivered is a matter for health authorities and hospital and community trusts in the light of available resources and local needs and priorities.

I attended a meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on skin on 20 October 1994 when the hon. Member for Linlithgow mentioned Professor Mackie's work. I am not aware of any submissions from Professor Mackie on behalf of the all-party group on skin. We will, of course, consider carefully any such representation.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards exist to ensure proper standards of domiciliary care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The social services inspectorate published guidelines "Developing Quality Standards for Home Support Services" in October 1993, copies of which are available in the Library. A code of practice is produced by the United Kingdom Home Care Association, by which all its members are expected to abide, and the Joint Advisory Group of Domiciliary Care Associations produced a document "A Framework for the Development of Standards for the Delivery of Domiciliary Care" last July. Local authorities who purchase domiciliary care from independent providers are able to include specific standards in their contract specifications, and should monitor compliance with them.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people received domiciliary care in 1993–94; and how many are estimated to need domiciliary care in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98.

Mr. Bowis: In a sample week in September 1993, there were an estimated total of 512,600 households in England receiving home help or home care.

Estimates are not made for future years.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to monitor the number of independent sector agencies providing domiciliary care.

Mr. Bowis: None.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are undertaken to monitor the suitability of domiciliary care provided to individuals who purchase such care directly from private agencies or individuals.

Mr. Bowis: Domiciliary care agencies are subject to the provisions of the Employment Agencies Act 1973.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the use of synthetic alternatives to premarin and prempak-C in hormone replacement therapy.

Mr. Sackville: There are many other forms of hormone replacement therapy available, all of which are synthetic and all of which can be prescribed under the national health service. It is for the woman and her doctor to decide which preparation is most suitable for her needs.

London Chest Hospital

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to close the London chest hospital;

(2) what plans she has for the future of the London chest hospital under "Making London Better".

Mr. Malone: "Making London Better" reported that North East Thames regional health authority would initiate public consultation on proposals to merge the management of the London chest hospital with that of the Royal London hospital. Following public consultation, the Royal Hospitals trust was established incorporating the London chest hospital, the Royal London hospital and St. Bartholomew's hospital.

East London and the City health authority is currently consulting on proposals to consolidate the trust's services at the Royal London hospital, Whitechapel. No decisions will be taken until all the responses to public consultation have been fully considered.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the research rating of the London chest hospital in relation to other hospitals.

Mr. Malone: The London chest hospital was included in the 1993 review of the research and development taking place in the London postgraduate special health authorities, as part of the Royal Brompton National Heart and Lung hospitals SHA. The Review Advisory Committee's report did not give a separate rating for the London chest hospital.

Closures

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has given in relation to district health authorities taking account of local opinion when deciding to close services.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 8 February, *Official Report*, column 277.

Glaucoma and Diabetic Eye Disease

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS of treating glaucoma and diabetic eye disease in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time *(a)* to see a consultant privately and *(b)* to see a consultant in the NHS in each of the last five years (i) generally and (ii) by specialty where such figures are available.

Mr. Malone: We do not collect information on waiting times for patients who see consultants in the private sector. Provisional information on outpatient waiting times for patients seen in the national health service is only available for the quarter ending 30 September 1994 and is contained in statistical bulletin 95/3, copies of which are available in the Library. This shows how long patients seen over the quarter had to wait following written referral by a general practitioner within specified time bands but does not give average waiting times.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the current average waiting times for operations *(a)* in the NHS and *(b)* privately.

Mr. Malone: In 1992–93, the latest year for which information on national health service operations is available, the average waiting times for patients admitted from waiting lists or who had booked admissions was just over three months. We do not collect information on waiting times in the private sector.

Opthamology

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the cost to the NHS in treating eye diseases and *(b)* the total budget for ophthalmology in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: District health authorities are funded through their general allocations for purchasing ophthalmology services.

Expenditure by health authorities and national health service trusts on opthamology is shown in the table.

Year	*Expenditure £000 (cash)*
1989–90	159,804
1990–91	177,976
1991–92	293,825
1992–93	308,715
1993–94	328,953

Note:
Figures after 1991–92 are not directly comparable with earlier years due to a change in accounting policy and practice with the introduction of the internal market.

Source:
Annual financial returns of district, regional and special health authorities—1989–90 to 1993–94—and NHS trusts—1991–92 to 1993–94.

Consultants

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional payments are made to NHS consultants to perform operations on NHS patients privately *(a)* in NHS hospitals and *(b)* in private hospitals.

Mr. Malone: Such payments are a matter for the individuals concerned.

Cataract Operations

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cataract operations were performed in each of the last five years; and what was the average cost of a cataract operation in England.

Mr. Sackville: The number of cataract operations performed in the last five years up to and including 1992–93 are shown in the table.

Year	*Thousands*
1988–89	82.3
1989–90	92.2
1990–91	97.9
1991–92	111.7
1992–93	118.6

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics.

Note:

Information on the average cost of cataract operations is not available centrally.

Closures, Hertfordshire

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what weight will be given to the views of Hertfordshire general practitioners on the closure of two Hertfordshire accident and emergency departments; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what is her policy in respect of closures of accident and emergency units in Hertfordshire for the next five years; and if she will make a statement;

(3) if she will make a statement on the proposed closure of two accident and emergency units in Hertfordshire, and the plans she has for hospital services in Hertfordshire.

Mr. Sackville: Hertfordshire health agency recently initiated a period of public debate on possible future patterns of health services, including accident and emergency services, in the county. The right hon. Member may wish to contact Ms Jenny Griffiths, chief executive of Hertfordshire health agency, for information on the conclusions that have been reached following this period of public discussion.

Supplementary Medicine Review

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will be the chairman of the review body for the review of the professions supplementary to the Medicine Act 1960; and when she expects to introduce measures for the protection of fully qualified physiotherapists.

Mr. Sackville: We intend to commission an independent review to examine the current operations of the statutory bodies concerned. The study team has yet to be decided. The report, to be produced within a year, should provide an authoritative and objective base from which to carry out a more comprehensive consultation on future arrangements.

St. Christopher Nursing Home

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will request a report from the chair of the Hertfordshire health authority on its investigation into the number of deaths at Takare plc St Christopher nursing home; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Investigations into deaths in any nursing home are a matter for the relevant health authority.

Hertfordshire Health Agency

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the members of the Hertfordshire health agency, the chief executive, their qualifications and a list of their outside interests.

Mr. Malone: The Hertfordshire health agency is an agency of the three Hertfordshire district health authorities—East and North Herts, South West Herts and North West Herts—and Hertfordshire family health services authority. Control of the agency rests with the four boards of the authorities. The chief executive is Ms Jenny Griffiths. The right hon. Member may wish to contact Ms Griffiths for any additional information.

Out-of-hours Service

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average cost of the general practitioner out-of-hours service per general practitioner in each of the last five years.

Mr. Malone: The cost of general practitioners' out-of-hours services is not separately identifiable within total GP remuneration.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the model of general practitioner out-of-hours services to be promoted by her Department.

Mr. Malone: The Department promotes general practitioner out of hours services which provide high-quality care for patients and manage effectively GP work load. It is for individual GPs to decide the exact model which best suits local needs.

Authority Funding

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list *(a)* real funding and *(b)* the preferred funding per head of population for each (i) district health authority and (ii) family health services authority in (1) 1992–93, (2) 1993–94, (3) 1994–95, (4) 1995–96 and (5) 1996–97.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally.

Population Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the average population by family health services authority from *(a)* census data and *(b)* general practitioner list size data.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 10 January, columns *129-31.*

Takare plc Nursing Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will investigate the arrangements made by district health authorities in respect of the registration of Takare plc Nursing Homes; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The registration and inspection of nursing homes is wholly delegated to health authorities.

Junior Doctors

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of operations was performed by junior doctors and what percentage by consultants in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally.

Consultation

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on the extent to which health authorities and health commissioning agencies should take account of the views of the local population and general practitioners.

Mr. Malone: Health authorities are expected to consult widely with their local populations, general practitioners and other interested agencies in establishing local priorities, developing annual purchasing plans and longer term strategies. Recent guidance—EL(94)79—sets out an enhanced role for GPs working in partnership with health authorities in developing local health strategies. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

General Practitioners (Night Visits)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many night visits were carried out by general practitioners in each of the last five years; and how many night visit claims were submitted by general practitioners in each of the last five years.

Mr. Malone: The table shows the number of night visits in each of the last five years, calculated from information held by the Department of Health on the number of night visit fee claims by general practitioners.

Financial year	*Number of visits*
1993–94	1,832,456
1992–93	1,585,999
1991–92	1,712,245
1990–91	1,586,960
1989–90	936,148

Note:
In 1989–90, night visit fees were payable for the period from 11 pm to 7 am. From 1990–91, this period was extended to cover 10 pm to 8 am.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she proposes to issue on the maximum target time before a patient needing emergency care from a general practitioner, should be initially assessed by that general practitioner.

Mr. Malone: None. All general practitioners are bound by their terms of service. It is for GPs to exercise their professional judgment, within these terms of service, as to when a patient needs to be seen.

Deprivation

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the average deprivation score for each district health authority.

Mr. Malone: Information will be placed in the Library showing figures for district health authorities calculated using the same method as the Department of the Environment's ward index of local conditions.

Bed Closures, London

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the number of *(a)* acute bed closures and *(b)* long-stay bed closures in London since the publication of the Tomlinson report.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* This information is not available centrally. However, analysis of published data on available beds suggests that the bed reductions in inner London as defined by Tomlinson, including special health authorities, between 1990–91 and 1993–94 were:

1,399 for acute beds and
900 for long-stay beds.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 15 February 1995

HEALTH

Community Care

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by her Department on community care for the mentally ill broken down by local authority in the last financial year; and what is the proportion of the resources allocated to community care spent on mental health patients.

Mr. Bowis: Figures for the last financial year are not yet available.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the results of GP fundholding in *(a)* the Fylde coast area and *(b)* Lancashire.

Mr. Malone: Fundholding general practitioners are at the leading edge of purchasing developments and are at the forefront of quality improvements for patients, including the creation of outreach clinics for such services as diabetes, physiotherapy, ophthalmology and vasectomy. The improvements made by general practitioner fundholders often have the effect of improving the quality of care for all patients.

Information on specific localities is not available centrally. For information about Lancashire, the hon. Member should write to Sir Donald Wilson, the chairman of the North West regional health authority.

NHS Chief Executive

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what limitations have been placed on the NHS chief executive in his dealings with the media.

Mr. Sackville: In accordance with the normal rules for civil servants, the national health service chief executive is permitted, under ministerial authority, to have contact with the media in order, inter alia, to explain Government policy and the performance of the NHS.

NHS Accounts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will amend the form of NHS authorities' and trusts' annual accounts to show the number of non-executive directors who decline to accept emoluments or salaries.

Mr. Sackville: No.

Child Protection Registers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each local authority the percentage annual decrease or increase of children placed on protection registers in England for the latest available year; and what were the figures for *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Mr. Bowis: Information for the year ending 31 March 1994 will be placed in the Library. The earliest reliable annual comparisons available centrally for each local authority are for the year ending 31 March 1990.

District Nursing Services

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to ensure that district nursing services are maintained at existing levels under the national health service reforms.

Mr. Sackville: Each locality will have different health needs and these will be reflected in the work of district nurses and other health professionals. It is for those who employ district nurses to assess continually and review their work with them.

Business Plans

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the value of business plans estimated under the public financial initiative broken down by region;

(2) what is the total value of the public financial initiative business plans currently being assessed by the NHS executive.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health does not have a public financial initiative.

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will cancel all payments to chairmen and non-executive directors other than the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses and make available the savings for the provision of intensive care beds.

Mr. Malone: No.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the occasions during the last five years when her Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Sackville: There have been no occasions when the Department or agencies have had to resort to legal action with consultancy firms over the last five years.

Acute Psychiatric Wards

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health *(a)* how many acute psychiatric wards there are, *(b)* how many beds are in each acute psychiatric ward, *(c)* on average what percentage of beds are vacant on those wards and *(d)* on average what percentage of patients are legally detained on those wards in respect of (i) the north-west regional office, (ii) the west midlands regional office, (iii) the south Thames regional office and (iv) the north Thames regional office of the NHS executive.

Mr. Bowis: The information is not available centrally.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information sought can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. But there is one readily identifiable case which is subject to legal action and for that reason no further details can be given.

The Lord Chancellor has three executive agencies, HM Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office. As the question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executives of the agencies are best placed to provide an answer, I have accordingly asked the chief executives to reply direct.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 10 February 1995:

Parliamentary Question—Legal Action by HM Land Registry Against Consultancy Firms

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning the occasions during the last five years when HM Land Registry has taken legal action against a consultancy firm.

I can reply that there have been no such occasions.

Letter from Julia Lomas to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 10 February 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary, of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your parliamentary question, listed on 9 February 1995 regarding legal action taken against consultancy firms over the last five years.

Over the last five years the Public Trust Office has instructed three firms of consultants and has not taken legal action against any of these firms.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 14 February 1995:

Parliamentary Question—Legal Action Against Consultancy Firms

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about legal action taken against consultancy firms.

The Public Record Office has not taken any legal action against a consultancy firm during the last five years.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *376*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In the last year, 244 new appointments were made to the public bodies for which the Lord Chancellor has ministerial responsibility. This does not include re-appointments or judicial appointments.

Pre-trial Interviews

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many pre-trial interviews in line with the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and the memorandum of good practice have been made since September 1993; how many applications to submit a pre-recorded video taped interview with a child witness have been made since this date; and how many have been refused as evidence and on what basis.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department does not collect data about numbers of pre-trial interviews. Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost and its accuracy could not be guaranteed as many interviews do not result in criminal proceedings. Between 30 September 1993 and 31 December 1994, 725 applications were made to submit pre-recorded video taped evidence. Of these, 41 applications were refused. The reasons for the refusals are not recorded.

Child Support Agreements

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those countries which have child support systems which as a result of agreements or treaties with the United Kingdom are able to collect child support and maintenance money in the United Kingdom in respect of *(a)* their own nationals, *(b)* United Kingdom nationals and *(c)* nationals of third party countries.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In accordance with the relevant international conventions and agreements to which the United Kingdom is a party, the following overseas countries have made arrangements with the United Kingdom for the reciprocal enforcement of maintenance payments through our courts. The nationality of the respondent is not relevant to the operation of the arrangements.

Countries

Algeria, Anguilla, Antigua*, Austria, Australia, Bahamas*, Barbados, Belize*, Belgium, Bermuda, Bosnia and Herzagovena, Botswana*, Brazil, British Solomon Islands Protectorate*, Brunei*, Canada, Cayman Islands*, Central African Republic, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus*, Denmark, Dominica*, Ecuador, Falkland Islands, Fiji, Finland, France, Gambia*, Germany, Ghana, Gibraltar, Greece, Grenada*, Guatemala, Guyana*, Guernsey*, Haiti, Holy See, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Isle of Man, Israel, Italy, Jamaica*, Jersey*, Kenya, Lesotho*, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malawi*, Malaysia*, Malta, Mauritius*, Monaco, Montserrat*, Morocco, Naura, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria*, Norfolk Island, Norway, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, St. Christopher and Nevis*, St. Helena, St. Lucia*, St. Vincent*, Serbia and Montenegro, Seychelles*, Sierra Leone*, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Swaziland*, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, except Zanzibar, Trinidad and Tobago*, Tunisia, Turkey, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uganda*, United States, Upper Volta, Virgin Islands*, Zambia*, Zanizibar*, Zimbabwe.

Note 1: Asterisked countries do not have reciprocal enforcement arrangements with Scotland.

Note 2: Reciprocal enforcement arrangements have not necessarily been made with all the states or territories of the countries listed.

Civil Cases (Appeals)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the number and proportion of *(a)* all civil cases in which the appeals heard by the Court of Appeal were unsuccessful, *(b)* all applications for leave to appeal to the House of Lords refused by the Court of Appeal, *(c)* all petitions to the House of Lords for leave to appeal that were

successful and *(d)* hearings in the House of Lords which overturned the ruling of the Court of Appeal after a successful petition.

Mr. John. M. Taylor: The latest available figures show that in the 12 months ending 30 September 1994, 1,102 or 71 per cent. of the 1,546 civil appeals disposed of by the Court of Appeal were unsuccessful. The information requested regarding applications for leave to appeal to the House of Lords refused by the Court of Appeal is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. During 1994, of the 167 petitions to the House of Lords for leave to appeal from the civil division of the Court of Appeal, 46 or 28 per cent. were allowed. Of the 25 civil appeals from the Court of Appeal allowed by the House of Lords during 1994, including one appeal allowed in part, 17 or 68 per cent. had been granted leave by the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fur Trade

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many fur pelts were *(a)* imported and *(b)* exported in each year since 1989; and what was their value.

Mr. Needham: The available information is published by the Central Statistical Office in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", available in the Library of the House. Fur pelts are classified to group 212 of the standard international trade classification.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many retail businesses were involved in the fur trade in each of the last five years.

Mr. Eggar: The Government do not collect data on the number of retailers involved in the fur trade.

Nuclear Levy

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the nuclear levy has raised for each year since it was introduced.

Mr. Eggar: The fossil fuel levy has raised the following amounts:

Year	*£ Million*
1990–91	1,175
1991–92	1,324
1992–93	1,348
1993–94	1,233

Source:
Office of Electricity Regulation.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the nuclear levy currently adds to average household fuel bills.

Mr. Eggar: The fossil fuel levy is charged to licensed electricity suppliers, at the rate of 10 per cent. of the value, net of VAT, of leviable electricity supplied. The levy has made transparent the nuclear costs that it finances; but because these costs were already being met, electricity prices did not have to increase when the levy was introduced in 1990.

Supply Network Programme

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to announce final details of the regional supply network programme.

Mr. Eggar: An announcement will be made shortly.

Insurance Cover (Mortgages)

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to encourage insurers to standardise definitions of unemployment and disability in respect of private mortgage protection policies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No. This is an operational matter for individual companies in which the Government has no powers to intervene. The Association of British Insurers has said that insurers are guided by an individual's welfare benefit entitlement or by the legislation on redundancy in settling such claims. During their consultation on the proposed changes the Department of Social Security will discuss with insurers how best to ensure that the interface between public and private provision works well.

Iraq (Sanctions)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the United Kingdom treated individuals and organisations listed by the United States Treasury in April 1991 as sanctions breakers or links with Iraqi procurement networks as persons in Iraq or Kuwait within the terms of the Iraq and Kuwait United Nations Sanctions Order 1990.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Some individuals and organisations listed by the United States Treasury are regarded as being persons in Iraq or Kuwait for the purposes of the Iraq and Kuwait United Nations Sanctions Order 1990.

Broadly, this would include any body constituted or incorporated under the law of Iraq and any body carrying on business, whether within Iraq or not, which is controlled by persons or bodies resident in Iraq or constituted or incorporated under the law of Iraq.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the United Kingdom companies which have been granted export licences to Iraq since sanctions began.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* It has been the practice of successive administrations not to disclose such information unless the public interest outweighs the requirements of confidentiality.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the products that have been exported to Iraq since sanctions began.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* To identify and list every product which has been exported to Iraq since sanctions began would incur disproportionate cost. Any export to Iraq has to either be notified to, or authorised by, the United Nations Sanctions Committee in New York. Exports which leave the territory of the United Kingdom will also require a export licence from my Department. Typical exports to Iraq include: foodstuffs, medical items, clothing and other items for essential civilian needs.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library information showing if each item listed in schedules 1, 2 and 3 of annexe A in his discussion document on the chemical weapons treaty is presently a licensable export and on what date the requirement to be licensed was imposed.

Mr. Ian Taylor: This information has today been placed in the Library of the House.

Food Competition

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to encourage genuine competition between different food manufacturers and stop the creation of cartels.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The competition legislation provides for the Director General of Fair Trading, Sir Bryan Carsberg, to consider and, if appropriate, investigate allegations of cartelistic behaviour, anti-competitive practices and abuse of market power. His remit covers all commercial activities in the United Kingdom including the food manufacturing sector. Sir Bryan has recently announced a new initiative against cartels. Should the hon. Member have any specific cases in mind he should write to him directly.

European Satellite System

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he proposes to take to involve United Kingdom manufacturers of navigation systems in the European Space Agency programme now being set up in co-operation with Eurocontrol and the European Commission to propose a European global navigation satellite system.

Mr. Ian Taylor: After consultation with officials from the Department of Trade and Industry and the European Space Agency, the Department of Transport has agreed to provide a Government financial contribution to the proposed European collaborative global navigation satellite system.

This Government funding will allow industry to play an active role in the proposed programme. I am also pleased to report that industry has agreed to provide support to the programme from its own resources.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the Secretary of State for Transport to discuss the operational and industrial importance to the United Kingdom of involvement in the steps being taken by Eurocontrol, the European Commission and the European Space Agency to establish a European global navigation satellite system.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Officials of the two Departments have been working closely for a number of months on UK participation in the European global navigation satellite system. I hope to meet my noble Friend Viscount Goschen, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, to discuss satellite navigation issues in the near future.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance the Government will give to companies providing products and support services to the fishing industry, to help them diversify.

Mr. Eggar: The Government provide a wide range of business support services for these companies and others. There is focused support available in assisted areas, and the full range of services is available to assist diversification in north Devon. Details can be obtained from the Government office for the south-west.

Assistance is also available from the European structural funds: north Devon is covered by the objective 5(b) single programming document which will make grants towards a variety of economic measures including many business support activities. Diversification is an important factor, and support will be provided for, among other things, product and process development and for increasing the level and capacity for research and development.

Information Super-highway

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many miles of co-axial cable have been laid towards the information super-highway infrastructure; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many miles of optical fibre cable have been laid towards the information super-highway infrastructure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Department does not hold details of how many miles of optical fibre and coaxial cable have been laid. Figures from industry sources, however, point to the rapid installation of new or upgraded communications networks. Investment in these new networks has been spurred by the Government's liberalisation of the telecommunications sector.

Optical fibre is the dominant technology for trunk networks and inter-exchange traffic, and increasingly for large business customers. BT, for example, has more than 1.4 million miles of optical fibre in its network. The cable industry is installing 260,000 miles of fibre per annum. Together with the networks being installed by other telecommunications operators such as Mercury, Energis, COLT, and MFS, the United Kingdom is estimated to have more than 2 million miles of fibre.

Coaxial copper cable, which is the medium normally used by the cable industry in the final connection to residential customers, is being installed at a rate of 60,000 miles per annum. Compression techniques can materially increase the amount of traffic which can be sent over these cables. The information super-highway embraces both fibre and coaxial cable and applications are being developed accordingly.

Nuclear Review

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what timetable he presently envisages for decisions and announcements on matters relating to the nuclear review.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 19 October 1994, *Official Report*, column 239.

Iraq (Visits)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give the names of the companies which have been given a licence to communicate with and visit Iraq in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995, in each case giving the date the licence was granted.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* It has been the practice of successive administrations not to disclose such information unless the public interest outweighs the requirements of confidentiality.

TREASURY

Tax Relief

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer of 7 December to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), *Official Report*, column *263*, for the year 1995–96 to provide a list of the reliefs categorised under the heading (c) other reliefs.

Sir George Young: Estimated full-year yields at 1995–96 income levels based on a projection of the 1992–93 survey of personal incomes and other survey data in line with the assumptions in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96" are given in the table. The figures do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such changes, and show the yield from restructuring each allowance or relief separately. If two or more were restricted, the total yield would be greater than the sum of individual figures. Most of the amount shown within heading (c) is relief for charitable covenants, for donations under the giftaid scheme, for allowable interest on loans to acquire company shares and relief for class 4 national insurance contributions.

	Restriction to			
	Basic rate		*20p*	
Effect of restricting	*Yield £ million*	*Numbers affected millions*	*Yield £ million*	*Numbers affected millions*
(a) Personal allowances	1,600	3.5	5,900	26.5
(b) Relief for pension contributions	730	2.0	1,410	11.6
(c) Other reliefs	150	0.7	[1]n/a	n/a

[1] Information on reliefs given at source is not available from the survey of personal incomes so it is not possible to estimate the effect of restricting other reliefs to 20 per cent.

Tobacco Duty

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue from tobacco duty in each year since 1992.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information is as follows:

Tobacco revenue	*£ billion*
1992–93	6.0
1993–94	6.5
1994–95[1]	6.8

[1] Forecast.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the receipts from value added tax in each year since 1993; and what are the forecast receipts of value added tax for the year 1995–96.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information is as follows:

VAT receipts	*£ billion*
1993–94	38.9
1994–95[1]	43.3
1995–96[1]	48.1

[1] Forecast.

Alcohol Duty

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue from alcohol duty in each year since 1992.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information is as follows:

Alcohol revenue	*£ billion*
1992–93	5.1
1993–94	5.2
1994–95[1]	5.4

[1] Forecast.

Capitalisation Values

Mr. Olner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current capitalisation values of *(a)* British Telecom, *(b)* British Steel, *(c)* British Gas, *(d)* the privatised water industry, *(e)* the privatised electricity industry, including the distribution element—Powergen and National Power and *(f)* the coal industry.

Sir George Young: The capitalisations of BT, British Steel, British Gas, the privatised water and sewerage companies and the privatised electricity companies are shown in the table. They reflect the market's assessment of the increased value achieved by the companies concerned since their flotation. The capitalisation of the privatised coal industry cannot be readily determined.

Capitalisation of Privatised industries

Company(ies)	*[1]Capitalisation (£ billion)*
BT	24.6
British Steel	3.1
British Gas	13.5
Water and sewerage companies (10 companies)	11.8
Electricity companies[2] (17 companies)	30.4

[1] As at close of business, 10 February 1995.[2] Excludes the four generating companies in Northern Ireland which are not listed companies.

Public Bodies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to reduce the payment of salaries to members of non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Aitken: Provision for the remuneration of chairmen and members of non-departmental public bodies is generally set out in the founding legislation of those statutory bodies. The Government's policy is to pay the appropriate remuneration as determined by Ministers with the consent of the Treasury.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Credit Unions

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *67*, when the consultation document on credit unions is to be issued; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury is currently preparing a consultation document on the proposed amendments to the Credit Unions Act 1979. It will be issued shortly. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Monetary Union

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to date of the Treasury's preparation on economic convergence in the European Union with a view to the possible introduction of a common currency and monetary union.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* It is not possible separately to cost work within the Treasury on economic convergence within the EU. The Government's macro-economic policies are directed toward achieving sound public finances and permanently low inflation. These objectives are shared by other EU member states, and are also key elements of the convergence criteria set out in the Maastricht treaty.

TRANSPORT

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Norris: None.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *716*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Norris: Eighty-two.

Network SouthEast

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list *(a)* the number of trains and *(b)* the percentage of trains, which arrived more than five minutes late during peak hours on each of the Network SouthEast divisions in each four-week period during (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1994;

(2) if he will list *(a)* the number of trains cancelled and *(b)* the percentage of trains cancelled on each of the Network SouthEast divisions in each four-week period during (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1994.

Mr. Watts: I have written to the hon. Member and placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

Waste Containers

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department or consultants to his Department have made of the suitability of the use of *(a)* elastomer rather than metallic seals and *(b)* austenitic steel rather than other metallic containment in the transport flasks used for the forthcoming shipment of high-level waste to Japan.

Mr. Norris: The Department judges the suitability of both seal materials and materials of construction of the containment system as a part of the design assessment process, against the stringent leaktightness criteria required by the International Atomic Energy Agency's regulations for the safe transport of radioactive material, for each application for design approval which it is required to undertake.

The forthcoming shipment of high-level waste to Japan will use a French design of package, assessed to the same standards by the competent authority of France.

Rail Service Withdrawals

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which rail services have been withdrawn since April 1992.

Mr. Watts: British Rail has discretion to vary services and many changes are made each year. Information on such changes could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Complete closure of a line or station is subject to statutory closures procedures.

Since April 1992 services have been completely withdrawn from the following stations:

Primrose Hill
Ditton
Tilbury Riverside
Westbourne Park
Brocklesby
Elsham
Llangelynin
Dover Western Docks

Rail Track Access Charges

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the rail track access charges in *(a)* each EU country, *(b)* each Scandinavian country, *(c)* the USA and *(d)* Japan.

Mr. Watts: These countries have different railway structures which would make it difficult to identify actual access charges and make accurate comparisons with our own access charge.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to ensure that charter aircraft engaged in the transportation of live cattle are airworthy.

Mr. Norris: Before issuing any permits to a non-European Economic Area airline to operate an aircraft for flights to or from the United Kingdom under article 88 of the Air Navigation Order 1989, my Department must be satisfied that the aircraft to be used has, among other things, a valid certificate of airworthiness issued by the state of registry of the aircraft.

In view of concern about the safety of flights engaged in the transportation of live cattle from Coventry airport as a result of the Air Algerie crash on 21 December 1994, the Department has taken the additional measure of requesting the Civil Aviation Authority to conduct inspections of the non-EEA aircraft for which an article 88 permit has been made in order to ensure, among other things, that the aircraft is airworthy.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Repetitive Strain Injury

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total Government spending for medical research into the causes and treatment of repetitive strain injury in each year since 1991; and what is the projected figure for 1995.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: None.

Antarctica

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give details of the clear-up work necessary at each of the abandoned British bases in the Antarctic region with the estimated costs in each case.

Mr. David Hunt: The removal of hazardous waste will be given priority. The cost, estimated at around £45,000 per station, is subject to weather conditions and accessibility. Complete removal of the abandoned stations may be necessary in the longer term.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reason in each case.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: None.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many public appointments have been made by his Department in the last year; and how many of those appointed were first identified by the public appointments unit.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Seventy-five public appointments have been made to Cabinet Office and Office of Public Service and Science sponsored public bodies in the last year.

Of these, 57 were to the scientific research councils whose creation was announced in the White Paper "Realising Our Potential". One of these was first identified by the public appointments unit. In common with other Departments, the Cabinet Office-OPSS follows the guidance provided in the "Guide on Public Appointments Procedures". This advises that PAU is just one option which may be appropriate in filling certain posts.

Scientists (Higher Education Institutes)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *757–58*, what number of research scientists and engineers were employed by higher education institutes in each year since 1981–82.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The estimated number of research scientists and engineers, as defined by OECD, employed in HEIs are available only for selected years and are shown in the table. It should be noted that these data are derived from total HEI staff numbers using a set of factors representing the proportion of time that different categories of staff spend on teaching or research. The numbers also include academics working directly on research and development, and the time of central support staff attributed to R and D.

Research scientists and engineers engaged on R and D within HEIs, 1986–1992[1]
(Full-time equivalents)

	1986	*1988*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
UK	25,000	26,000	28,000	29,000	31,000

Note:
[1] The definition of R and D employment is from the Frascati manual.
Source:
Forward Look 1994 Statistical Supplement (table 1.7.1).

EDUCATION

Class Sizes

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what account she has taken, in formulating policy, of research carried out by Peter Mortimore of the London Institute of Education, linking performance in reading and mathematics to class size.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department is aware of research published by Professor Mortimore and his colleagues in 1988. His report noted that the weight of earlier research had supported the view that larger classes were more effective. The Department will continue to monitor research in this field.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the occasions during the last five years when her Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Boswell: Neither the Department nor its one next steps agency, the Teachers Pensions Agency, has taken legal action against a consultancy firm during the last five years.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *398*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by her Department in the last year.

Mr. Boswell: In the last year, 149 appointments to public positions were made by the Department.

Careers Advice

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the quality of careers advice for those aged 16 to 19 years in south-east London; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: I have been asked to reply.

Quarterly and half-yearly reviews of the careers services in south-east London have indicated that they are achieving the objectives set out in their business plans. Impartial and timely careers advice is essential to help young people make informed choices about education, training and employment.

ENVIRONMENT

Air Pollution, Rotherham

12. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to monitor air pollution in Rotherham.

Mr. Atkins: My Department, in co-operation with Rotherham metropolitan borough council, monitors levels of smoke and sulphur dioxide at four sites and nitrogen dioxide at four sites in the Rotherham area.

Shop Front Design

24. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met members of the English Historic Towns Forum to discuss shop front design.

Sir Paul Beresford: We have invited many organisations, including the English Historic Towns Forum, to discuss our proposals to improve the quality of design in our towns and cities, set out in the discussion document "Quality in Town and Country".

Diesel Engines (Public Health)

25. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of diesel engines on public health; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Diesel vehicles emit a range of pollutants, notably small particles—PM10. Advisory committees of my Department and of the Department of Health are examining possible health and environmental effects of PM10 and are expected to make recommendations on possible air quality standards shortly. More generally, Government will continue to fund research into links between air quality and, in particular, respiratory health.

Revenue Support Grant, Sunderland

26. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of the reduced revenue support grant on the provision of services in Sunderland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Sunderland's budget is properly a matter for the city council. Within our provisional capping criteria, the council may increase its expenditure in 1995–96 by 0.5 per cent.

Water Supply

27. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will arrange to meet representatives of the water authorities to discuss quality and reliability of water supply.

Mr. Atkins: From time to time Ministers and officials do meet representatives of the water companies to discuss matters of mutual interest. My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans for meetings to discuss quality and reliability of water supply.

House Building

28. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet representatives of the house building industry to discuss prospects for new house building in the coming year and the impact of Government policies.

Mr. Gummer: I met representatives of the volume housebuilders study group on 13 February. Discussion covered a number of topics of mutual interest.

Housing Market

29. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the prospects for the housing market in 1995.

Mr. Curry: The housing market will continue to benefit from a range of Government policies, including the right to buy, cash incentives and shared ownership schemes for local authority and housing association tenants, and from our economic policies which have produced low interest rates and made home ownership more affordable than for many years.

Urban Environment

30. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to improve the quality of the urban environment.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department launched last summer a wide-ranging initiative, "Quality in Town and Country", designed to see what more can be done to improve the quality of the built environment, in city, town and village. In the light of the overwhelmingly positive response, we are considering how best Government and others can take forward this initiative. The Government already help to improve the quality of life in urban and other areas through the single regeneration budget, including city challenge partnerships. My Department has also issued planning policy guidance aimed at sustaining the vitality and viability of town centres, and encouraging effective town centre management.

Standard Spending Assessment, Leicester

31. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the percentage increase in the SSA for Leicester council between 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: On a comparable basis, Leicester city council's SSA increases by 2.6 per cent. from £40.340 million in 1994–95 to £41.396 million in 1995–96. This compares with an increase of 0.1 per cent. for non-metropolitan districts as a whole.

Out-of-town Shopping Developments

32. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new out-of-town shopping developments await planning approval subject to DOE appeal.

Mr. Gummer: There are 18 appeals awaiting a decision.

National Parks

33. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he will take of the views of national park residents on his plans to change the structure of national park authorities.

Mr. Atkins: Our proposals for the future administration of the national parks are set out in part III

of the Environment Bill, which is currently being considered in another place. No doubt my hon. Friend and other hon. Members whose constituents live in the parks will make their views known when the Bill comes before the House in due course.

Lobbying Groups

34. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on meeting lobbying groups.

Mr. Gummer: I try to meet as many as possible of the various types of groups that wish to see me, and I listen carefully, with an open mind, to what they say.

Departmental Staff

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial resources, broken down by programme where possible, have been allocated and are to be allocated by each department to each Government office for the regions, in the financial years 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Public Bodies

Mr. Patten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those public bodies for which he retains departmental responsibility; which of these bodies have been identified as suitable for placing in the private sector; and by when it is expected each of these bodies will enter the private sector.

Mr. Gummer: Details of the public bodies for which I have departmental responsibility are listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1994". A copy is available in the House of Commons Library. In addition to the bodies listed in that publication I now have responsibility for two further executive non-departmental public bodies. These are:

Stonebridge Housing Action Trust, Brent
The National Forest Company

I announced plans in October 1994 to privatise the docklands light railway which is wholly owned by the London Docklands development corporation. The first step will be taken in 1996, when DLR operations will be franchised to the private sector for a period of about seven years. The second step will be taken at the end of the franchise period, when the aim will be to transfer the railway as a whole into the private sector.

There are no plans at present to privatise any of the other public bodies, but non-departmental public bodies are subject to a quinquennial review. Each such review considers the scope for privatising, contracting out or market testing all or part of the functions of the body. The Department's larger executive public bodies have programmes to contract out and market test parts of their work, where this is not already carried out in the private sector.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out a year-by-year projection from 2000 to 2010 of the projected level of sulphur dioxide emissions in the United Kingdom; and if he will indicate for each projected sulphur dioxide total the targets required under the United Nations economic commission's second sulphur protocol.

Mr. Atkins: Year-by-year projections from 2000 to 2010 are not available.

The most recent published projections of sulphur dioxide emissions, prepared by the Warren Spring Laboratory, now the National Environmental Technology Research Centre, were:

	'000 tonnes	
	High	*Low*
2000	2.596	2.050
2005	2.200	1.890
2010	2.332	1.889

These figures represent 47 to 58 per cent., 53 to 61 per cent. and 52 to 61 per cent. reductions respectively against 1980 sulphur emissions. The protocol requires reductions in sulphur emissions against 1980 levels of 80 per cent. by 2010, to be achieved through intermediate targets of 50 per cent. by 2000 and 70 per cent. by 2005.

There have been considerable changes since these projections were prepared and the Government expect to produce revised projections this year, taking account of recent developments. These will provide a basis for consultation on a national strategy to achieve the protocol commitments.

Property Sales, Westminster

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties that are designated for sale have been empty in each of the wards within the borough of Westminster in the last *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months, *(d)* 12 months and *(e)* 24 months.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the district auditor's interim report on Westminster city council's designated sales policy has caused his Department to review guidelines on relationships between members and officials in the control of local councils.

Mr. Robert. B. Jones: No.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines have been issued to local authorities since the district auditor's interim report on Westminster city council's designated sales policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government have said that they will consider whether there are any general lessons to be learned, when it is possible to do so without prejudice to the particular case in question. No guidelines have been issued by the Secretary of State to local authorities concerning housing sales since the district auditor published his provisional findings on the allegations relating to council house sales in Westminster, in January 1994. Designated sales take place under long-standing statutory consents for voluntary sales of housing as part of authorities' normal activities. Revised consents were issued in September 1994 and my Department is currently consulting the local authority associations on further revisions to those consents.

Consultants

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the framework of rules for engaging consultants by local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities wishing to engage consultants must follow their own standing orders and obtain value for money. In this regard, the Audit Commission, in 1994, produced a good practice guide for local authorities called "Reaching the Peak? Getting Value for Money from Management Consultants".

McDonald's Restaurants Ltd.

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals his inspectors have heard against the refusal of councils to grant planning consent to McDonalds Restaurants Ltd.; and what were the results of the appeals in each of the last three years.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held in the Department's records.

Foleshill Gas Works

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with English Partnerships about grant to assist the development of the Foleshill gas work site.

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand that English Partnerships has reached agreement with British Gas about the grant required to develop phase I of the site and that a survey will be completed this month for British Gas to establish ground conditions on phase II of the site. A formal submission to the board of English Partnerships will be made shortly after that about the offer of a grant to British Gas.

Liquid Fuels

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will investigate whether the secondary liquid fuel currently being burned by Rugby Cement at Barrington should be reclassified as hazardous waste.

Mr. Atkins: It is for waste regulation authorities to decide whether or not a material should be classified as a waste under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994, and, if so, whether that waste should be considered special, under the Special Waste Regulations 1980. The Department of the Environment has issued guidance on what is a waste and what is not in its circular 11/94, and on how to determine whether or not a waste is special in waste management paper No. 23. I understand that Cambridge waste regulation authority has taken the view that the material in question is not waste.

Public Expenditure, Kent

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest estimate of public expenditure per head in the county of Kent.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authority net revenue expenditure per head of population in Kent in 1994–95 was budgeted to be £773. Central Government expenditure in Kent is not available.

Whitechapel Moors, North Devon

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of representations made to him relating to his decision over whether to call in the planning application for a leisure development at Whitechapel moors, north Devon.

Sir Paul Beresford: I will arrange for the hon. Member to receive copies of all the representations made about the proposed leisure development at Whitechapel moors, north Devon, as it would not be appropriate to place copies in the Library. Copies of all these representations have already been sent to the agents acting for the applicant and North Devon district council.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations underlay his Department's delay in calling in the planning application for a leisure development at Whitechapel moors, north Devon.

Sir Paul Bereford: I refer the hon. Member to the answers that I gave him on 2 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1152-53*.

There was no undue delay in calling in the planning application.

On 21 December 1994 North Devon district council wrote to the Government office for the south-west indicating that it had resolved to grant planning permission for a leisure development at Whitechapel moors, north Devon. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took full account of all the planning issues involved, and the representations received, and called in the application for his own determination on 19 January 1995—15 working days after receipt of the council's letter.

The planning issues which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wants considered at the public inquiry are set out in the call-in letter issued by the Government office for the south-west.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of housing benefit paid in the last year for which figures are available to private tenants renting properties previously acquired from local authorities under the right-to-buy scheme.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Council Tax

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total cost to date of processing appeals against council tax bandings.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The cost of work undertaken by the Valuation Office agency on council tax banding proposals and appeals in England between 1 April 1993 and 31 December 1994 was £56.2 million.

During the same period, the running costs of the valuation tribunals in dealing with all types of appeal, including non-domestic rating, council tax liability and valuation, were £18 million. Non-domestic rating cases accounted for a majority of this figure, but no exact breakdown is available.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties currently have

exemption from council tax under each category of exemption.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest information on the number of properties in England under each class of exemption is as follows:

As at 7 June 1994	*000s*
A. Empty dwellings where works are required, under way or recently completed	89.5
B. Empty dwellings owned by charities	1.5
C. Dwellings left empty and unfurnished	201.5
D. Dwellings left empty by prisoners	1.0
E. Dwellings left empty by patients in hospitals and care homes	31.6
F. Dwellings left empty by deceased persons	57.5
G. Dwellings which are unfit etc.	10.4
H. Empty clergy dwellings	1.2
I. Dwellings left empty by people receiving care	5.9
J. Dwellings left empty by people providing care	0.7
K. Dwellings left empty by students	2.1
L. Repossessed dwellings	31.9
M. Halls of residence	9.2
N. Dwellings occupied solely by students or school leavers	98.5
O. Armed forces' accommodation	61.9
P. Visiting forces' accommodation	14.0
Q. Dwellings left empty by bankrupts	0.6
R. Vacant caravan sites and moorings	0.5
Total	620.0

The number of dwellings on the valuation list, including the 620,000 listed was 20,216,303.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the factors taken into account in the calculation of local authorities' standard spending assessments in order of importance.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The amounts allocated by each of the main indicators in the standard spending assessment formula for 1994-95 were set out in the standard spending assessment handbook 1994–95, a copy of which was placed in the Library. The corresponding figures for the SSAs for 1995–96 will be set out in the next edition of the handbook which is expected to be published in April.

Homelessness

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has received on the extent of homelessness among young single people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In central London, where the problem of rough sleeping is greatest, a count undertaken last November by voluntary sector agencies found 288 people sleeping rough, of whom two were aged under 18 and a further 45 aged 18 to 25.

Outside central London, I know of no reliable information about the number of young homeless people. It is properly the responsibility of each local authority to consider the housing needs of all people in their area, including young homeless people.

British Waterways Board

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the future of the British Waterways Board.

Mr. Atkins: I have today published a consultation paper continuing the review of navigation functions of the British Waterways Board and the National Rivers Authority recommended by the Select Committee on the Environment. I intend to consider carefully the views of those who respond and, therefore, I cannot yet say what effect the outcome of this consultation exercise may have on the future of the British Waterways Board.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he hopes to fulfil his undertaking to inspect the Forth rail bridge.

Mr. Gummer: Soon.

Air Pollution

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what study his Department has made of changes in air pollution levels in *(a)* Manchester and *(b)* other United Kingdom cities; what comparable information he has about the situation in major industrial cities elsewhere in the EU; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Changes in annual average levels of pollution in Manchester and other United Kingdom cities are set out in the 16th edition of the Department of the Environment "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Information on levels of pollution in major industrial cities elsewhere in the European Union is not held centrally.

A European topic centre of the European Environment Agency on air quality has been established to assess, among other issues, environmental data requirements, collection and reporting, with a view to improving information on urban air quality across Europe.

Ozone Layer (Damage)

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action the United Kingdom is taking to phase out the production of substances damaging the ozone layer.

Mr. Atkins: The production of halons, chlorofluorocarbons and carbon tetrachloride has already ceased, and methyl chloroform will cease by the end of this year. The Community has introduced a new European regulation which phases out hydrochlorofluorocarbons by 2015. This is directly applicable in United Kingdom law.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State is not aware that any legal action has been taken during the last

five years by his Department in relation to a consultancy contract.

London Boroughs (Rents)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the planned average rent, *(b)* the planned actual average rent rise and *(c)* the planned percentage rent rise of each of the London boroughs.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities set their own rents and are currently in the process of doing so for 1995–96. For the purposes of calculating housing revenue account subsidy, each authority is given an average weekly guideline rent. These are as follows for all London boroughs for 1995–96:

	Guideline rents		
	Rents	*Increase over 1994–95*	
Borough	*(£)*	*(£)*	*(per cent.)*
Barking and Dagenham	36.98	2.82	8.2
Barnet	46.84	2.51	5.7
Bexley	39.59	2.82	7.7
Brent	44.40	2.82	6.8
Bromley	43.62	1.82	4.4
Camden	42.88	2.82	7.0
City of London	44.98	1.82	4.2
Croydon	48.57	2.82	6.2
Ealing	47.04	2.82	6.4
Enfield	45.96	2.82	6.1
Greenwich	44.06	2.82	6.4
Hackney	39.79	2.82	7.1
Hammersmith and Fulham	49.39	2.82	6.1
Haringey	48.49	2.82	6.2
Harrow	49.29	2.82	6.1
Havering	43.92	2.82	6.9
Hillingdon	44.15	2.82	6.8
Hounslow	41.56	2.82	7.3
Islington	44.76	2.82	6.7
Kensington and Chelsea	58.50	2.82	5.1
Kingston upon Thames	49.11	2.82	6.1
Lambeth	39.35	2.82	7.7
Lewisham	43.17	2.82	7.0
Merton	44.00	1.89	4.5
Newham	40.14	2.82	7.6
Redbridge	46.56	1.82	4.1
Richmond upon Thames	46.60	2.82	6.4
Southwark	44.86	2.82	6.7
Sutton	45.12	2.82	6.7
Tower Hamlets	39.80	2.82	7.6
Waltham Forest	42.07	2.82	7.2
Wandsworth	48.93	1.82	3.9
Westminster	50.93	1.82	3.7

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *411*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Sir Paul Beresford: No central record is maintained of the total number of appointments made by the Department. However, information readily available indicates that 105 public appointments were made during 1994.

Regeneration Policies

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new jobs have been created through regeneration policies since April 1992.

Sir Paul Beresford: Since April 1992, there has been a reduction of more than 500,000 in the number of unemployed. In that time, my Department's policies have been successful in creating or safeguarding over 340,000 jobs.

EC Eco-management Scheme

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take to assist small firms to improve their environmental performance when the European Community eco-management and audit scheme becomes fully operational in April.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government strongly supports the EC eco-management and audit scheme which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be launching on 10 April. The scheme will give public recognition, throughout the European Union, to manufacturing businesses which adopt a positive approach to managing their environmental impacts. I am now delighted to be able to announce that we will be introducing a new grant to help small companies participate. The grant will be known as the small company environmental and energy management assistance scheme or SCEEMAS.

SCEEMAS will be an adaptation of the existing energy management assistance scheme. It will help small firms address the whole spectrum of environmental issues facing them. Energy will remain an important element since the scope for saving energy must always be considered in establishing an environmental management system. Eligibility will be confined to manufacturing industry and to firms with fewer than 250 employees.

The details of the grant will be refined over the next few weeks and its management will be contracted out, subject to satisfactory competitive tenders being received. I expect SCEEMAS to come into operation during May.

To make way for SCEEMAS, the existing grant scheme will be phased out over the next year. Fresh applications under the existing scheme will be allowed up to 31 March; applications for successive stages will be allowed up to 29 September; with final claims allowed up to 31 January 1996. My officials will be writing to consultants involved in the scheme in the next few days, explaining the arrangements.

The new grant should play an important role in promoting environmental management among smaller firms, and assisting them to become more competitive.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken to continue the review of British Waterways and the National Rivers Authority's navigation functions recommended by the Environment Select Committee.

Mr. Atkins: I have today published a consultation paper continuing the review of British Waterways' and the National Rivers Authority's navigation functions begun in 1991. Copies have been placed in the House libraries.

The paper seeks views on how we might secure the best possible stewardship of our waterways for future generations. A number of options are identified, including those of transferring all the NRA's existing navigations to BW and vice versa, achieving more effective management through closer co-operation between existing authorities, and the possibility of creating a new single statutory authority for navigation. Our waterways are a unique asset and must serve a wide range of interests and uses. This consultation aims to give all those concerned about the waterways the opportunity to make their views on the best way forward known to Government.

Docklands Light Railways

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the extension to Lewisham of the docklands light railway.

Mr. Curry: I have today given my approval for Docklands Light Railway Ltd. to shortlist four private consortia to tender for the concession to finance, build, own and maintain the extension of the DLR to Lewisham, under the Government's private finance initiative. The competition is expected to last about nine months, with the concession contract being concluded before the end of this year. Construction should start in 1996, and the extension should then open to passenger services in 1999.

Private sector interest in the project has been strong, with seven consortia representing a wide range of finance, construction and project management expertise from the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan competing to prequalify. The four selected by DLR Ltd. to proceed to tendering are, in alphabetical order:

Brown and Root, AMEC and Dragados
Docklands Link Group
Lewisham Extension Company
Light Rail Group.

In l atement last October, the Secretary of State indicated that the project could not be financially viable \ Cutty Sark station included and that the station could therefore be built only if its costs were to be met in full by third parties. He said that contributors should agree unconditionally and contractually by the end of January 1995 to meet the actual costs of the station as they arose during the construction period. I have to report that no funding package was submitted by third parties. The tender documents to be issued by DLR Ltd. for the Lewisham project will therefore make it clear that bids are being invited on a basis of six stations, without provision for a station at Cutty Sark.

Greenwich council, local landowners and other interested bodies wish to discuss with the four prequalified bidders for the Lewisham extension the possibility of their making separate contractual and financial arrangements to provide a station at Cutty Sark. Those discussions must neither delay the Lewisham project nor prejudice its financial arrangements. The decision whether to enter into negotiations or reach an agreement with the council and other local interests will be for the private bidders to make, according to their own commercial judgment. I have asked DLR Ltd. to provide information, as requested, to assist any discussions between third parties.

I am pleased to confirm that the Lewisham line will have a new station at Island Gardens just north of the river, which will be 600 m from Cutty Sark via the Thames foot tunnel and another alongside the Greenwich BR station, some 700 m south west of the Cutty Sark. Further south it will have stations at Deptford Bridge, Elverson Road and Lewisham town centre, all in the Deptford city challenge area. The extension will therefore dramatically improve access to Greenwich and Lewisham, and provide new cross-river access to and from the City, Docklands and Stratford for local residents, tourists and north Kent commuters. It will be a splendid addition to the capital's public transport network and will reinforce the Government's commitment to promote regeneration in the Thames gateway.

Credit Liabilities

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the provision for credit liabilities as at 31 March 1994; and what is his estimate of the total of the provision for credit liabilities represented by cash for each local authority and its total for England.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* Returns to the Department indicate that the total amount that English local authorities had set aside for debt repayment at 31 March 1994 was £6 billion.

The Department has no detailed information as to the extent to which these amounts are represented by cash held by local authorities, but is aware that many authorities have made use of the cash involved to meet their financing needs.

Opencast Gravel Mining, Avon Valley

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans there are for opencast gravel mining in the Avon valley.

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Proposals for minerals extraction in Hampshire are set out in the deposit draft of the Hampshire minerals and waste local plan, which is due to be considered at a public local inquiry commencing on 21 March. There are no proposals in the draft plan for gravel working in the Avon valley.

Countryside Stewardship Sites

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report,* columns *15–18,* if he will name and provide a grid reference for each countryside stewardship site; and if he will indicate those sites where access is available beyond September 2004.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* A list of the names of countryside stewardship sites has been placed in the House Library. Details of grid references of sites are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Countryside stewardship agreements are signed for 10 years. Contractual obligations to provide access under current stewardship agreements will not extend beyond September 2004 when the last of these agreements terminate. Existing rights of way are unaffected.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Compensation

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent on criminal damage and emergency provisions compensation in each of the last 10 years.

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Compensation Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Denis Stanley. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Denis Stanley to Ms Majorie Mowlam, dated 13 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply, on behalf of the Compensation Agency, to your recent Question regarding criminal damage and emergency provisions compensation.

The following amounts of compensation were paid out on criminal damage and emergency provisions in each of the last ten years:

Year	Criminal damage compensation	£ million Emergency provisions compensation
1984–85	19.9	Not available
1985–86	17.2	Not available
1986–87	15.2	0.3
1987–88	19.0	0.6
1988–89	20.6	1.3
1989–90	22.1	1.2
1990–91	22.7	1.7
1991–92	33.1	1.9
1992–93	75.9	2.8
1993–94	67.9	2.6

Fair Employment

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *168*, if he will list the 58 consultants who undertook assignments under the small firms fair employment scheme.

Mr. Ancram: The list of consultants is as follows:

R. Allen
J. Smyth
N. Semple
R. Shevlin
CTR Services
G. Parkes
P. McCallion
J. Chapman
Coopers and Lybrand
DTM Management Consultants
G. Ward
Engineering Employers Federation
P. E. Scullion and Co.
Ernst and Young
Fair Employment Services
Gilpin Black Associates
A. Patrick
B. Forsythe
G. Wilson
Harold Moss Services
Hillen and Jenkinson
Sales Placement NI Ltd.
IRPC Group Ltd.
MDS
Leonard Personal Services
Price Waterhouse
S. Cullen
Peartree Consultants
Management Consultants
R. McRoberts
RMA Consultants
M. James
Saville and Holdsworth
University of Ulster
J. McQueeney
Time Consulting Group
M. McBride
Mary Carson Management Consultancy
Mentor Management Consultancy
H Walker
Oakes Personnel Consultancy
KPMG Management Consultants
G. Patterson
J. Wylie
Finegan Gibson
G. Ackah
D. Gibson
Archusa Management Services
Rose Personnel Associates
M. Templeton
Personnel and Training Services
Resource Counselling
Toner Recruitment Agency
I. McKay
Employment Equality Services
J. Hawthorne
G. Patterson
W. Deane

Boundary Commission

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *167–68*, on what basis officials of the political affairs division of the Northern Ireland Office gave guidance as to the revised recommendations of the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission prior to the publication of those recommendations.

Mr. Ancram: In accordance with normal briefing practice, on receipt of the deputy chairman's letter of 16 January 1995 the political affairs division was asked to contribute to the advice for Ministers on the possible electoral consequences if the revised recommendations of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland were implemented.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Sir John Wheeler: None.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The information requested is not available in all the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office for each year. However, from the information available, expenditure on external consultants, including management consultants in 1994 prices was:

Year	*Expenditure (£000)*
1987–88	1,580
1988–89	8,889
1989–90	14,451
1990–91	17,753
1991–92	26,141
1992–93	29,662
1993–94	30,286
1994–95	[1]16,933

[1] Available estimates to date.

As consultants are, in many instances, engaged to contribute particular skills to an element of a much larger process, it is not possible to quantify cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in but, in each instance, consultants were engaged on the basis of best value for money.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *420*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Sir John Wheeler: From 1 February 1994 to 31 January 1995, 395 individuals were appointed or reappointed to the bodies listed in the publication entitled "Public Bodies 1994", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Delorean Motor Car Co.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the total and breakdown of legal fees and all other costs associated with the action being pursued against Arthur Anderson in connection with the collapse of the Delorean Motor Car Co. and related matters; on what date the action was commenced; when it is expected to be concluded; and if he will make a statement on progress of that action to date.

Mr. Ancram: The legal fees and other costs associated with the action are a matter between the Government and their lawyers and disclosure while the action continues would not be in the public interest. The action was commenced on 15 February 1985. Arthur Anderson and Co. has filed a motion for summary judgement which is at present under consideration by the court. A date for trial cannot be set until the court has ruled on that motion and it is not possible to state when the action will be concluded.

Sheep Pox

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of sheep pox have been reported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: Sheep pox has never been reported in Northern Ireland.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the annual expenditure per capita of the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland in each of the last three years.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

1992–93: 79p

1993–94: 87p

1994–95: 94p

Criminal Justice

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provisions there are in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 to protect the principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty by due process of law.

Sir John Wheeler: Generally speaking the prosecution bears the burden of proving all the elements of the offence necessary to establish guilt. It would not be necessary therefore for the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 to provide any specific protection as the common law rule is not affected by this legislation.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMEMT ADMINISTRATION

Crown Agents

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being made to meet expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration in 1994–95 in connection with the proposal to change the status of the Crown Agents.

Mr. Baldry: As announced in the gracious speech on 16 November 1994, the Government intend to bring forward legislation to change the status of the Crown Agents. In advance of the enactment of the legislation, expenditure will be incurred on preparatory advisory services and suppliers have been contracted to provide these services.

Parliamentary approval to this new service will be sought in a spring supplementary estimate for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Overseas Development Administration external assistance vote, class II, vote 5. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure, estimated at £59,000, will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

The Attorney-General: There are none.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *399*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

The Attorney-General: None.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* There have been no special advisers in the departments for which I am responsible in the past five years.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Privy Council

Ms Lestor: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many women are currently on the Privy Council; and how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been appointed since 1979.

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council currently includes 18 women. Since 1979, 266 men and 13 women have been appointed to the Privy Council.

House of Commons Medical Facilities

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what medical provision is available in the House to hon. Members and their staff who require medical but not accident and emergency help from a hospital.

Mr. Michael J. Martin *[holding answer 10 February 1995]:* The staff of the occupational health service, located off the Lower Waiting Hall, are available to advise Members or their staff, and staff of the House, who require medical help. It is their practice to deal with any small-scale accidents or emergencies, and to arrange for the transfer of more serious cases of this kind to St. Thomas's hospital. The service is not intended to provide medical treatment for which an individual's own general practitioner would be more suitable.

PRIME MINISTER

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Office or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

The Prime Minister: None.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *398-99*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

The Prime Minister: I have made 18 appointments since January 1994 to bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1994".

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what action he plans to take to ensure a higher priority within public spending to the provision of intensive care beds.

The Prime Minister: It is for each purchasing authority to determine the appropriate level and type of provision of intensive therapy, and to priorities these accordingly based on an assessment of the total needs of its population. For their part, the Government have undertaken to increase the real level of resources devoted to the health service.

Education Priorities

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 9 February to the right hon. Member for Bridgewater (Mr. King), *Official Report*, column 452, if he will list those local education authorities which may need to look carefully at education priorities.

The Prime Minister: All local education authorities need to consider their priorities to ensure that they provide an effective and efficient service.

Hong Kong

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to visit Hong Kong in 1995.

Marchioness

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will *(a)* meet those who survived the sinking of the motor vessels Marchioness and their relatives, and *(b)* respond positively to the requests for legal aid to be granted to them for their representation at the forthcoming inquest.

The Prime Minister: My right Hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor would be willing to meet a delegation of survivors of the tragedy and their relatives. Legal aid is not available for representation at inquests. Subject to financial eligibility, advice and assistance may be available before the hearing under the green form scheme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have made commitments to the proposed UN peacekeeping force in Angola; how many troops are involved; and what provision has been made to provide the necessary logistical support for such an operation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The authorised maximum strength of United Nations Angolan unification mission III is 7,000 military personnel, 350 military observers and 260 civilian police observers. Some 30 countries have made offers of troops to UNAVEM III and the UN has accepted commitments from Brazil, Romania, India, Uruguay, Pakistan and Zimbabwe. Logistical support for the operation will be handled by a civilian contractor to be appointed by the United Nations.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how quickly the UN believes it can install United Nations Angolan verification mission III in Angola; and what commitment he has made to assist.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Security Council resolution authorising the deployment of UNAVEM III was adopted on 8 February. That resolution called for the phased deployment of forces subject to a report from the UN Secretary-General that certain conditions have been met for example, an effective cessation of hostilities and provision of all relevant military data. We are considering whether we are able to assist the operation.

Football Agents

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Norwegian Government concerning their investigation into the activities of football agents, with particular reference to Mr. Rune Hauge.

Mr. David Davis: None.

Ministerial Travel (Hong Kong)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no firm plans to visit Hong Kong in 1995, but he intends to continue to pay regular visits to the territory.

Cyprus

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the accession of Cyprus to the European Union; and what conditions he attaches to such accession.

Mr. David Davis: We agreed at the Corfu European Council that Cyprus would be involved in the next phase of enlargement. We welcome that prospect. The Council is currently reviewing Cyprus's application. We want to see the whole island join the EU, and want to help remove the obstacles presented by the intercommunal dispute.

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the proposal of the French Foreign Minister for holding a summit meeting in Paris to which representatives of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia would be invited.

Mr. David Davis: We, along with our EU and contact group partners, support the French Government's initiative. If successful, such a meeting could be a major advance towards political settlements of the conflicts of former Yugoslavia.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department has not taken court proceedings against a consultancy firm in the last five years. On one occasion during that period a legal dispute with a consultancy firm was referred to arbitration. This concerned the alleged failure of an architectural practice properly to carry out design, supervision and administrative functions.

Antarctica

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to offer former bases in Antarctica to non-governmental organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: Our policy is to offer, where appropriate, UK former bases in Antarctica to other Antarctic treaty parties, to promote the spirit of scientific co-operation between states foreseen by the Antarctic treaty. There are no plans to change this policy.

European Movement

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial assistance the European Movement received from his Department in 1994; and what commitment has been given for 1995 or future years.

Mr. Baldry: The European Movement was given a one-off grant of £10,000 in 1993, which was paid in January 1994. It has received no financial assistance this year. No commitment has been given for 1995, or for future years.

Equipment Sales (Human Rights)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice he gives to the Secretary of State for Defence on the transfer of equipment which is likely to violate human rights.

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* If my Department judged that defence equipment, if transferred, would be likely to be used to violate human rights, it would advise against the transfer.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about reported Sudanese military air attacks on Uganda, the reasons for such activities and the British and international response.

Mr. Baldry: We are aware of the recent incident in which two bombs were dropped on Ugandan territory near the border with the Sudan. The Sudanese authorities have stated that this was an accident and continue to maintain normal relations with Uganda. There has therefore been no requirement for a formal British or international response.

Defence Exports

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account the Government take, in considering applications for licences for the export of defence equipment, of its likely use for internal security purposes.

Mr. David Davis: We do not issue licences for the export of equipment likely to be used for internal repression.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Escaped Prisoners, Parkhurst

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of searching for and recapturing the three prisoners who escaped from Parkhurst prison in January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost of searching for and recapturing the three prisoners who escaped from Parkhurst prison in January.

It is difficult to give a definitive answer to your Question as some costs have not yet been finally calculated. The estimated additional cost to the Prison Service of mounting the operation to recapture the escaped prisoners is about £25,000.

The cost of the police operations from the beginning of the incident until Thursday 9 February was £252,000. It is not anticipated that this figure will increase substantially.

Group 4 Ltd.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the benefits from the contract with Group 4 Ltd. for court services in Merseyside, Greater Manchester and north Wales.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Peter Thurnham, dated 15 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about court escorting and custody services in the North West.

Group 4 has been awarded the contract for the court escort and custody service in the North West (Area 6). Based on the tender submitted, the terms of the contract and prior experience, this contract is expected to lead to fewer escapes, a better quality service to the courts, less disruption to the police and Prison Service, and lower costs.

Experience in the East Midlands and the Metropolitan Police District shows that there are fewer escapes than occurred when the police and Prison Service were responsible for escorts. In the East Midlands, where Group 4 has been running the service for more than a year, escapes are now 40 per cent. fewer than under the previous arrangements.

Contract standards are enforceable, with penalties for non-compliance. Two full time Prison Service monitors will be based in the contract area carrying out regular spot checks. In a recent survey in the East Midlands, over 90 per cent. of court staff said that Group 4 was providing a service as good or better than under the previous arrangements.

Contracting out this task also relieves prison and police officers of a non core task, enabling them to concentrate on more important duties. Police forces and prisons will be relieved of a task which is unpredictable in its demands and will no longer have to redeploy officers to meet unexpected peaks. They will be able to plan better how to use their resources most effectively.

The overall cost saving, following the award of Area 6 to Group 4 is estimated to be £11 million or 14 per cent. Duplication between the police and Prison Service will be eliminated.

Prisons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the salary scales for *(a)* prison officers and *(b)* prison auxiliaries; and if he will distinguish between the duties of each.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the salary scales for a) prison officers and b) prison auxiliaries; and to distinguish between the duties of each.

The salary scales are from £15,630 to £19,491 for prison officers and £8,348 to £9,299 for prison auxiliaries. In addition to their basic salary, all prison auxiliaries receive 12.6 per cent. shift disturbance allowance and additional hours worked are paid by overtime. Prison officers are compensated for additional hours by time off in lieu.

Prison officers are required to undertake and pass formal training at a Prison Service College and accept that they are fully mobile. They are required to demonstrate a wide range of skills and competencies in dealing with inmates in order to perform their duties, which include supervising activities, searching, escorting prisoners, counselling, offending behaviour programmes, advising on legal procedures, sentence planning, categorising prisoners, crisis intervention and support, report writing, security information collation, disciplinary action, interviewing, incident response (including control and restraint techniques) and pre-release course leadership.

Prison auxiliaries are non mobile and perform a wide range of support duties, such as staff mess caterer, gate keeper, records officer, escorting contractors and assisting in control rooms.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce the successful bids for the next phase of private prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 15 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the next phase of contracted out prisons.

The next phase will be the first two design, construct, manage and finance prisons, one in Bridgend in South Wales and another in Merseyside.

We have received a first round of tenders and we are discussing those with the tenderers under the negotiated procedure of the EU Services Directive. We hope to issue a final invitation to tender in the next few weeks.

After consideration of tenders, we would expect to make an announcement of the successful contractor or contractors in the spring or early summer.

Radio Broadcasts

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what monitoring he carries out of radio broadcasts to see whether they comply with the Race Relations Acts or Public Order Acts;

(2) what investigations he has made into the organisation, Muslim Community Radio;

(3) how many staff are employed monitoring radio broadcasts to consider whether they are racially offensive or incite racial hatred;

(4) what guidelines are issued to the Radio Authority with regard to broadcasting of racially offensive or anti-semitic material.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Section 22 of the Public Order Act 1986 makes it an offence to broadcast material intended to stir up racial hatred. The investigation of any complaints is a matter for the police and prosecuting authorities.

The Home Office has no role in the monitoring of radio broadcasts. The responsibilities of the Radio Authority are a matter for the Department of National Heritage.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been detained at Manchester airport under Immigration Act powers in the last two years;

(2) how many people were detained on entry at Manchester airport over the past two years; and what was their country of origin;

(3) how many people detained at Manchester airport under Immigration Act powers were subsequently transferred to other detention centres or prisons over the past two years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information set out shows the number of people detained at Manchester airport overnight or longer broken down by nationality. Of these, 94 were detained on entry in 1994 and an estimated 82 in 1993. The other information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Country	*1993*	*1994*
Not determined/stateless	27	32
Afghanistan	3	5
Albania	3	—
Algeria	20	34
Angola	1	7
Antigua	—	1
Argentina	—	1
Australia	3	1
Austria	2	—
Bangladesh	27	33
Bermuda	1	—
Brazil	1	1
Bulgaria	1	1
Cameroon	3	—
Canada	4	1
China	6	6
Colombia	7	4
Congo	1	—
Croatia	3	—
Cyprus	3	2
Czechoslovakia	—	4
Dominican Republic	1	—
Ecuador	3	—
Egypt	1	3
Gambia	11	13
Ghana	15	28
Guyana	1	—
Hong Kong	21	13
Hungary	1	1
India	153	244
Iran	1	7
Iraq	—	1
Israel	6	—
Ivory Coast	3	1
Jamaica	19	20
Japan	—	10
Jordan	1	1
Kenya	2	2
Latvia	1	—
Lebanon	1	2
Liberia	2	—
Libya	1	-1
Lithuania	—	4
Malawi	2	—
Malaysia	21	18
Malta	2	—
Mauritius	1	1
Mexico	—	3
Morocco	3	4
Nepal	4	—
New Zealand	2	—
Nigeria	36	49
Pakistan	127	184
Peru	2	2
Philippines	7	1
Poland	4	9
Portugal	3	—
Romania	3	2
Russia	3	2
St. Lucia	—	1
St. Vincent and Grenada	1	—
Senegal	1	—
Sierra Leone	3	6
Singapore	1	1
Somalia	2	6
South Africa	9	7
South Korea	—	1
Spain	—	1
Sri Lanka	10	24
Switzerland	—	1
Syria	2	—
Tanzania	1	6
Thailand	2	1
Togo	2	—

Country	1993	1994
Trinidad and Tobago	1	—
Tunisia	5	2
Turkey	23	72
Uganda	2	—
Ukraine	—	3
United Arab Emirates	1	—
USA	7	7
Yemen	4	1
Yugoslavia	—	2
Zaire	4	4
Zambia	2	1
Zimbabwe	—	2
Total	663	918

Football

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Carling Premiership and Endsleigh Insurance league clubs together with the total season's attendance at *(a)* matches played in the Carling Premiership and Endsleigh Insurance leagues and *(b)* matches played in the FA Cup, Coca-Cola Cup and Autoglass Trophy with the total number of (i) arrests and (ii) arrests as a percentage of the total attendance at each category of such matches, accurate to four decimal places, for the 1993–94 season.

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the following tables:

Premier league 1993–94 season

Club	Total attendance	Arrests	Arrests Percentage
Arsenal	641,833	80	0.0125
Aston Villa	609,314	141	0.0231
Blackburn Rovers	372,145	59	0.0159
Chelsea	407,732	94	0.0231
Coventry	280,392	90	0.0321
Everton	480,391	75	0.0156
Ipswich	344,025	28	0.0081
Leeds	724,363	130	0.0179
Liverpool	808,361	214	0.0265
Manchester City	560,899	46	0.0082
Manchester United	929,133	59	0.0064
Newcastle	707,269	82	0.0116
Norwich	381,436	70	0.0184
Oldham	263,815	19	0.0072
Queens Park Rangers	298,782	59	0.0197
Sheffield United	410,805	87	0.0212
Sheffield Wednesday	571,002	67	0.0117
Southampton	309,765	61	0.0197
Swindon	320,761	31	0.0097
Tottenham	570,359	62	0.0109
West Ham	432,008	59	0.0137
Wimbledon	219,961	17	0.0077
Total	10,644,551	1,630	0.0153

Division one 1993–94 season

Club	Total attendance	Arrests	Arrest Percentage
Barnsley	175,037	77	0.0440
Birmingham	333,636	92	0.0276
Bolton	241,462	50	0.0207
Bristol City	203,596	47	0.0231
Charlton	185,279	11	0.0059
Crystal Palace	360,092	61	0.0169

Division one 1993–94 season

Club	Total attendance	Arrests	Arrest Percentage
Derby	365,549	54	0.0148
Grimsby	143,747	28	0.0195
Leicester	351,209	20	0.0057
Luton	181,197	13	0.0072
Middlesbrough	239,218	26	0.0890
Millwall	225,893	98	0.0434
Nottingham County	197,726	25	0.0126
Nottingham Forest	529,168	25	0.0158
Peterborough	170,477	57	0.0334
Portsmouth	268,918	50	0.0186
Southend	140,404	24	0.0171
Stoke	366,419	89	0.0243
Sunderland	389,493	54	0.0139
Tranmere	186,278	94	0.0505
Watford	181,607	20	0.0110
West Bromwich Albion	387,327	123	0.0318
Wolverhampton	505,190	119	0.0236
Total	6,487,104	1,359	0.0209

Division two 1993–94 season

Club	Total attendance	Arrests	Arrest Percentage
AFC Bournemouth	100,156	28	0.0280
Blackpool	109,403	129	0.1180
Barnet	55,906	13	0.0233
Bradford	147,095	33	0.0224
Brentford	129,043	37	0.0287
Brighton	177,301	21	0.0118
Bristol Rovers	122,214	8	0.0065
Burnley	259,283	23	0.0089
Cambridge	84,773	6	0.0071
Cardiff	139,150	15	0.0108
Exeter	76,366	20	0.0262
Fulham	107,068	28	0.0262
Hartlepool	47,742	14	0.0293
Huddersfield	146,556	42	0.0287
Hull	136,199	15	0.0110
Leyton Orient	97,442	8	0.0082
Plymouth	206,075	33	0.0160
Port Vale	191,435	38	0.0199
Reading	158,437	117	0.0738
Rotherham	85,438	29	0.0339
Stockport	117,081	13	0.0111
Swansea	81,281	9	0.0111
Wrexham	91,098	48	0.0527
York	106,160	55	0.0518
Total	2,972,702	782	0.0263

Division three 1993–94 season

Club	Total attendance	Arrests	Arrests Percentage
Bury	54,529	4	0.0073
Carlisle	116,244	16	0.0138
Chesterfield	66,958	33	0.0493
Chester	67,008	30	0.0448
Colchester	59,998	6	0.0100
Crewe	83,809	13	0.0155
Darlington	47,796	8	0.0167
Doncaster	52,041	8	0.0154
Gillingham	66,110	10	0.0151
Hereford	47,499	1	0.0021
Lincoln	66,758	0	0.0000
Mansfield	57,082	19	0.0333
Northampton	72,534	12	0.0165
Preston	154,918	56	0.0361

Division three 1993–94 season

Club	Total attendance	Arrests	Arrests Percentage
Rochdale	55,788	7	0.0125
Scarborough	35,302	20	0.0567
Scunthorpe	66,816	5	0.0075
Shewsbury	92,435	162	0.1753
Torquay	72,167	2	0.0028
Walsall	88,977	10	0.0112
Wigan	39,844	17	0.0427
Wycombe	114,411	17	0.0149
Total	1,579,024	456	0.0289

Cup competitions in the 1993–94 season

	Attendance	Arrests	Percentage
FA Cup	1,989,474	761	0.0383
Coca-Cola	1,744,120	487	0.0279
Autoglass	251,381	48	0.0191
Total	3,984,975	1,296	0.0325

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to re-examine the provisions of section 3 of the Football (Offences) Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: We have no specific plans to do so. We do, however, keep under review all of the provisions of the Football (Offences) Act 1991, as well as other football legislation concerned with public order.

Al Fayed Brothers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to take decisions on applications for British citizenship by *(a)* Mr. Ali Al Fayed and *(b)* Mr. Mohammed Al Fayed; if he has all the information he requires on which to take decisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: As I explained in reply to a question from the hon. Member on 31 October 1994, *Official Report*, column 947, I do not propose to comment further on the detailed processing of these applications.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: During the period specified, I am not aware that the Home Office has had occasion to take legal action against a consultancy firm.

Asylum Seekers

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reinforce asylum decision taking procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Government intend to undertake a significant reinforcement of the asylum determination system, and of the independent immigration appellate authorities in respect of their responsibility for hearing asylum appeals.

The United Kingdom fully adheres to its obligations towards genuine refugees. But the number of abusive or otherwise undeserving asylum applications has grown massively since the late 1980s. Currently, nearly 80 per cent. of asylum applications are rejected outright, and the great majority of appeals are dismissed. It is not in the interests of genuine asylum seekers for the system to be overloaded with applications from people whose real motives have nothing to do with a well-founded fear of persecution.

Additional money is being made available to fund 150 additional determination staff in the asylum division of the Home Office, and there will be a corresponding reinforcement in the independent appeal system. Once the additional staff are in post and trained, it will make possible an additional 7,000 initial decisions annually.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what use is being made of the power in section 7 of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 to curtail the leave to enter or remain of an asylum seeker at the same time as his claim is being rejected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The use of the curtailment power has been reviewed in the light of the first year's experience of the operation of the Act. The curtailment power has deliberately been used sparingly while the new asylum procedures were settling in. I have concluded that it would now be right to make wider use of this power.

A refused asylum applicatant with extant leave at the time of his application may, if the curtailment provision in section 7 of the 1993 Act is not used, appeal twice, first against the asylum decision, and then, if he overstays, against deportation. This is wasteful of resources, leads to delay and is not in the interests of either genuine refugees or an efficient asylum system.

Greater use of curtailment will speed up appeal procedures and make it easier to remove those with existing leave to enter or remain who have sought to abuse the asylum procedures. Genuine asylum seekers are better served by a system that deals with undeserving cases swiftly and effectively.

Section 7 of the 1993 Act allows curtailment of any existing leave to enter or remain at the time of refusal of an asylum claim. Curtailment takes effect immediately the decision is served. The applicant's appeal right is triggered by the service of a notice of intention to deport. The applicant's detention may be ordered pending his deportation. If the applicant decides to appeal, then all relevant aspects of the case, including the asylum and deportation aspects, may be addressed by a special adjudicator at a single hearing.

During the passage of what became the 1993 Act, the Government indicated that it was not the intention that curtailment should be used either automatically or punitively. We propose no change of approach in these respects.

However, discussion of curtailment during the passage of the Bill tended to focus on the case of a person who is admitted as a bona fide tourist but makes an asylum

application soon after, thus revealing that the real intention in coming here was to apply for asylum. Experience since implementation of the 1993 Act suggests that it would restrict the curtailment power too narrowly to confine its use to cases of this sort.

At present, some two thirds of all asylum applications in the United Kingdom are made after entry, rather than at the port. More than half of these in-country applications are made by people with existing leave to enter or remain. In the bulk of cases, the asylum application is not made immediately after leave to enter or remain has been granted, but shortly before it is due to expire. We have concluded that in these cases there is significant scope for proper use of the curtailment power.

There will in future be a general presumption that curtailment will be used where available except where this would be inappropriate. Each case will continue to be looked at on its individual merits and, as before, curtailment will be neither automatic nor punitive. Cases where curtailment might be inappropriate include those where it is right to allow existing leave to run after the asylum decision has been taken; where the applicant qualifies for leave to remain under another category of the immigration rules—for example, if they are married to a British citizen or person settled here; or where there are compelling compassionate or other circumstances which would make it inappropriate to proceed to deportation action. Where the curtailment power is used, a notice of intention to deport will normally be served at the same time. This is necessary in order to trigger a right of appeal against the refusal of asylum. It will still be open to the applicant to leave voluntarily, either before or, if it is unsuccessful, after the appeal.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the total cost to public funds of the Metropolitan police in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: As police authority for the Metropolitan police district, I have approved estimates which provide for net revenue expenditure of £1,687.828 million in 1995–96.

The receiver for the Metropolitan police district is issuing, with my approval, a precept of £47.86 per property in band D of the council tax valuation band for Metropolitan police purposes.

I have discussed the estimates for the Metropolitan police expenditure in 1995–96 with representatives of the London local authority associations.

Boundary Commission for Wales

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take on the fourth periodical report of the Boundary Commission for Wales.

Mr. Howard: I have today laid before Parliament the fourth periodical report of the Boundary Commission for Wales together with a draft Order in Council for giving effect, without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the report.

SCOTLAND

Contagious Agalactia

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of contagious agalactia have occurred in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro: No cases of contagious agalactia have been recorded since it was made notifiable on 1 January 1993. Official records are not available before that date.

Sheep Pox

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of sheep pox have been reported in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro: No cases of sheep pox have been recorded in Scotland since 1985.

Power Generation

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to change Government policy in respect of directing the Scottish utilities, Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro to accept Scottish Nuclear's total generation production at any time.

Mr. Kynoch: Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric purchase all of Scottish Nuclear's output of electricity under the terms of the nuclear energy agreement. Any change in this commercial contract would be a matter for the three companies.

Strathclyde Fire Brigade

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many malicious calls were made to Strathclyde fire brigade in *(a)* Inverclyde and *(b)* Strathclyde in each of the past three years; and, of these, how many led to successful prosecutions in the district courts in (i) Inverclyde and (ii) Strathclyde.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Relevant information is as follows:

Malicious calls made to Strathclyde fire brigade

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Inverclyde	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	292
Strathclyde total	11,370	16,349	13,970	7,914

[1]Information about calls in particular districts is not readily separable from brigade totals for years prior to 1994.

Persons with a charge proved under section 31 of the Fire Services Act 1947 (false alarms of fire)

	1991	*1992*	*1993*
District court			
Inverclyde	—	—	—
Strathclyde	1	—	—
Stipendiary Magistrates	4	4	3
Sheriff court			
Greenock	1	—	2
Strathclyde (including Greenock)	10	17	19

Note:
Information for 1994 is not yet available.

Mountain Rescue Teams

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legislation to require those who benefit from the services of Scottish mountain rescue teams, and who subsequently receive payments from newspapers to provide details of such rescues, to pay over such sums to the rescue services in question; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: I cannot commend too highly the work carried out by our mountain rescue teams, the members of which provide their services free of charge. Although it is most disappointing when a rescued person seeks to sell the story to a newspaper and does not donate the proceeds to the rescue services concerned, I do not consider it appropriate for the Government to legislate in the manner proposed.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what compensation will be available for staff made redundant as a result of reorganisation of local government in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: I am laying before the House today regulations setting out the compensation which will be made available, in general, to local authority staff who may be made redundant or prematurely retired as a result of local government reorganisation in Scotland. Further regulations will be laid shortly covering members of the teachers' superannuation scheme who are in administrative posts and who may be similarly affected. Copies of the regulations will be placed in the Library.

In determining the compensation package, I have given careful consideration to the comments received on the draft proposals which were circulated for consultation at the end of last year. In response to these comments, I have simplified the administrative arrangements and, as indicated, will be bringing forward regulations to provide similar arrangements for members of the teachers' superannuation scheme who are in administrative posts in local authorities. I believe local authorities will welcome these changes.

I believe the compensation package being made available represents a sensible and balanced approach to an important issue and one which will allow authorities and their staff to take forward the necessary planning for transition to the new unitary authorities.

Child Witnesses

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, when he expects to extend the provision of closed circuit television for the taking of children's evidence in the High Court and criminal trials in the sheriffs courts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Following consultation with the Lord Justice General and the sheriffs principal, arrangements are being made to extend these provisions from 3 April 1995 to the whole of Scotland. The necessary facilities will be provided in one court house in each sheriffdom.

Boundary Commission Report

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to present to Parliament the report of the Boundary Commission for Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The report has been laid before Parliament today, together with the draft of an Order in Council for giving effect to the recommendations.

Trading Standards

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to safeguard the trading standards service in the future local government structure.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* The trading standards service is a local authority function and I will expect the new councils to give careful consideration to how this important function should be provided in the new structure, including exploring the use of joint arrangements. Should suitable arrangements fail to be made, my right hon. Friend has powers under section 20 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 to establish a joint board.

Mature Students

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students in Scotland currently benefit from the mature students allowance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* In the academic year 1993–94—the latest period for which complete figures are available—the number of Scottish domiciled students qualifying for a mature students' allowance as part of their means-tested maintenance award under the students' allowances scheme was 7,272.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Expenditure by my Department and its agencies on advertising, based on 1994 prices, has been:

Year	*£*
1993–94	1,874,000
1992–93	1,648,000
1991–92	2,104,000
1990–91	1,911,000
1989–90	2,713,000
1988–89	1,470,000

Figures in the form requested are not available for 1979–80 to 1987–88. Total expenditure on information publicity for each year of that period, at 1994 prices, was:

Year	*£*
1979–80	629,000
1980–81	744,000
1981–82	724,000
1982–83	664,000
1983–84	592,000
1984–85	1,102,000

Year	*£*
1985–86	1,001,000
1986–87	1,228,000
1987–88	1,507,000

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* A full reply could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I refer the hon. Member to my answers to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 21 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *51*, and to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 16 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *660*, which contain much of the information sought.

EMPLOYMENT

Saddlery

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the prospects for young people to enter, and receive training for, the saddlery trade; if he will support the continuing provision of centres of excellence within the trade for the provision of training; and what plans he has to ensure that employment prospects in the industry are strengthened.

Mr. Paice: The prospects for young people entering and receiving training in the saddlery trade are very good. The industry is interested in developing a modern apprenticeship framework which will enhance and improve existing opportunities.

The industry is successful in the domestic and overseas markets and should be responsible for primary support for centres of excellence. Young people are, of course, eligible for support through youth training. Individual training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies have flexibility in addressing the needs of their local labour markets.

Training

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of people who took part in schemes run under the auspices of employment training and employment action progressed to further training as a result of their scheme in the years 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Paice: Of those leaving employment training in Great Britain in both 1991–92 and 1992–3, 2 per cent. went into another Government training programme. The only full year for which data are available for employment action is 1992–93. Of those leaving EA in Great Britain in that year, 11 per cent. went into another Government training programme.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, how many young people with severe disabilities are currently participating on a youth training scheme; how many are awaiting a position on a youth training scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: Of those leaving youth training in England and Wales in the period April to September 1994, 5 per cent. had a disability or health problem.

There are no figures available for the number of disabled people waiting for a position on a YT scheme.

Ministerial Travel (Hong Kong)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to travel to Hong Kong.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the total assets available to South Thames TEC prior to it going into receivership.

Mr. Paice: This is a matter for the receiver. A list of South Thames training and enterprise council's assets and liabilities is still in the process of being drawn up.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for what reasons his Department is asserting preferential creditor status with regard to the receivership of South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: The Department is not a preferential creditor with regard to South Thames training and enterprise council. The Department is a secured creditor as a result of the debenture with the TEC. Where, as in the case of South Thames TEC, public money is at risk, the Department has a duty to protect it. Were secured creditor status to be waived, this would not be possible. The debenture provides for a relationship between the Department and the administrative receiver which enables it, consistent with the receiver's legal responsibilities, to influence the management of the contract with the Department so as to minimise the disruption caused by the receivership to individuals on Government programmes within the South Thames TEC area.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the South Thames TEC assets will go to his Department as preferential creditor; and how much will go to the training providers owed money by the TEC.

Mr. Paice: The receiver is currently still in the process of drawing up a list of South Thames training and enterprise council's assets and liabilities. Until this is known, I am not in a position to make a statement about the division of assets between the Department and other creditors.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Miss Widdecombe: Records held by the Department and its agencies do not differentiate between consultancy firms and other organisations. It would be disproportionately costly to examine all case records manually.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *461*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1994, 201 appointments were made to the public bodies which are the responsibility of the Employment Department group.

Unemployment

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures showing the number of unemployed persons with dependent children who have been unemployed for *(a)* less than six months, *(b)* six to 12 months and *(c)* 12 months or more.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Latest estimates from the summer 1994 labour force survey for Great Britain show that there were 785,000 International Labour Organisation unemployed parents with dependent children. Of these, 297,000 had been ILO unemployed for less than six months; 138,000 had been ILO unemployed for six to 12 months and 349,000 had been ILO unemployed for over one year.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish the latest figures showing the number of children living in families with an unemployed head;

(2) if he will publish the latest figures showing the number of children living in families headed by a person who has been unemployed for *(a)* less than six months, *(b)* six to 12 months and *(c)* 12 months or more.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Latest estimates from the summer 1994 labour force survey for Great Britain show that there were 1,103,000 children living in families with an ILO unemployed head. Of these, 297,000 children lived in a family where the head had been ILO unemployed for less than six months; 170,000 in a family where the head had been ILO unemployed for six to 12 months and 635,000 in a family where the head had been ILO unemployed for over a year.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his oral answer of 7 February to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), *Official Report*, column 124, (1) if he will make a statement regarding measures he is taking to improve the working of the labour market which will address discrimination faced by ethnic minorities;

(2) what are the measures he has taken to tailor the most effective help for those facing prejudice on the grounds of race when looking for a job.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The Race Relations Act 1976 makes racial discrimination in employment matters generally unlawful and anyone who feels that they have been discriminated against any complain to an industrial tribunal.

The Department's race relations employment advisory service advises employers on how to provide racial equality of opportunity. The Department has also published guidance for employers on this.

Helping people at a disadvantage in the labour market to find work is one of the strategic priorities set for training and enterprise councils. They are contractually obliged to ensure that they and their providers promote equality of opportunity in access to, treatment on and outcomes from their programmes. Performance-related funding encourages TECs to improve the rate of job outcomes from training for ethnic minority people.

The Employment Service applies the principles of racial equality of opportunity in its programmes and services. ES has taken a number of measures to assist people from ethnic minorities. Employers wishing to use ES provisions must comply with the Race Relations Act.

Jobsearch Plans

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's policy on whether it will be considered reasonable, in answer to question 18 of the draft jobsearch plan, to specify a figure below the benefit level that the jobseeker would get if he remained unemployed.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The draft jobsearch plan has been designed to enable jobseekers to set out information to help them prepare for the discussions with an employment adviser about their jobseeker's agreement. Whether a particular level of pay is reasonable will be determined in the light of the jobseeker's skills and experience, whether he has a previous occupation and the labour market conditions. As now, people with a previous occupation may be allowed a permitted period of up to 13 weeks during which they may refuse employment where the level or remuneration is lower than they are accustomed to receive. Legislation would stipulate that, as now, the level of remuneration cannot be a reason for refusing employment outside the permitted period.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance he proposes to issue in respect of the lowest wage that can be specified under question 18 of the draft jobsearch plan without a refusal of benefit resulting; and if he will make a statement about question 18 of the draft plan.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 3 February 1995]:* The draft jobsearch plan has been designed to enable jobseekers to set out information to help them prepare for the discussions with an employment adviser about their jobseeker's agreement. A question about the level of pay is relevant for consideration of the permitted period during which an unemployed person may refuse employment where the level of remuneration is lower than he is accustomed to receive. The same question is already asked of all unemployed people when they make a claim for benefit. The draft Jobsearch plan simply carries forward existing practice in this respect.

Beyond any permitted period, the jobseeker may still be allowed to restrict his availability on grounds of pay for up to six months, provided that he retains reasonable prospects of securing employment, and that he becomes available for an increasing range of jobs. Legislation

would stipulate that, as now, the level of remuneration cannot be a reason for refusing employment outside the permitted period.

Decisions on such issues will be a matter for independent adjudication officers who are not subject to guidance from the Secretary of State. It is for the chief adjudication officer to issue guidance based on the relevant legislation and case law.

Labour Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people left unemployment in each quarter since 1987 after *(a)* zero to 13 weeks unemployed, *(b)* 12 to 26 weeks unemployed, *(c)* 26 to 39 weeks unemployed, *(d)* 39 to 52 weeks unemployed, *(e)* 52 to 65 weeks unemployed, *(f)* 65 to 78 weeks unemployed, *(g)* 78 to 91 weeks unemployed, *(h)* 91 to 104 weeks unemployed, *(i)* 104 to 140 weeks unemployed, *(j)* 140 to 156 weeks unemployed and *(k)* 156 to 208 weeks unemployed; and what is the exit rate as a percentage of the relevant stock of unemployed for each duration.

Mr. Oppenheim: Unadjusted quarterly information on the stock of claimant unemployment, and on claimant outflows, by duration can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. No information is available on ILO unemployment flows.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many, and what proportion of people, in each year since 1974, who were *(a)* unemployed, *(b)* unemployed for more than one year and *(c)* unemployed for more than two years have (i) a degree, (ii) GCEs or GCSEs and (iii) no qualifications.

Mr. Oppenheim: For years 1984 onwards, this information is available from the labour force survey and can be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library.

Industrial Accidents

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if Her Majesty's Government support the decision of the European Parliament to amend the EC industrial hazards directive 82/501 so as to require EU member states to forward data on industrial accidents to the Commission and the European Environment Agency.

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand that the European Parliament is to consider at its session on 16 February 1995 amendments suggested by its members to the proposed Council directive on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances, which is intended to replace Council directive 82/501. The Parliament has, therefore, not yet taken a decision on the position of data on industrial accidents being forwarded to the Commission and the European Environment Agency.

The Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Environment, which jointly lead on negotiations on the proposed directive, are considering the implications of an additional reporting requirement to the European Environment Agency. I will take a view on this when the European Parliament has made its position clear.

Part-time Workers

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he intends to take to publicise the new employment rights for part-time workers.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Employment Department publicises employees' statutory rights in a number of ways. A press notice was issued on 20 December last year when the Government announced their intention to remove the qualifying hours thresholds. News items on the removal of the thresholds have since been included in the Department's "Employment Gazette" and "Employment News" publications. In addition, the Department's series of free leaflets on employment protection rights is being revised to reflect the new position.

WALES

Pregnancy Statistics

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number and rate of *(a)* conceptions, *(b)* full-term pregnancies and *(c)* terminations for each of the last 10 years, for girls in the age group 12 to 15 years; and if he will disaggregate this information to the level for which figures are collected centrally.

Mr. Richards: The information available for Wales is shown in the following table. Corresponding information for district health authorities, with rates averaged over three year periods, is published in the OPCS Monitor, "Conceptions in England and Wales 1991: residents of regional and district health authority areas FM1 94/1", which is in the Library of the House.

Conceptions at ages under 16—rate per 1,000 women aged 13–15

			Conceptions leading to:	
Year	*Number*	*Total conceptions*	*maternities*	*abortions*
1984	553	8.6	4.5	4.2
1985	577	9.3	4.9	4.3
1986	510	8.4	4.7	3.7
1987	545	9.6	5.0	4.6
1988	536	9.9	5.4	4.5
1989	460	8.9	4.9	4.0
1990	523	10.4	6.3	4.1
1991	461	9.5	5.0	4.5

Note:
Rates use the mid-year population estimates revised following the rebasing of mid-1991 estimates using the 1991 census of population.

Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many 16 and 17-year-olds are unemployed in each of the counties of Wales and in each of the parliamentary constituencies; and what is the percentage not receiving a benefit.

Mr. Redwood: Information on levels of claimant unemployment for under 18-year-olds are available from the NOMIS database in the Library of the House. Information on the numbers of people in receipt of benefits is not available from the claimant count.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many long-term unemployed there are in

each of the parliamentary constituencies and counties of Wales;

(2) how many young unemployed adults there are in each of the counties in Wales and in each of the parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Redwood: The data requested are available from the NOMIS database, which can be accessed by the staff of the Library of the House.

Training

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives there are in place to ensure that there are sufficient training opportunities for young people with special needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Youth training provides a range of opportunities for young people, including those with special needs. This is underpinned by the Government's guarantee that all 16 and 17-year-olds not in education or employment who are seeking training shall receive the offer of a suitable YT place. The guarantee may be extended to those aged 18 who have been prevented from taking up, or continuing with, a YT place for specified reasons including language difficulties and disability.

Civil Servants (Redundancy Payments)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors are taken into account by his Department in relation to the setting of redundancy payments made to civil servants; and if he will make it his policy to offer the same terms to local government staff.

Mr. Redwood: The financial terms for civil servants in the event of redundancy are set out in the civil service compensation scheme. This scheme, which applies throughout the civil service, was laid before Parliament on 20 December 1994 by Her Majesty's Treasury.

The Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994 set out the redundancy terms for local government staff, which are not the same as those which apply to civil servants. The regulations were approved by a resolution of the House on 24 January 1995. The Government have no plans to amend them.

Receiverships

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many firms went into receivership in Wales in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1991, *(e)* 1990 and *(f)* 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Official statistics on companies placed into receivership are not available separately for Wales.

Dentists

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each *(a)* district council area, *(b)* health authority area and *(c)* for Wales as a whole for the latest available date and for the previous three years the number of (i) dentists and (ii) dentists accepting new patients to NHS lists.

Mr. Richards: Information on the number of general dental practitioners treating NHS patients in Wales is collected centrally by family health services authority area and is given in the following table. Information on the number of dentists accepting new patients to NHS lists is not held centrally.

Number of dentists at 30 September [1]

FHSA	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Clwyd	105	102	114	117
Dyfed	101	105	104	105
Gwent	139	135	135	138
Gwynedd	65	66	67	66
Mid Glamorgan	123	133	126	125
Powys	36	35	34	33
South Glamorgan	129	127	133	133
West Glamorgan	134	128	130	132
Wales	832	831	843	849

[1] Principles and assistants. Dentists working in more than one FHSA are accounted in the FHSA where they perform most work.

Free School Meals

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children attending *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools are entitled to free school meals and how many do not receive them; and if he will provide the information by local education authority.

Mr. Richards: The information available is shown in the following table:

School meals service, by LEA area 1993–94

	Clwyd	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Wales*
Primary schools:									
Number of pupils taking free midday meals[1]	6,570	6,201	10,744	4,111	15,726	1,212	10,125	8,173	62,862
Number of pupils entitled to free meals[2]	7,540	6,972	12,910	4,535	18,078	1,334	10,964	9,342	71,675
Secondary schools:									
Number of pupils taking free midday meals[1]	2,862	2,875	4,378	1,736	6,612	405	3,762	3,789	26,419
Number of pupils entitled to free meals[2]	3,815	3,906	6,249	2,379	9,398	486	5,290	5,003	36,526

[1] Pupils taking free midday meals on 18 January 1994.

[2] Pupils on roll on 18 January 1994 who were registered as being entitled to free meals. Pupils entitled to free meals but absent from school on 18 January are included.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has taken legal action against one consultancy firm in the last five years. This action, initiated in 1994, is being taken in connection with alleged defective workmanship on a trunk road scheme. Further information cannot be provided until the case has been resolved.

W. S. Atkins and Partners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) on what grounds he instructed the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to place W. S. Atkins and Partners on a stop list for the purposes of hospital design consultancy work; and on what date subsequent modification to that instruction have taken place;

(2) if he will specify what instructions his Department issued to Welsh Health Common Services Authority to place W. S. Atkins and Partners on a stop list; on what date the stop list was lifted or modified; what bearing the stop list classification had on pre-qualification for inquiries about sale of hospital design sections of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: W. S. Atkins and Partners has not been placed on any stop list in Wales. Health authorities in Wales were advised on 22 September 1988 that it should not be appointed to major new commissions in Wales without the approval of the Department and to ensure the company was capable of performing satisfactorily in all aspects of the proposed commission.

The requirement for departmental approval was lifted on 4 January 1991, but health authorities were required to exercise caution when considering any appointment of W. S. Atkins and Partners.

Any speculation about the future of the EstateCare Group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority or the interest of any particular company is premature until the current review of market testing opportunities has been completed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority in relation to inquiries by W. S. Atkins and Partners with a view to the market testing and sale of the EstateCare group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *423*, how many officers of the Welsh Development Agency have had disciplinary action taken against them arising out of problems on procurement of information systems.

Mr. Redwood: I have asked the chief executive of the agency to write to the hon. Member and will arrange for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Habitat Scheme

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the habitat scheme was launched; and when details were made available to farmers and their unions.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The habitat scheme was announced on 15 December 1994. Further information is available from the new countryside and agricultural information service or Agriculture Department divisional offices.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total budget of the environmentally sensitive area schemes in *(a)* the Cambrian mountains, *(b)* Lleyn peninsular, *(c)* Radnor and *(d)* Preseli.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The total budget available for distribution under the schemes in Wales in 1995–96 will be £6,900,000.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications have been processed for grant aid under the present environmentally sensitive area scheme; and what was the average time spent processing them.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are 793 extant management agreements in Wales. Processing time is not currently recorded but has varied according to the circumstances of each case, and has depended upon the complexity of the application and the amount of help needed by farmers in drawing up a scheme.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications have been received to take part in the Preseli environmentally sensitive area scheme.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Ninety-five.

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of Welsh health authorities and trusts concerning the provision of additional intensive care beds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have not discussed the provision of intensive care beds with NHS chairmen, but will shortly be asking all health authorities in Wales to assess the need for such beds and then to work with hospitals to introduce any changes that are necessary.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *444*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Redwood: Between 1 December 1993 and 30 November 1994, I made 198 appointments, excluding reappointments, to non-departmental public bodies, including NHS bodies.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the dispatch of tender documents for a buildings condition survey in relation to the impact of rising groundwater from the Cardiff bay barrage; how many applications

were received by the 20 January deadline; what is the estimated survey cost in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: None. My Department has authorised the provision of £5.04 million in total for expenditure on property condition surveys. The number of survey applications received and the estimated cost of surveys in each of the next five years are operational matters for the corporation and the chief executive will write to the hon. Member.

St. David's Hospital, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has received for the construction of a new local neighbourhood hospital on the site of St. David's hospital, Cowbridge road east, Cardiff; on what date he received the full detailed business case; what was the date of its approval; if he will make a statement on the application of the principles of the private finance initiative to the business case; and what was the proposed capital expenditure in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97.

Mr. Redwood: The Department received and advised on a draft proposal for a local hospital on the site in February 1994. South Glamorgan health authority's revised submission taking into account its strategic purchasing plan and its consultations with local community health councils is still awaited.

If and when the outline business case is approved, expressions of interest will be sought from private sector organisations wishing to submit proposals for the design, build, finance and management of non-clinical facilities.

Stillborn Baby, Wrexham

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the Wrexham Maelor hospital into the transportation of a stillborn baby from Wrexham to the University hospital of Wales, Cardiff.

Mr. Redwood: Yes. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Hague: No legal action has been taken by the Department of Social Security or its agencies against a consultancy firm during the last five years.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State or Social Security how many appeals concerning invalidity benefit were received by his Department during each of the quarters since 1994; and what percentage of these were found in the claimant's favour.

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the table.

Invalidity benefit appeals

Quarters in 1994	*Received*	*Heard and decided*	*Percentage in appellant's favour*
January–March	6,381	4,005	58
April–June	6,290	3,683	58

Information from "Quarterly Social Security Appeal Statistics" produced by the Government Statistical Service.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *387*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Hague: There were 87 such appointments or re-appointments to those bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1994".

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for unemployment benefit in the last available year the claimant *(a)* gained the adult dependent addition and *(b)* refused the addition on the grounds that the claimant's dependents earnings were above the threshold.

Mr. Roger Evans: The latest available information is that the number of claimants with an adult dependency increase to unemployment benefit in Great Britain, as at May 1994, was 73,000 and, as at November 1993, was 82,000. Figures are for a point in time, rounded to the nearest thousand, and based on a 5 per cent sample. They are derived from the "Half yearly analysis of unemployed claimants", a copy of which is in the Library.

Information on the number of refusals of adult dependency increases by reason is not available.

Incapacity Benefits

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the exercise of monitoring the revised medical control procedures introduced for incapacity benefits will be completed and published.

Mr. Hague: The current medical control arrangements for benefits for incapacity will be superseded by the introduction of incapacity benefit from 13 April 1995. Data collection from the monitoring of the procedural changes introduced in April 1993 will continue for some time after that. We expect analysis to be completed towards the end of the summer.

Net Incomes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *825-26*, if he will provide a comparable table on income distribution for quintiles 2, 3 and 4.

Mr. Burt: The following table gives the change in the real net incomes for quintiles 2, 3 and 4 of the United Kingdom income distribution of families with children for the period 1979 to 1991–92. 1991–92 is the two calendar years combined.

Information is given both before and after housing costs.

Percentage change in real incomes of 2nd, 3rd and 4th quintiles of families with children, 1979 to 1991–92

	Quintile 2 20–40 per cent.	*Quintile 3 40–60 per cent.*	*Quintile 4 60–80 per cent.*
Before housing costs	(7)	22	33
After housing costs	(1)	20	32

Notes:
1. In the table quintiles 2, 3 and 4 refer to the second from bottom, middle and second from top quintiles respectively.
2. Percentage growth estimates are calculated from the median income of each quintile.
3. Estimates in brackets () are particularly uncertain; see appendix 5 of "Households Below Average Income 1979 to 1991–92—a copy of which is in the Library—for details of the tests applied to estimates of changes in real incomes.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns 825–26, on income distribution, if he will indicate *(a)* the numbers in each quintile in each year, *(b)* the actual income levels in each year for each quintile, 1 to 5 and *(c)* at what income level there was no change in income (i) before housing costs and (ii) after housing cost; and if he will provide a regional analysis of real income levels in each quintile, 1 to 5.

Mr. Burt: Information is provided for the United Kingdom as a whole. Information is not available on a regional basis.

In 1979 there were 5.5 million individuals in each quintile of the income distribution of families with children. For 1991–92 the equivalent figure is 5 million. 1991–92 is the two calendar years combined.

The available information is in the table.

Income of families with children: quintile medians for 1979 and 1991–92

	Quintile 1 bottom 20 per cent.	*Quintile 2 20–40 per cent.*	*Quintile 3 40–60 per cent.*	*Quintile 4 60–80 per cent.*	*Quintile 5 Top 20 per cent.*
Before housing costs					
1979	103	138	165	198	261
1991–92	100	148	202	263	394
After housing costs					
1979	86	117	141	172	227
1991–92	76	118	169	226	339

Notes:
1. The figures relate to the median income level in each quintile in April 1994 prices. Estimates are for weekly income and are given to the nearest whole £.
2. The figures given are for equivalised income.
3. All estimates are subject to sampling error.

Before housing costs the income level of the 21st percentile of the income distribution of families with children is the same in 1979 as in 1991–92. After housing costs the equivalent figure is approximately the 29th percentile.

Newcastle Estate

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy that as part of the proposed redevelopment of his Department's Newcastle estate the new office will be in the Tyneside area and will not involve any loss of jobs locally.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The administration of the Department's Newcastle estate is the responsibility of Mr. George Bertram, the acting chief executive of the Contributions Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from George Bertram to Mr. Neville Trotter dated 14 February 1995:

As Acting Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for control and administration of the Department of Social Security's Newcastle Estate. I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for Social Security regarding the proposed development of the Estate.

The Newcastle Estate Development Project seeks to provide new accommodation within a ten mile radius (approximately) of Newcastle city centre. This encompasses the whole of the Tyneside area and also extends into Wearside, whilst skirting the boundaries of Durham and Northumberland.

Organisations who express interest will, over the coming months, develop proposals to satisfy our accommodation requirements, the evaluation of which will consider all factors including location, and most importantly, value for money for the taxpayer.

The aim of the project is to provide modern, multi-functional accommodation for the use of DSS staff currently on the Newcastle Estate. As you know, the Department continues to seek efficiency savings and possible future reductions in staffing levels may coincide with a change of location. However, the rationalisation of the accommodation will not itself involve any loss of jobs although the physical location of the jobs may change within the ten mile radius.

I hope you find this information helpful.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Poultry Transport

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the regulations applying to the transport of poultry; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The following orders, made under the Animal Health Act 1981, apply to the transport of poultry:

The Transit of Animals (General) Order 1973

The Welfare of Poultry Transport Order 1988

The Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Jack: Expenditure on consultants in each of the years concerned was as follows:

Financial year	*Expenditure* £	*Expenditure at 1994 prices* £
1987–88	44,015	61,887
1988–89	1,174,114	1,547,016
1989–90	2,972,150	3,661,506
1990–91	4,495,793	5,125,327
1991–92	5,374,284	5,761,665
1992–93	7,010,814	7,238,665
1993–94	12,169,785	12,169,785
1994–95	[1]11,534,575	—

[1] Estimated.

The figures for 1987–88 exclude computer consultants.

It is not possible to quantify savings accruing from this expenditure, since most of the benefits derive from new systems and working methods, and from the consultants' expertise in certain fields, in which permanent staff do not have the necessary knowledge and experience.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what checks were made that the calves unable to be flown from Coventry airport on 3 February were fed, watered and rested every 15 hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: Two consignments of calves that had arrived at the airport were returned to their premises of origin after planned flights were disrupted by demonstrators. A third consignment was turned back before reaching the airport. Two of the three would have reached their premises of origin within the 15-hour statutory period. The third could not and the calves were therefore returned under a notice requiring their feeding and watering immediately on arrival at the home premises.

As a result of this incident we are now insisting that exporters make contingency arrangements for the animals to be lairaged in premises near the airport in the event of similar disruptions.

Fur Farms

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many mink were killed on fur farms in the United Kingdom in 1994; and how their carcasses were disposed of.

Mrs. Browning: This information is not available.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people were employed in the killing of animals on fur farms in the United Kingdom in 1994; and what were their qualifications for this.

Mrs. Browning: In monitoring welfare standards on fur farms the state veterinary service takes account of guidelines laid down in the recommendation concerning fur animals adopted by the Council of Europe in 1990. That recommendation specifies that the killing of farmed fur-bearing animals must be carried out by a competent person. However, no specific qualifications are laid down and information regarding the number of people involved is not available.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the environment needs of farmed mink and Arctic fox; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The Farm Animal Welfare Council's review of fur farming in 1989 considered the environmental needs of farmed mink and fox. It concluded that there was insufficient evidence to make specific recommendations on the keeping of fur-bearing animals and recommended that the industry should carry out further research.

The Farm Animal Welfare Council has recently given its views on a report by Respect For Animals which made certain recommendations regarding the keeping of mink and Arctic fox. Interested organisations are being consulted on this further advice from FAWC.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many reports he has received of mink escaping from fur farms on the Isle of Wight in the last 10 years.

Mrs. Browning: Over the last 10 years no reports have been received by this Ministry of mink escaping from the licensed mink farm on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many licences for fur factory farms of the Isle of Wight he has issued in the last 10 years.

Mrs. Browning: In each of the last 10 years only one licence has been issued to keep mink at premises on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what checks are carried out to ensure that pentobarbiturate used killing animals on fur farms has been properly and legally authorised and obtained.

Mrs. Browning: Products used to kill animals require authorisation under the marketing authorisation for veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994. All such products are categorised as prescription-only medicines and are subject to the usual checks for product of that sort. Members of the state veterinary service, as part of their duties during regular visits to all farms for welfare purposes, including fur farms, check that veterinary medicines have been properly authorised and obtained.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Ministry or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Jack: No central records are kept, but so far as we can ascertain no such actions have been taken.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *447*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Jack: In the last year, my right hon. Friend has made 205 appointments to those bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1994". Of these, 80 were re-appointments and 125 were new appointments.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of compensation paid in respect of animals slaughtered as BSE carriers has subsequently been discovered to have been paid in respect of animals which were not infected in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The percentage of cattle slaughtered as BSE suspects which were subsequently not confirmed after laboratory examination for the past five years is as follows:

Year	*Percentage unconfirmed*
1990	15
1991	14
1992	15
1993	16
1994	[1]23

[1] Provisional figure.

However, it is not possible without disproportionate costs to divide the total amount paid out in compensation into the percentages for confirmed and unconfirmed cases. The compensation paid varies from animal to animal according to market value within a ceiling which is adjusted monthly—the indicative market price. The ceiling is increased by 25 per cent. for unconfirmed cases.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *645*, what was the nature of the other experiments which revealed that cows milk contains no detectable BSE infectivity.

Mrs. Browning: The other experiments involved challenge of mice with:

A) A mixture of milk and udder by feeding;
B) Milk alone by feeding;
C) Udder alone by inoculation; and
D) Milk alone by inoculation;

All derived from cows with clinical signs of BSE and confirmed by microscopic examination of the brain. No infectivity was detected in any of these studies.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *647*, how the sterilisation of specified bovine offals is undertaken.

Mrs. Browning: The term "sterilised" is defined in the Specified Bovine Offal (Prohibition) Regulations 1989, as amended, and has the meaning as given in the Meat (Sterilisation and Staining) Regulations 1989.

Under existing legislation, specified bovine offal must either be sterilised or stained at the place of its removal—that is, at the slaughterhouse. The sterilisation option is rarely used by slaughterhouses and the Government have recently consulted with interested parties on proposals to withdraw this option for slaughterhouses.

SBO will continue to be sent from slaughterhouses to rendering plants for treatment before being buried or incinerated under licence.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *646*, what was the monthly number of cases of BSE confirmed in the United Kingdom during 1994 that *(a)* were born before 18 July 1988 and *(b)* after 18 July 1988.

Mrs. Browning: The number of confirmed cases of BSE in Great Britain for 1994 is as follows:

Year	*Born before 18 July 1988*	*Born after 18 July 1988*
January	1,559	637
February	2,312	805
March	2,160	1,119
April	1,643	945
May	1,425	558
June	1,480	1,024
July	948	493
August	1,019	539
September	992	884
October	1,071	940
November	1,079	816
December	685	495
Total	16,373	9,255

The number of cases of BSE in Northern Ireland for 1994 is as follows. The ruminant feed ban in NI came into force on 11 January 1989.

Year	*Born before 11 January 1989*	*Born after 11 January 1989*
January	44	8
February	36	7
March	42	7
April	28	2
May	11	0
June	23	6
July	19	2
August	23	4
September	20	8
October	22	3
November	22	7
December	17	2
Total	307	56

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *645*, what was the apparent source of the infection in the cow born in April 1989.

Mrs Browning: It is not possible to precisely indicate specific routes of infection for most individual cases. The breeding records relating to the case in question were incomplete and the date of birth was therefore estimated by its dentition. The animal's mother has been sold but has not been reported as a BSE suspect elsewhere.

Milk Quota

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received concerning delays in transferring milk quota by the Intervention Board.

Mr. Jack: The Ministry received 57 representations concerning the delays in processing milk quota transactions by the Intervention Board following the transfer of responsibility for administering the milk quota system to the board on 1 April 1994. These delays were due in part to technical problems with the Intervention Board's new computer system, but the principal cause was the delay on the part of the milk marketing boards in providing essential information. These problems have now been overcome and the processing of quota transactions is proceeding satisfactorily.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many transfer applications the Intervention Board had for *(a)* the sale and *(b)* the leasing of milk quota in England and in Wales.

Mr. Jack: As milk quotas can be transferred throughout the United Kingdom, separate figures are not available for England and Wales. For the whole of the UK the Intervention Board had received 24,404 applications for the lease of milk quotas by the end of the leasing period on 31 December 1994, and 5,762 applications for the permanent transfer of milk quotas by 13 February 1995.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total litreage of milk quota transferred by the Intervention Board *(a)* by sale and *(b)* for leasing to date.

Mr. Jack: The total litreage of milk quota processed by the Intervention Board at 13 February 1995 was 341,000,000 litres by permanent transfer and 1,339,000,000 litres by lease.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the average time spent by the Intervention Board in processing applications for transfer of milk quota by *(a)* sale and *(b)* leasing in England and in Wales.

Mr. Jack: After initial processing delays when milk quota records were being transferred from the milk marketing boards and subsequently amended following vesting day changes on 1 November 1994 in England, Wales and Scotland, the Intervention Board is now processing the majority of milk quota leases and transfers within 15 days of receipt of acceptable applications.

DEFENCE

Land Sales

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to ensure that sale by tender or auction is not the invariable method of approved disposal where another method would achieve better value; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It is our normal practice to dispose of the freehold of surplus land—in which there is no former owner of pre-emptive interest—on the open market by competition, so as to maximise the financial return. A range of other methods may, however, be used if professional advice indicates that such alternatives would produce a better value.

Departmental Property

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action his Department has taken to ensure the provision of an efficient and cost-effective service to customers of his Department's property services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A new Defence Estate Organisation is to be formed which will incorporate the staff who are involved in providing services to the occupiers of the defence estate. The intention is that this will provide a top-down oversight of the estate and thereby improve the efficiency of those services. As announced on 17 January, the chief executive of the new organisation will take up his appointment on 1 April.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy as to the notice given to agents appointed to dispose of property by reference to the date of closure of a service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: When disposing of surplus property, it is our policy to seek the smoothest possible transition from service to civilian use by ensuring that as much notice as possible of closure and vacation dates together with other appropriate information is given to appointed agents.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action is taken to ensure that the use of joint ventures is encouraged so that optimal value is achieved for property disposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It is our practice to consider alternative methods of disposal, including joint venture, where professional advice indicates that conventional open market sale would not achieve optimal value.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has established a clear distinction between his Department as estate owner and the various budget holders as occupiers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The responsibilities of the budget holders as occupiers of the defence estate are clearly established. They are responsible for the efficient and economic use of the estate in ensuring that the armed forces are properly prepared for war. Their responsibilities include the maintenance of the estate, taking account of operational requirements, conservation, the interests of tenants and, wherever possible, the generation of income and allowing access by the public. The budget holders are ultimately responsible to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, in whom title to the estate is vested, for the discharge of these duties.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect of disposal pressures on the achievement of optimal value for property disposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: We are conscious that many factors such as the size and nature of the establishment; the local planning environment; the state of the market; and the timing of the disposal can impact on the achievement of optimal value. All such factors are taken into account in developing a disposal strategy for a site.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action his Department has taken to promote the effective utilisation of landed property and its

rationalisation, reductions in cost of use and operation and consequently properly planned redundancy and disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The director of estate rationalisation, defence lands service is specifically charged with identifying opportunities for rationalisation and disposal of the defence estate, so as to promote its best and most cost-effective use; this includes ensuring that estates issues are taken fully into account in investment appraisals and studies.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the normal time scale for the disposal of surplus property; what discretion is given to the defence estate in this respect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: In common with other Government Departments, it is our policy to dispose of surplus property, wherever practicable, within three years. It is accepted that for some sites a longer-term disposal strategy is required, and in those circumstances, a flexible approach is adopted.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will restructure the defence land service and the defence works service and infrastructure to form one overall organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It was announced on 17 January that the first chief executive of the Defence Estate Organisation will be Mr. Brian Hirst who will join the Ministry of Defence on 1 April this year. The new organisation will incorporate the defence lands service, the defence works service and the infrastructure and logistics, infrastructure, division.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to amend budgetary rules related to anuality to ensure that optimal value is achieved for property disposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: There are no plans to seek changes to the existing end-year flexibility scheme which allows funding to be carried forward from one year to the next subject to certain criteria being met. All defence operating costs, including property disposals, and defence procurement expenditure are eligible for carry-forward under this scheme.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all his Department's property assets are valued; if a comprehensive database has been established; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Some parts of the defence estate have already been valued and other elements are to be valued under a programme which is due to be completed by the end of 1996. As a separate but related exercise, a new database is to be created containing a more detailed record of property assets held by my Department.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to ensure his Department's estate becomes more proactive in overall occupational and budgeting decisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Defence estate issues are already given the fullest possible exposure in Departmental studies and other initiatives involving occupational and budgeting decisions.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his strategic plan encompassing property interests at his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It is our objective to manage the defence estate so that it supports, cost effectively, the military capability of the armed forces in peace and war. Property which is no longer required for these purposes is disposed of.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons phasing plans are used for large-scale disposals of his Department's property; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A phased disposal strategy may be employed under various circumstances including: where market supply exceeds demand; where planning objectives can best be met by staged release of land; or, where the financial return from sale cannot otherwise be maximised.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he takes to ensure value for money in property maintenance in his Department.

Mr. Soames: Following my Department's untying from the Property Services Agency on 1 April 1990, property maintenance became the responsibility of individual top-level budget holders. At each unit which controls maintenance programmes, three independent parties undertake clearly defined tasks. The Department appoints a service or civilian officer as property manager who is advised by a contractor—establishment works consultant. Another contractor acts as works services manager carrying out the tasks. This system, centering on contractorisation, reinforced by independent reviews and audits, is intended to ensure best value for money.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to ensure his Department's property estate places greater emphasis on active asset management and asset realisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Department is taking a number of steps to place greater emphasis on the management of the defence estate as an asset. These include the creation of the Defence Estate Organisation which will provide a top-down view of all estate related activities. In addition, the estate is being valued as a precursor to the introduction of resource accounting and the valuation work is linked to the creation of a new property database.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances his Department's estate is allowed to enter into term contracts with the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: As with all contracts, term contracts are used when they are both appropriate and to my Department's advantage in terms of value for money. The scale and nature of the demand and delivery requirements are also factors used to determine whether a term contract is the most appropriate means to meet a particular need.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice his Department gives in the preparation of planning briefs for significant disposals of property, including joint ventures, to ensure appropriate greater local authority involvement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It is normal practice to seek to develop, in co-operation with the local authority, a planning brief for large or complex sites.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the surplus air bases in the eastern counties of the United Kingdom that *(a)* have and *(b)* have

not a phasing plan for disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The following air bases in the counties of Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk have been declared surplus to RAF requirements: RAF Bentwaters, RAF Sculthorpe, RAF Swanton Morley, RAF West Raynham and RAF Woodbridge. An offer has been accepted for the sale of RAF Bentwaters in its entirety. No disposal plans have been finalised for the other sites, several of which remain under consideration for alternative defence uses.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department will liaise with the Department of National Heritage and other appropriate bodies where buildings need to be preserved for posterity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department has developed good working relationships at all levels with the Department of National Heritage, English Heritage and other national heritage bodies with the aim of achieving the highest standards of conservation of its historic buildings.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to ensure that buildings declared surplus but which have feasible alternative uses are not neglected to such an extent as to make their disposal at a later date more difficult and less cost-effective; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It is already our policy to take steps, wherever possible, to maintain the viability of surplus buildings which have alternative use potential and to explore the scope for realising revenue through their short-term commercial use where disposal of the freehold is not in immediate prospect.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account is taken in his strategy for control of his property operations of heritage policy and the military married quarter estate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Within the overall strategy of holding the minimum amount of land and buildings necessary to support the operations of the armed forces, historic buildings are considered for their suitability alongside other buildings. Many continue in full use and others are being adapted to a new defence use but where an historic building is redundant, my Department seeks to dispose of it for an alternative use which will preserve its architectural and historic value.

The Department is committed to ensuring that the number of married quarters is kept to the minimum necessary to meet service demands. Responsibility for management of the estate will pass to the defence housing executive on 1 April 1995.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to forming a holding agency to cover those properties held by his Department for which there is no immediate market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The House of Commons Defence Committee report on the defence estate recommended that consideration be given to the creation of a separate agency to hold and dispose of surplus land. This recommendation will be given further consideration when the chief executive of the new Defence Estate Organisation takes up his appointment on 1 April 1995.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to learn from the experience gained by the NHS in a conservation strategy for his Department's buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Officials in the Department of National Heritage who have been working with the NHS on their conservation strategy also work with my Department and policy is being developed along similar lines. In particular, my officials are working with English Heritage on the selective listing of aviation structures, dockyards and barracks, on which thematic surveys are being carried out. In addition, officials from my Department held a meeting in August last year with the chairman of the historic hospitals working group to discuss common problems and respective approaches.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what phasing plans exist for disposal of Old Park barracks, Dover; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Discussion with the local authority and other interested parties concerning a single regeneration budget to assist in the development of the site is ongoing. A planning brief has been agreed for the site and phased development is an option for disposal.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those properties *(a)* sold by his Department and *(b)* in the process of being sold where the sale involved a joint venture with private or public sector partners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Although, to date, no Ministry of Defence properties have been sold through joint venture schemes, the following properties are in the process of being sold through such schemes: the former central vehicle depot, Hilton, Derbyshire, and the former ordnance storage depot, Ruddington, Nottinghamshire.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to ensure that there is greater emphasis on active asset management and asset realisation in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A number of financial management improvements are being introduced as a result of the defence costs study. These include conventional asset accounting techniques, supported by appropriate commercial software, which are to be introduced throughout the Department.

Royal Air Force Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of running Royal Air Force Finningley in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: The cost of running Royal Air Force Finningley, including the cost of operating the units based there, for each of the last three financial years is as follows:

	£ million
1991–1992	29.5
1992–1993	27.5
1993–1994	31.2

Information for financial years 1984–85 to 1990–91 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Simulated low-altitude Bombing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who can request and obtain simulated low-altitude bombing attacks on publicly owned buildings.

Mr. Soames: Any public body can request that its premises be used as targets for simulated low-level attacks. Any request would be considered on its merits taking into account not only the reasons for the request, but the usual criteria for selecting suitable simulated targets.

Land Contamination

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the most recent assessment he has made of land contamination at *(a)* the Defence Research Agency, Woolwich arsenal and *(b)* Royal Ordnance, Waltham abbey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The royal arsenal, Woolwich, comprises two sites. A number of studies have been commissioned on the west site; the ground study report has been completed, but the results of the building investigation are still awaited. Studies for the east site have been commissioned but not completed. The most recent assessment of contamination of Waltham abbey was conducted in August 1992.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions his Department has given in respect of the production of land quality statements for service establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: As part of an on-going review of land contamination and the defence estate, steps are being taken to incorporate the production of a land quality statement into site disposal procedures. Appropriate guidance for site occupiers is being prepared.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what budget is allocated for his Department's potential liabilities in respect of contaminated land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Individual budget holders within my Department are responsible for all aspects of site management, including any survey and decontamination work, and for making appropriate financial provision.

Burtonwood

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons his defence land agent did not inform Warrington borough council local planning department of the operational decision made in respect of Burtonwood; what was the role of that local authority's economic development unit in promoting its availability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: RAF Burtonwood has not been declared surplus to MOD requirements, pending consideration of an alternative defence use. The defence land agent has had on-going discussions with Warrington borough council regarding short-term lettings while the future of the site is determined, and also about non-defence uses in the event that the site was declared surplus. Warrington borough council will be advised when a final decision has been taken on the future of RAF Burtonwood and consulted fully about the future of the site.

"Instructions for Opening Fire in Northern Ireland"

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the current wording on the "Instructions for Opening Fire in Northern Ireland" issued to British armed forces.

Mr. Soames: Instructions concerning the use of firearms in Northern Ireland are part of rules of engagement which, like other operational documents, are not made publicly available.

Battle of Britain Memorial Flight

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to maintain the battle of Britain memorial flight's Lancaster in an airworthy condition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: All necessary steps are being taken to retain the BBMF Lancaster in an airworthy condition.

Rules of Engagement, Bosnia

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the current wording on the cards issued to armed British peacekeeping troops in Bosnia in respect of rules of engagement.

Mr. Soames: The wording on the cards issued to British troops in Bosnia is part of rules of engagement which, like other operational documents, are not made publicly available.

Defence Land Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the timetable for informing the defence lands service in respect of operational decisions; and what account is taken of its planning systems.

Mr. Soames: Our procedures require that the defence lands service should be closely involved from an early stage in studies where defence estate issues are, or are likely to be, a factor in operational decisions.

Private Lee Clegg

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action was taken against the officer in charge of the patrol at the time of the incident which led to the imprisonment of Private Lee Clegg; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The officer concerned was tried in the Belfast high court on two counts: making a statement with intent to pervert the course of justice; and obstructing the police. The officer was found not guilty of both charges.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any of the volunteers who underwent tests for *(a)* inoculations and *(b)* nerve agent pre-treatment sets at Porton Down in preparation for the Gulf war were women.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mrs. Edwina Currie dated 15 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if any of the volunteers who underwent tests for (a) inoculations and (b) nerve agent pre treatment sets at Porton Down in preparation for the Gulf War were women has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare is assessed and the effectiveness of medical countermeasures evaluated.

3. No Service volunteers participated in studies on inoculations and nerve agent pre-treatment sets (NAPS) in preparation for the Gulf War. However, a number of studies into NAPS using Service volunteers were carried out primarily between 1970 and the early 1980s at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, RMCS Shrivenham, Dover, Bulford, Cambridge Military Hospital as well as some collaborative work with the Institution of Aviation Medicine and more recently in 1993 at the Cambridge Military Hospital. These studies were to evaluate the acceptability of using pyridostigmine bromide and whether such use had adverse side effects or was affected by the nature of the duties of the Service personnel. These studies which lasted for up to eight weeks included the assessment of the effects of NAPS on volunteers undergoing strenuous exercise and of a thermally stressful environment. Our records indicate that a total of about 11 female Service volunteers received NAPS during these studies.

4. Insofar as vaccines are concerned, over many years the staff at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment and previously at the Microbiological Research Establishment at Porton Down engaged in work involving potential biological warfare agents have been vaccinated to protect them against the microorganisms they are working with in the laboratory. Over the past five years this has involved the vaccination about 150 female personnel.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the conditions and illnesses which have so far been diagnosed among those British veterans claiming to be suffering from Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Soames: Initial findings from my Department's Gulf war medical assessment programme show that those diagnosed so far are suffering from medical conditions which can be categorised as follows: approximately 25 per cent. are suffering from psychological conditions; 20 per cent. from serious, but well-recognised, medical conditions; 10 per cent. from chronic fatigue syndrome and the remainder from minor physical ailments. None of the conditions has been found to be peculiar to service in the Gulf. There is no single illness, major or minor, common to those examined and no evidence to suggest the existence of a Gulf war syndrome. More detailed preliminary findings will be made public shortly, when 100 individuals have been fully assessed and diagnosed.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men and women claiming to be suffering from Gulf war syndrome have registered a claim for compensation; how many have presented themselves to his Department's medical officers for examination; and how many have been assessed to date.

Mr. Soames: To date, my Department has received notification of 483 potential claims in respect of alleged ill health as a result of service in the Gulf. Approximately one third of these are from serving armed forces personnel and the remainder from former personnel. Some 39 of these potential claims have subsequently been withdrawn.

So far, 233 personnel have requested medical assessment through the Gulf war assessment programme, of whom about 25 per cent. are serving. Some 90 of these have been examined to date.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces are currently garrisoned on the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Figure 2 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1994 lists the British military units deployed to the Falkland Islands. It is not our practice to reveal precise details of the numbers of personnel involved. We keep force levels in the Falkland Islands under review and, if the need arises, the garrison can be reinforced at very short notice using the airfield at Mount Pleasant.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Ministry or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Freeman: I am not aware of any such actions.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *451*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Soames: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Haymes Garth

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds he has decided not to publish the independent investigation by KPMG Peat Marwick into the official residence known as Haymes Garth.

Mr. Soames: I have made a full report to Parliament on this matter, and do not believe it would be appropriate to publish the report by KPMG Peat Marwick, which is confidential and was prepared for the use of senior management and Ministers.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 February to the hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd), *Official Report*, column *465*, if he will specify the occasions on which the

House was provided with wrong information concerning expenditure on Sir Sandy Wilson's official residence, Haymes Garth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The two occasions on which the House was provided with incorrect information on this subject were in the answers given by the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. J. Hanley), first to the hon. Member on 9 February 1994, *Official Report*, columns *362–63*, which put the figure at some £250,000, and, subsequently to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) on 29 March, *Official Report*, column *732*, which gave a figure of around £260,000. In his answer to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) on 4 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *85*, the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces provided the revised figure of £387,000 and expressed his regret that an incorrect figure had been given in the preceding answer.

Gulf War Veterans

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action is taken to ensure that ex-service men and women who have been assessed as suffering from medical conditions following their service in the Gulf war are followed up to ensure adequate care and treatment.

Mr. Soames: The health care of individuals who have left the armed forces is the responsibility of the NHS. In accordance with standard medical practice, and to ensure continuity of health care, the medical reports on those ex-service personnel assessed by my Department are therefore forwarded to the patient's general practitioner. These reports contain recommendations for further care where necessary.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individuals have returned for a second examination under his Department's Gulf war veterans' medical assessment programme.

Mr. Soames: Some 14 out of the 90 patients seen to date under the Department's Gulf medical assessment programme have attended for further examinations by the service consultant co-ordinating the programme on one or more occasions.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people who have taken part in his Department's Gulf war veterans' medical assessment programme are *(a)* currently in the armed forces and *(b)* were in the armed forces at the time of their assessment but have since left the services.

Mr. Soames: Some 24 of the 90 patients seen to date were in the armed forces at the time of their assessment. Information relating to the number of individuals who may have left the services since being assessed is not readily available.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which separate tests are incorporated into the examination of an individual under his Department's Gulf war veterans' medical assessment programme.

Mr. Soames: All tests offered to individuals coming forward for assessment are tailored to the particular requirements of each patient after considering the medical and occupational history, the reported symptoms and clinical signs found on initial examination. Possible tests include: full blood assay, radiological examination—CT/MRI scan—electrocardiograph, endoscopy and psychiatric or psychometric assessment but further tests or referrals are available when required.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much each examination of an individual under his Department's Gulf war veterans' medical assessment programme costs.

Mr. Soames: No separate or central record of the cost of the assessments under this programme is maintained.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individuals have been referred to a second doctor for examination under his Department's Gulf war veterans' medical assessment programme.

Mr. Soames: Current records show that 48 out of the 90 individuals seen to date have been referred to another consultant following initial assessment.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the projected total cost of his Department's Gulf war veterans' medical assessment programme.

Mr. Soames: The assessments do not form a separately funded programme and their total costs would, in any case, depend upon final numbers of those coming forward, which are still uncertain.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 16 February 1995

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many public appointments have been made by his Department in the last year; and how many of those appointed were identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Goodlad: Nine public appointments were made in the last year by the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, of which one was identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Four public appointments were made in the last year by the Overseas Development Administration wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, of which one was identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Corfu

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many complaints by British holiday makers have been received by the British consul in Corfu regarding *(a)* unprovoked attacks and *(b)* attacks involving theft.

Mr. Baldry: Our records do not show whether attacks were provoked or not. In 1994, our consulate in Corfu were notified of five robberies with assault, and 16 assaults, including five rapes.

Lebanon

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice is currently being given to British citizens wishing to visit Lebanon.

Mr. Baldry: Foreign Office travel advice to British nationals wishing to visit Lebanon is not to travel outside the main towns. We also advise against travel to the southern suburbs of Beirut, south Lebanon and the north and west of the Bekaa valley, particularly the area around Baalbeck and Hermel.

We strongly advise our nationals to register with the embassy.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the Lebanese track of the middle east peace negotiations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Progress on the Lebanese track of the middle east peace process is vital if there is to be a comprehensive settlement. We continue to call for the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 425.

Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what suggestions for a comprehensive peace in the middle east were put forward by the EU troika in its recent mission to Syria; and what was the response of the Syrians.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The EU troika reaffirmed the EU's support for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on UN Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace. They urged both Syria and Israel to reach a negotiated settlement as soon as possible. The EU's support for the peace process was welcomed by Syria.

Syria

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Foreign Ministers of the European Union agreed to remove the arms embargo on Syria; what considerations led to the decision; and how he informed the House of the decision.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in another place, on 7 December 1994 *Official Report, House of Lords*, column *85*. The arms embargo was lifted as the original grounds for imposing the restrictions no longer existed and to provide a signal of encouragement to Syria with regard to progress in the middle east peace process.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the removal of the arms embargo on Syria required parliamentary consent.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Sierra Leone

Ms Harriet Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of British citizens in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Baldry: Since 26 January, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been advising dependents and those with no pressing need to stay in Sierra Leone, to leave. Many have already done so, but we estimate that 200 British nationals with the right of abode in the United Kingdom remain in Sierra Leone.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the situation in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Lady to my written answer of 30 January, columns *493-94* to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington).

The security situation in Sierra Leone continues to give cause for concern. Seventeen abducted foreign nationals, including six Britons, remain in captivity: we are working to secure their release. Large numbers of Sierra Leoneans have been displaced by the conflict, with damaging consequences for the economic and social structure of the country. We have given some £500,000 in emergency aid this financial year to help Sierra Leonean victims of this war, and stand ready to provide further such help. Special representatives of the UN and Commonwealth Secretaries-General have now arrived in Sierra Leone, and we continue to give our strong support to efforts to bring about a settlement to the conflict.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people have been killed in Sierra Leone since disturbances started in 1991.

Mr. Baldry: There are no official figures, but unofficial estimates vary between 15,000 and 20,000 deaths.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the kidnapping of aid workers in southern Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Twelve aid workers, including one British national, were kidnapped on 8 February by a rebel group in southern Sudan. By 11 February, all the aid workers had been released unharmed.

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what practical arrangements have been made to transport UNAVEM III troops to Angola.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UN is discussing the practical arrangements for the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops in UNAVEM III with potential troop-contributing countries.

Mrs. Christina Nevan Gando

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current position concerning the application by Mrs. Christina Nevan Gando—Ref: R250794—made to the United Kingdom post in Abuja to join her husband in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the entry clearance officer in Abuja to let me have a report on the application by Mrs. Christina Nevan Gando. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

Mrs. Ushaben Sunil Bhai Patel

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is going to be made on the application made by Mrs. Ushaben Sunil Bhai Patel—Ref: AP/94/10/38—to the post in Bombay to join her husband in the United Kingdom; when her application was made; when was she interviewed at the post; if she has been notified of the outcome of her interview; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the entry clearance officer in Bombay to let me have a report on the application of Mrs. Ushaben Sunil Bhai Patel. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Benzodiazepine Litigation

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will give *(a)* the total cost to date to the legal aid fund of the Benzodiazepine litigation, *(b)* the total number of legal aid certificates issued for Benzodiazepine litigation, *(c)* the average cost per certificate where no proceedings were issued, *(d)* the average cost per certificate where proceedings had commenced and *(e)* total generic costs associated with the Benzodiazepine litigation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The estimated cost to date to the legal aid fund of the Benzodiazepine litigation is £28.6 million. Some 13,500 certificates were issued in total. Of these, approximately 5,000 claims resulted in the issue of proceedings. The average cost per certificate where no proceedings were issued is estimated to be £1,590. The average cost per certificate where proceedings have been commenced is difficult to estimate because taxations are currently proceeding in these cases and a substantial number of cases have yet to be taxed. Some 3,200 cases have so far been taxed at an average cost of £3,500. This figure is expected to rise as the 1,800 outstanding cases are likely to contain a higher proportion of more expensive cases. The total generic costs paid out to date are £3.9 million.

The costs are now being taxed and, as with all other legal aid bills, the amount to be paid out of the legal aid fund will be that which the court determines to be reasonable. All the above figures include solicitors' costs, counsel fees, disbursements, court fees and VAT.

Judges (Training)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Judicial Studies Board has to introduce additional training for judges on managing rape cases.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Judicial Studies Board determines what training is appropriate for judges. The courses which it provides cover rape cases. I understand that the board has no plans to introduce additional training.

Legal Aid

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to order re-examination of all cases where legal aid costs have exceeded £1 million to establish the justification for approving the legal aid to recover the sums involved in cases where resource statements are found to be false.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The grant and discharge or revocation of civil legal aid certificates is the responsibility of the Legal Aid Board. The grant and revocation or withdrawal of criminal legal aid is the responsibility of the court dealing with the case. Legal aid regulations say what may be done if the assisted person's circumstances change or new information about his or her circumstances comes to light.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the amount of public funds available *(a)* to conduct prosecutions and *(b)* to conduct defences by barristers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The amount of public funds available to conduct prosecutions is a matter for the various prosecuting agencies. It is estimated that the net cost of criminal legal aid paid to barristers in the current financial year to conduct defences is £158 million.

Revenue (Fines)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much revenue was collected by way of fines imposed by magistrates courts and the Crown court in England and Wales in each year since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Figures relating solely to fine revenue are not available. The revenue collected by way of fines, fees, confiscation orders, compensation orders and fixed penalties imposed by magistrates courts and the Crown court in England and Wales in each year since 1989 was:

Year	*£ million*
1989–90	241
1990–91	269
1991–92	241
1992–93	232
1993–94	233

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Walthamstow of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *10*, if he will make it his policy to instruct area advisory committees on justices of the peace to record the ethnic origin of all those applying to become a JP.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor is reviewing his policy. He has already made it clear that he wishes to see more ethnic minority candidates recommended for appointment. Suitability for appointment remains the overriding consideration.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the upper limit on employer's national insurance contributions was abolished; if he will state the additional revenue gained each year since; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of research the Government commissioned on the impact of this change on the employment patterns of higher and lower-paid earners.

Mr. Arbuthnot: An estimate of the amounts raised each year following the abolition of the upper limit on employer's national insurance contributions is in the table.

Year	*£ billion*[2]
1985–1986[1]	0.50
1986–1987	1.50
1987–1988	1.75
1988–1989	2.25
1989–1990	2.75
1990–1991	3.00
1991–1992	3.00
1992–1993	3.00
1993–1994	3.00
1994–1995	3.25

[1] Upper Earnings Limit abolished on 6 October 1985.
[2] Figures are founded to nearest £¼ billion.

Abolition of the upper earnings limit for employer's national insurance contributions made it possible for the rates of employees' and employers' national insurance contributions to be reduced, especially at lower levels of pay. This was aimed at improving job prospects for the low paid, particularly among the young and unskilled, by reducing individuals' national insurance payments and reducing the business costs of prospective employers.

Research commissioned by this Department shows that a fifth of employers consider national insurance contributions when setting wage levels and that some employers take contribution rates into account when fixing staffing levels. This supports the view that reducing employers' wage costs in respect of lower-paid workers helps to promote their employment prospects.

Occupational Deafness

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount spent on disablement benefit for occupational deafness in 1993.

Mr. Hague: Information is not available in the precise format requested. Estimates based on a 10 per cent. sample suggest that in 1992–93, the latest available year, occupational deafness accounted for around £25 million of disablement benefit expenditure.

Notes:

(i) This figure has been rounded to the nearest £5 million, but is not accurate to that degree.

(ii) This figure includes cases with aggregate assessments, where occupational deafness was the first, or highest assessment.

(iii) This figure does not include any expenditure on reduced earnings allowance/retirement allowance or any of the additional allowances such as constant attendance allowance or exceptionally severe disablement allowance.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when his appeal to the European Court over the social security commissioner's April 1992 decision about the rate of invalidity benefit payable to women over the age of 60 years is expected to be finally resolved.

Mr. Hague: The appeal against the social security commissioner's decision—CS 27/91—was made to the Court of Appeal jointly by the Secretary of State and the chief adjudication officer. At a hearing on 18 January 1994, the Court of Appeal decided to refer the case to the European Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling on questions of European law. A date for the European Court hearing has been set for 6 April 1995, but the court's ruling is not expected before July 1995. The case will be referred back for a decision by the Court of Appeal following this ruling.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that the invalidity benefit claimants affected will receive the real value of

back payments of invalidity benefits made to them should the European Court uphold the social security commissioner's decision in respect of the payment of the benefit to women over 60 years.

Mr. Hague: Increased awards of invalidity benefit made as a result of the social security commissioner's decision—CS27/91—are being suspended pending the outcome of the appeal by the Secretary of State and the chief adjudication officer, except in cases of hardship. Any benefit which has been suspended will be paid in full if the commissioner's decision is upheld. There is no provision for the payment of interest in these circumstances.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants for invalidity benefit have been granted a suspension of his decision in respect of women over 60 years on grounds of hardship, while his appeal to the European Court over the social security commissioner's April 1992 decision is being resolved.

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the table.

Suspensions of increased Invalidity Benefit awarded as a result of Commissioner's decision CS27/91

Cases in which suspension applied	*Hardship applications*	*Cases in which suspension lifted on hardship grounds*
41,560	1,604	994

Notes:
1. Figures relate to 31 March 1994, the latest date for which information is available centrally.
2. *Source:* Manual count in Benefits Agency offices.

Disabled People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to publicise the independent living fund for disabled people.

Mr. Hague: The provision of information to potential clients of the independent living (1993) fund is a matter solely for the trustees. I understand from the fund's director that the trustees have a carefully focused programme to ensure that potential clients of the fund, and local authority social services departments which must support applications to the fund, are aware of the eligibility criteria and application procedures.

Social Fund

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he made of the regional variations in the cost of a *(a)* new grave and *(b)* funeral in making his decision about funeral payments under the social fund.

Mr. Roger Evans: We took account of a range of factors, including regional variations in costs, before making our proposals. These are now with the social security advisory committee. We expect to receive its report shortly.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will make a further allocation of funds to the discretionary social fund budget.

Mr. Roger Evans: I am pleased to announce that due to further improvements in the recovery of social fund loans we have been able to make another additional allocation in the current financial year. A total of £2 million in equal amounts of £100,000 is to be made available to the Benefits Agency's area directorates on 16 February 1995. This is on top of the £13 million in additional allocations we were able to make in November 1994.

The whole of the additional allocation will be devoted to social fund loans. We believe that social fund loans offer excellent value for money. They enable us to target available resources on those in most need and to recycle funds to help more applicants.

Since the scheme started, we have been able to make nearly £1.3 billion worth of loans for an outlay of only £286 million. This expansion of the social fund loans budget will ensure that more people receive help and that the fund continues to play a valuable role in complementing mainstream social security provision.

Details of individual district allocations have been placed in the Library.

Mortgages (Insurance Cover)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about insurance cover on home mortgages from the insurance ombudsman; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: None, but we will be seeking the views of the insurance ombudsman as part of the consultation process.

Personal Assistants

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with his colleagues on the employment status of personal assistants, with special reference to personal assistants employed by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other bodies.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have had no discussions on this subject.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy that people who leave their job because of discrimination or exploitation at work should not be obliged to live on reduced income support or no benefit at all while their case is being investigated.

Mr. Roger Evans: The Government have considered this issue in the context of the introduction of the new jobseeker's allowance. Where a doubt arises as to whether a claimant has left his job without just cause, but the claimant satisfies the conditions of entitlement for jobseeker's allowance, the Government propose to pay benefit in full until a decision is reached on the case by an independent adjudication officer. This change will be introduced from April 1996.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy that suspension from unemployment benefit will not prejudice applications for hardship payments, and that each application will be decided on its merits alone.

Mr. Roger Evans: Unemployment benefit is suspended where a question arises over the claimant's

entitlement. In such cases, hardship payments of income support are made at the discretion of an adjudication officer on a case-by-case basis. However, hardship payments may be made only to people who are not actively seeking work if they have children, are pregnant or have a pregnant partner, or a sick or disabled or have a partner who is sick or disabled.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many unemployed claimants *(a)* immediately draw income support, *(b)* draw only unemployment benefit, *(c)* draw unemployment benefit and means-tested support and *(d)* draw income support as the right to draw unemployment benefit ceases in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is contained in tables 1.1 of the "Quarterly Analyses of Unemployed Claimants", copies of which are in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many successful housing benefit applications for each district council in Scotland there have been in each financial year since 1985–86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the format requested. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on Thursday 27 October, *Official Report*, column *801*. The available case load information for 1994 is set out in the table.

Average housing benefit caseload for each district in Scotland 1994 (based on February, May and August 1994 data)

District	*Average housing benefit caseload*
Aberdeen	16,379
Angus	6,769
Annandale and Eskdale	2,517
Argyll-Bute	5,306
Badenoch	823
Banff and Buchan	5,531
Bearsden and Milngavie	923
Berwickshire	1,342
Caithness	2,033
Clackmannan	5,759
Clydebank	6,726
Clydesdale	4,540
Cumbernauld	2,656
Cumnock and Doon	5,329
Cunninghame	13,498
Dumbarton	7,421
Dundee	23,257
Dunfermline	10,977
East Kilbride	1,233
East Lothian	6,950
Eastwood	1,278
Edinburgh	41,671
Ettrick and Lauderdale	2,246
Falkirk	14,297
Glasgow	124,771
Gordon	2,746
Hamilton	11,483
Inverclyde	11,058
Inverness	4,470
Kilmarnock	8,563
Kincardine and Deeside	1,670
Kirkcaldy	14,520
Kyle and Carrick	10,078
Lochaber	1,507
Midlothian	4,920
Monklands	13,659
Moray	5,487
Motherwell	18,488
Nairn	790
Nithsdale	4,346
North East Fife	3,729
Orkney Isles	964
Perth and Kinross	8,230
Renfrew	21,121
Ross and Cromarty	4,089
Roxburgh	3,069
Shetland Isles	1,038
Skye and Lochalsh	784
Stewartry	1,416
Stirling	6,695
Strathkelvin	3,948
Sutherland	1,015
Tweeddale	936
West Lothian	10,522
Western Isles	1,728
Wigtown	3,247

Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System

Notes:
1. The above figures refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
2. The average case-load is based on 100 per cent. inquiries taken at the end of February, May and August 1994. November 1994 figures are not yet available.
3. When a local authority has failed to send in a return, figures have been estimated.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money was spent on housing benefit, for each district council area in Scotland in each financial year since 1985–86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit expenditure

Scottish authorities	*1985–86* £	*1986–87* £	*1987–88* £	*1988–89* £	*1989–90* £	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Aberdeen	8,730,000	10,650,000	13,280,000	13,290,000	14,760,000	14,530,000	15,580,000	16,570,000	18,330,000
Angus	4,110,000	4,580,000	4,880,000	4,440,000	5,160,000	5,390,000	5,740,000	6,250,000	6,970,000
Annandale and Eskdale	1,760,000	1,890,000	2,010,000	2,040,000	2,160,000	2,260,000	2,570,000	2,970,000	3,380,000
Argyll-Bute	3,670,000	3,890,000	4,160,000	4,230,000	4,970,000	5,510,000	6,470,000	7,900,000	9,240,000
Badenoch	510,000	600,00	620,000	640,000	660,000	670,000	830,000	1,090,000	1,310,000
Banff and Buchan	3,500,000	4,020,000	4,110,000	4,250,000	4,790,000	5,000,000	5,170,000	5,970,000	6,470,000
Bearsden and Milngavie	520,000	630,000	750,000	790,000	870,000	930,00	1,140,000	1,340,000	1,510,000

Housing benefit expenditure

Scottish authorities	*1985–86* £	*1986–87* £	*1987–88* £	*1988–89* £	*1989–90* £	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Berwickshire	980,000	1,010,000	1,080,000	1,120,000	1,170,000	1,220,000	1,340,000	1,530,00	1,740,000
Caithness	1,200,000	1,300,000	1,490,000	1,590,000	1,730,000	1,830,000	2,060,000	2,380,000	2,660,000
Clackmannan	2,470,000	2,780,000	3,050,000	3,110,000	3,850,000	4,330,000	4,720,000	5,180,000	5,660,000
Clydebank	3,760,000	4,530,000	5,270,000	5,840,000	7,040,000	7,670,000	7,860,000	8,110,000	8,710,000
Clydesdale	2,390,000	2,590,000	2,750,000	2,940,000	3,280,000	3,540,000	3,930,000	4,540,000	5,170,000
Cumbernauld	1,190,000	1,400,000	1,600,000	1,760,000	2,110,000	2,550,000	3,180,000	3,580,000	3,830,000
Cumnock and Doon	2,440,000	2,770,000	3,130,000	3,090,000	3,430,000	3,640,000	4,290,000	5,310,000	5,980,000
Cunninghame	5,950,000	7,340,000	9,060,000	9,240,000	10,670,000	11,580,000	13,100,000	15,450,000	17,680,000
Dumbarton	3,160,000	3,920,000	4,990,000	5,900,000	6,960,000	8,000,000	8,660,000	9,710,000	11,090,000
Dundee	12,220,000	14,340,000	16,680,000	18,890,000	24,220,000	27,750,000	31,000,000	34,600,000	37,570,000
Dunfermline	5,170,000	6,100,000	6,870,000	7,790,000	9,130,000	10,020,000	11,290,000	12,800,000	14,290,000
East Kilbride	570,000	670,000	690,000	670,000	930,000	1,090,000	1,310,000	1,670,000	2,020,000
East Lothian	3,910,000	4,540,000	5,170,000	5,560,000	6,430,000	6,800,000	7,940,000	8,410,000	9,120,000
Eastwood	620,000	680,000	700,000	720,000	840,000	910,000	1,040,000	1,560,000	1,820,000
Edinburgh	33,380,000	38,890,000	49,370,000	50,600,000	57,520,000	60,470,000	65,160,000	73,400,000	79,750,000
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,360,000	1,400,000	1,480,000	1,470,000	1,550,000	1,680,000	1,890,000	2,290,000	2,550,000
Falkirk	8,240,000	9,150,000	9,910,000	10,060,000	11,420,000	12,040,000	13,110,000	14,600,000	16,300,000
Glasgow	66,190,000	81,480,000	96,050,000	106,050,000	136,220,000	153,520,000	175,490,000	194,090,000	207,080,000
Gordon	1,520,000	1,810,000	1,940,000	1,890,000	2,190,000	2,180,000	2,630,000	3,360,000	3,690,000
Hamilton	5,820,000	6,880,000	7,980,000	7,860,000	9,350,000	9,860,000	10,680,000	12,750,000	14,100,000
Inverclyde	5,860,000	6,770,000	7,480,000	7,760,000	9,500,000	10,610,000	11,580,000	13,550,000	14,720,000
Inverness	2,340,000	2,760,000	3,230,000	3,360,000	4,600,000	4,480,000	4,960,000	5,950,000	6,980,000
Kilmarnock	4,420,000	5,240,000	5,940,000	6,070,000	6,970,000	7,360,000	8,230,000	8,920,000	9,910,000
Kincardine and Deeside	850,000	1,020,000	1,120,000	1,060,000	1,080,000	1,210,000	1,290,000	1,610,000	2,060,000
Kirkcaldy	7,780,000	8,910,000	9,880,000	10,790,000	12,810,000	14,220,000	15,890,000	19,700,000	22,080,000
Kyle and Carrick	5,680,000	6,410,000	7,020,000	6,810,000	8,450,000	9,280,000	10,320,000	11,940,000	15,170,000
Lochaber	1,090,000	1,160,000	1,220,000	1,170,000	1,230,000	1,310,000	1,520,000	1,790,000	2,180,000
Midlothian	2,960,000	3,140,000	3,310,000	3,760,000	4,330,000	4,020,000	4,180,000	4,720,000	5,530,000
Monklands	7,120,000	9,430,000	10,250,000	10,920,000	12,150,000	12,580,000	13,920,000	15,060,000	16,480,000
Moray	3,440,000	3,770,000	4,230,000	4,480,000	5,140,000	5,310,000	5,190,000	6,000,000	7,090,000
Motherwell	9,590,000	10,730,000	12,210,000	12,710,000	14,180,000	15,030,000	15,640,000	17,910,000	20,830,00
Nairn	460,000	550,000	620,000	670,000	680,000	590,000	690,000	900,000	1,050,000
Nithsdale	2,200,000	2,540,000	2,680,000	2,790,000	3,240,000	3,600,000	4,190,000	5,220,000	5,900,000
North East Fife	2,710,000	3,190,000	3,420,000	3,520,000	3,810,000	3,790,000	4,190,000	4,830,000	5,270,000
Orkney	530,000	630,000	740,000	760,000	930,000	950,000	1,100,000	1,260,000	1,420,000
Perth and Kinross	4,910,000	5,440,000	5,790,000	5,550,000	6,390,000	7,160,000	7,930,0000	9,440,000	10,320,000
Renfrew	9,880,000	11,820,000	13,510,000	13,720,000	15,980,000	18,930,000	21,810,000	25,680,000	28,620,000
Ross and Cromarty	2,370,000	2,750,000	3,000,000	3,040,000	3,380,000	3,570,000	4,210,000	5,150,000	6,160,000
Roxburgh	2,010,000	2,190,000	2,200,000	2,240,000	2,440,000	2,520,000	2,920,000	3,840,000	4,120,000
Shetland	590,000	690,000	730,000	730,000	840,000	970,00	1,160,000	1,410,000	1,550,000
Skye and Lochalsh	430,000	520,000	590,000	580,000	690,000	790,000	950,000	1,140,000	1,340,000
Stewartry	930,000	1,020,000	1,050,000	1,060,000	1,180,000	1,260,000	1,530,000	1,800,000	2,000,000
Stirling	3,930,000	4,680,000	5,320,000	5,280,000	6,030,000	6,530,000	7,360,000	8,460,000	9,890,000
Strathkelvin	2,480,000	3,100,000	3,510,000	3,790,000	3,970,000	4,270,000	4,860,000	5,660,000	6,450,000
Sutherland	610,000	700,000	730,000	750,000	780,000	880,000	1,010,000	1,220,000	1,460,000
Tweeddale	520,000	620,000	640,000	730,000	780,000	850,000	950,000	1,100,000	1,290,000
Western Isles	1,270,000	1,300,000	1,370,000	1,560,000	1,710,000	1,810,000	2,490,000	2,650,000	2,880,000
West Lothian	5,880,000	6,520,000	6,920,000	6,560,000	7,510,000	7,890,000	8,820,000	10,180,000	11,310,000
Wigtown	2,140,000	2,300,000	2,310,000	2,390,000	2,770,000	2,920,000	3,560,000	4,510,000	5,160,000
Total	280,340,000	329,720,000	380,090,000	400,440,000	476,970,000	519,660,000	580,630,000	659,000,000	727,220,000

All figures rounded to the nearest £10,000.
Source:
Audited subsidy claims, except 1993–94 which is final subsidy claim.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were claiming *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax rebate at the last available date.

Mr. Roger Evans: At the end of August 1994, there were 4,667,000 recipients of housing benefit and 5,606,000 recipients of council tax benefit. A recipient may be a single person or a couple.

Income Support

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current policy of his Department regarding payment of deductions from benefits for rent arrears to local authorities; and what changes to the policy he is considering.

Mr. Roger Evans: Deductions from income support for rent arrears are paid to local authorities at intervals of 13 weeks and credited to tenants' rent accounts. There are no plans to change this policy.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the total amount of income support annually given to families with *(a)* one adult working, *(b)* two adults working and *(c)* three or more adults working, specifying the amount given to people aged 18 to 24 years in each category; and how much is given to single parents in category *(a)*;

(2) how many families currently receiving income support have *(a)* one adult working, *(b)* two adults working and *(c)* three or more adults working, specifying

the number of people aged 18 to 24 years each category includes; and how many single parents are included in *(a)*.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is in the table.

Information relating to part *(c)* is not available, as any working adults living in the same household as the claimant and their partner would claim income support in their own right.

	Number of families	*Average weekly income support* £	*Estimated annual income support* £ *million*
One adult worker	117,000	72.88	442
of which:			
— single parents	74,000	67.08	257
— 18–24 year olds	7,000	56.16	21
Two adult workers	1,000	90.17	2
of which:			
— 18–24 year olds	0	0	0

Figures rounded to nearest thousand.

Notes:

1. Estimated annual income support is calculated as total weekly income support—number of families in the inquiry week multiplied by average weekly income support—multiplied by 52.
2. Families have been taken to mean a single person or couple with dependants. Expenditure figures in the departmental report for families are benefits for lone parents only.
3. Adult workers can be either the claimant or partner.
4. Figures may not sum to totals due to rounding.
5. There may be some 18 to 24-year-old lone parents who will be included in both categories but will only be counted once in the overall total.

Source:

6. Income support quarterly statistical inquiry—February 1994.

Contribution Conditions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *433–35*, if he will publish the calculations of his Department on the number of claimants who lost *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* sickness benefit or *(c)* retirement pension as a result of the changes in the contributory conditions since 1975.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information relating to unemployment benefit and sickness benefit is not yet available. I will let the hon. Member have such information as becomes available as soon as possible.

The information available in relation to retirement pension is as follows.

No existing beneficiary lost entitlement to retirement pension as a result of the changes to the contribution conditions since 1975.

For new beneficiaries, comparisons between notional entitlement under the pre-1975 legislation and actual entitlements are not available.

In general, the 1975 changes made it easier for a person to qualify for retirement pension. The financial and explanatory memorandum to the 1972 Social Security Bill stated that the extra cost of the overall changes to the contribution conditions for benefits was likely to be small.

Similarly, no financial savings were anticipated from the 1978–79 change to the definition of a qualifying year; I refer the hon. Member to the *Official Report*, 29 April 1975, column *355*.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the organisational links between his Department and other departments which are concerned with countering benefit fraud.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Close and effective links are maintained between the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service, local authorities and the police to combat benefit fraud. Through its work with the ministerial group on crime prevention and other initiatives, the Department has also established contact with a number of other Departments and agencies.

Asbestosis

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many sufferers from asbestosis paid back benefits to the compensation recovery unit of his Department in the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995; and what was the range of repayments they made.

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *542*.

Residential Care and Nursing Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of residents of care or nursing homes with preserved entitlements to Department of Social Security benefits who have currently insufficient personal resources to meet the costs of their care.

Mr. Roger Evans: The number of residents with preserved rights to the higher limits of income support whose total entitlement to social security benefits does not meet the fees is about 78,500.

Some of these residents may have disregarded benefits, income or capital which could be used to meet any shortfalls.

Source: February 1994 quarterly statistical inquiry.

Benefits Agency Medical Service

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants in each region, for each quarter ending March 1994, were examined by the Benefits Agency medical service; and how many were found capable of *(a)* all work and *(b)* alternative work;

(2) how many claims for sickness and invalidity benefit were referred to the Benefits Agency medical service in each quarter since March 1994; how many of these resulted in an examination; and what were the outcomes *(a)* where examinations took place and *(b)* where they did not.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 15 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about examinations made by the Benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS). This was with regard to the number of customers found capable of work for each quarter ending March 1994; also from March 1994 with regard to the number of sickness and invalidity benefit cases referred to BAMS and the outcomes.

The BAMS are asked to give an opinion on capacity for work by the independent Adjudication Officer (AO). The decision on the claim to benefit is made by the AO and whilst the AO may take the opinion of the BAMS into account in making a decision the AO is not bound by that opinion. An opinion that a customer is fit for work is not given by the BAMS without the customer being examined. If the evidence available to the BAMS suggests that the customer is incapable of all work, then there will usually be no need for an examination.

For the year ending March 1994 I have provided information in respect of those cases referred to the BAMS to ask for an opinion on incapacity in relation to Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit. The information for the four quarters ending March 1994 is provided in Annexes A,B,C and D.

The information requested from March 1994 is provided in Annexes E and F. Figures for the quarter ending 31 December 1994 will not be available until the end of February.

It should be noted that the figures given may not accurately reflect cases referred to the BAMS within each quarter at each centre because relevant statistics are compiled at the date a case is cleared rather than the date it is received. All of the Annexes have been placed in the Library.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

PRIME MINISTER

Private Office Staff

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister how many of his private office staff are fluent in European languages and which ones.

The Prime Minister: A number of my staff are fluent in a number of European languages.

Phoenix Project

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to the letter dated 19 May 1994 from the leader of Somerset county council concerning the Phoenix project.

The Prime Minister: My office has no trace of the letter.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the conclusions or recommendations of paragraphs 11, 19, 20, 23, 29, 31, 35, 40 and 50 of the first report of the British Government on sustainable development, together with the Government's response in each case.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has welcomed the first report from the Government panel on sustainable development. The Government will consider the recommendations and respond in due course.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has had from Dr. David Fieldhouse, former police surgeon at Bradford, on the discrepancies between the Foreign Secretary's explanation of events concerning himself in relation to Lockerbie in December 1988 and Dr. Fieldhouse's own account of duties as a police surgeon as agreed by the Dumfries and Galloway police.

The Prime Minister: None.

Knighthoods

Mr. Sedgmore: To ask the Prime Minister how many hon. Members have received knighthoods since the 1979 general election.

The Prime Minister: One hundred and twenty two hon. Members have received knighthoods since the 1979 general election.

Oxfordshire Education Authority

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister, following his recent statement, how Oxfordshire education authority will be able to maintain its current pupil to teacher ratio in the financial year 1995–96.

The Prime Minister: Under local management of schools, it is for governing bodies to determine school staffing levels within the resources available to them, including reserves.

Climate Change Convention

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Prime Minister, if he will be attending the meeting of the conference of the parties of the climate change convention, in Berlin in March.

The Prime Minister: No. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment hopes to attend.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 February.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Special and Political Advisers

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Prime Minister how many ministerial special and political advisers were paid salaries in excess of the highest salary payable to a civil servant in each of the last five years; and what were the total annual salary payments to those advisers in each of those years.

The Prime Minister: None.

Single European Act

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange for a copy of a report he commissioned from the head of the Cabinet Office European Secretariat, concerning the policy implications arising from the opt-out negotiated by Her Majesty's Government in 1985 to the Single European Act to be placed in the Library.

The Prime Minister: No. It has been the practice of successive Administrations not to disclose policy advice.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister, what representations he has received expressing concern at the requirement under the Single European Act on non-British citizens settled in the United Kingdom, to obtain visas before making short visits to other member states of the European Union; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none. The Single European Act contained no provisions relating to visa requirements.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister, what action he proposes, in relation to the forthcoming intergovernmental conference, concerning the maintenance by the United Kingdom of its frontier immigration controls; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We shall take whatever steps are necessary to maintain our frontier controls. It is too soon to decide whether we shall need to take action on this during next year's intergovernmental conference.

TREASURY

Pool Betting Duty and Lottery Duty

Mr. Alton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to address the tax anomaly between football pools operators and the national lottery in respect of the aggregate out-take from receipt for duty and good causes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no present plans to change the rates of either pool betting duty or lottery duty. In his Budget speech on 16 March 1993, my right hon. Friend the member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) said that, in deciding the tax rate of the national lottery, account was taken of the level of tax on other forms of gambling and the extent to which spending was likely to be diverted from other taxed activities. He went on to say that much would depend on how the lottery developed and the position would be kept under review. In his recent Budget speech, the Chancellor announced that the 1991 reduction in pools betting duty of 2.5 per cent., to help fund the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, should continue for another five years provided that the pools companies also continue to fund sport and the arts at their present level. HM Customs and Excise is monitoring the effect of the national lottery on receipts of pool betting duty and other gambling duties.

Iraq (Sanctions)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what lists Customs and Excise prepared of countries or destinations which were possible diversionary routes for the evasion of sanctions at the time of, or after, the passing of the Iraq sanctions orders in 1990.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Customs and Excise has prepared a number of lists at different times, based on intelligence currently available, to assist its officers to prevent breaches of the Iraq sanctions orders. It is not Customs' policy to make public such information provided in confidence to support operational effectiveness.

Civil Servants (Rail Travel Costs)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of rail travel incurred by civil servants in the course of their duties; and what proportion of this total represents the cost of *(a)* first class and *(b)* standard class travel for each year since 1991.

Sir George Young: Government Departments and agencies are responsible for the travel arrangements of staff travelling on official business. Details of the costs of rail travel and the class of travel used by civil servants are not held centrally.

UK Residents

Ms. Jowell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were United Kingdom residents for tax purposes but not domiciled in the UK for each year since 1991.

Sir George Young: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

European Community Budget

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the final adopted version of the EU budget for a 15-member Community; and if he will publish figures showing the level of expenditure for 1995 for all 15 members.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The 1995 EC budget was adopted by the President of the European Parliament on 15 December 1994 on the basis of 15 member states. It will be published soon in the *Official Journal.*

The total commitments in 1995 amount to 80.9 billion ecu, or £63.8* billion and total payments to 76.5 billion ecu, or £60.4 billion. The budget does not give details of expenditure receipts by member state.

*Throughout this reply an exchange rate of £1=1.2675 ecu has been used.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the process of Her Majesty's Treasury's drawing up a supplementary and amending budget which allocates the additional expenditure to the detailed EU budget headings among new member states.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The 1995 EC budget which was adopted by the President of the European Parliament on 15 December 1994 includes provision for additional expenditure to take account of enlargement.

The Commission will shortly be proposing a preliminary draft supplementary and amending budget which will allocate the additional expenditure to individual EC budget headings, as necessary. The Government will carefully consider the proposal, which will be subject to the usual parliamentary scrutiny procedure.

Review Body on Senior Salaries

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer in 1995–96 of implementing the review body on senior salaries 17th report.

Mr. Aitken: The estimated cost in 1995–96 of implementing the seventeenth report of the review body on senior salaries is £5.7 million, which includes salary increases and associated national insurance and pension contributions. It will be met from the existing public expenditure provision.

Group of Seven Meeting

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much time the Group of Seven Finance Ministers and central bank governors spent discussing the long-term ecological sustainability of economic activity at their recent meeting in Toronto.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There was no discussion of this issue.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since its 1979, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Expenditure by HM Treasury and the Chancellor's agencies on advertising in the period 1988–89 to 1993–94 at 1993–94 prices, and the spend to date in 1994–95 is shown in the table. Figures for other years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Year	*HM Treasury* £	*Privatisation for which HMT responsible* £	*Agencies* £
1988–89	64,900	—	—
1989–90	70,822	—	434,550
1990–91	49,671	—	779,087
1991–92	112,096	13,976,853	82,255
1992–93	50,204	—	399,420
1993–94	19,651	10,810,000	536,046
1994–95	2,373	7,603,000	446,071

Tiger Products

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of all tiger products seized in 1994 and in 1995 to date by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The figures are as follows:

1994

1 tiger skin
9 tiger teeth
41 packets of tigerbone plasters
1,726 individual tigerbone plasters
20 × 70 cl bottles of tigerbone tincture
96 bottles of tigerbone pills

1995 (to date)

10 packets and 1 bottle of tigerbone pills.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Elliot Morley: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, if he will list the number and type of livestock exported for *(a)* slaughter and *(b)* further fattening to Greece in each year since 1984.

Mr. Jack: Official trade statistics for total numbers of livestock exported to Greece between 1984 and 1993, and in the first nine months of 1994, are given in the table. These statistics do not distinguish animals for slaughter or for fattening. However, information derived from the Animo computer system in 1994 shows that health certification issued for sheep and pigs being exported to Greece has been for breeding animals only.

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994 (part)*
Cattle	2	0	0	0	246	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheep	0	0	0	0	0	265	0	0	334	0	287
Pigs	285	1,041	717	598	643	817	859	796	264	184	1,032
Poultry	43,944	110,141	151,232	229,701	273,240	325,835	471,649	718,366	762,625	183,018	662,126

Source:
HM Customs and Excise

British Beef (German Import Restrictions)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the continuing German restrictions on the import of British beef, what representation he has received concerning the legality of the restrictions; and what action the Government can take to resolve the issue.

Mrs. Browning: The German Government have implemented the European Commission decision on BSE rules for the export of UK beef to other member states, which exempt meat from animals born after 1 January 1992 from any special trade conditions. In some German Länder, however, there are voluntary trade bans on the importation of UK beef. The European Commission has written to the German authorities questioning the legality of these voluntary bans under Community law. I welcome this prompt action by the European Commission.

The Government have received no representations about these developments, but will continue to seek the respect of EC law in this area.

EMPLOYMENT

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the real increase in take-home pay of a single man at the lowest 10 per cent. of the earnings distribution, between *(a)* 1973–74 and 1978–1979 and *(b)* 1978–79 and 1993–94.

Mr. Oppenheim: Real take-home pay for a single man at the lowest 10 per cent. of the earnings distribution fell by 1 per cent. between 1973–74 and 1978–79 and increased by 23 per cent. between 1978–79 and 1993–94.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether benefit can be reclaimed if a claimant who was taking steps to carry out a reasonable direction for purposes of seeking entitlement to jobseeker's allowance benefit fails to do so.

Miss Widdecombe: If a claimant fails to carry out a jobseeker's direction which was reasonable having regard to his circumstances, the adjudication officer will consider whether he had good cause for doing so in deciding whether to impose a sanction. Jobseeker's allowance will be paid in full until the adjudication officer has made the decision.

If the adjudication officer decides that the claimant failed without good cause to carry out the direction, a sanction will be applied for two weeks. Vulnerable groups will have access to hardship payments during a period of sanction.

Unemployment

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people, and what proportion of the unemployed, left unemployment in each quarter since 1974 to *(a)* go into work and *(b)* leave the labour force altogether; and what figures he has for those in each category who had been unemployed for (i) 0 to six months, (ii) six to 12 months, (iii) one to two years and (iv) two years or more.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is not available in the form requested.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, how many people were unemployed in each quarter since 1974 for *(a)* under a year, *(b)* between one year and two and *(c)* more than two years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information on claimant unemployment by duration is available on a quarterly basis from October 1983 and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. Information on ILO unemployment by duration can be obtained via the quantime labour force survey service in the Library and is available annually from spring 1984 until spring 1992 and quarterly thereafter.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons and what percentage of the work force have been unemployed for *(a)* under six months and *(b)* six to 12 months, *(c)* 12 to 24 months and *(d)* over 24 months, in Islwyn in each year since 1979 expressing the figure quarterly and breaking the data down by gender.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on the unadjusted level of claimant unemployment by duration in each local authority district or parliamentary constituency is available from October 1983 onwards, for the months of January, April, July and October, and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. Claimant unemployment by duration cannot be calculated as a percentage of the work-force below the level of travel-to-work-areas.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people entered unemployment in each quarter since 1974; and what are the figures as a proportion of the labour force.

Mr. Oppenheim: Unadjusted figures for claimant unemployment flows in the United Kingdom are available monthly from June 1986 and can be obtained, together with work force denominators, from the NOMIS database in the Library. No information is available on ILO unemployment flows.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many and what percentage of people were unemployed in Islwyn in each quarter since 1979, breaking the data down by gender.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on the unadjusted level of claimant unemployment in each local authority district or parliamentary constituency is available from July 1983 and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. Claimant unemployment rates are not available below the level of travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what EU schemes or projects to assist areas of unemployment have benefited Coventry and the west midlands; how much the United Kingdom has benefited from these schemes over the last five years; and what assessment he has made of whether the formulae used by France, Germany and Holland over the last five years to calculate unemployment would have increased the amounts of money coming in the form of grants to Britain to help the unemployed.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on funding from the European social fund from 1990 to 1993 is set out in the table. It covers Warwickshire, the west midlands and Great Britain. It is not possible to produce comprehensive figures below county level except at disproportionate cost. The 1994 figures at regional and county level are not yet available.

In so far as unemployment levels are a factor in determining allocations from ESF, the European Commission uses the International Labour Organisation measure of unemployment published by the Statistical Office of the European Communities. This is an international standard across all European Union countries. Allocations to the UK are thus made on the same basis as those to every other member state.

ESF funding in Warkwickshire, West Midlands and Great Britain, 1990–1993

£ pounds

Year	*Warwickshire*	*West Midlands*	*Great Britain*
1990	476,152	12,034,653	287,936,452
1991	489,787	22,878,238	361,623,462
1992	517,319	16,658,843	361,157,739
1993	614,524	24,795,153	494,417,781

Note:
(i) The figures cover payments made under all the EC Structural Fund Objectives but exclude payments made under Community Initiatives.
(ii) Warwickshire and West Midlands also benefitted over the period from ESF support for National Government training programmes, figures for which are included in the third column but not the first two.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the differences in calculating figures for unemployed people in the United Kingdom and in France, Germany and Holland; how Britain benefits by using a different calculation; and whether the use of a different formula for calculating the unemployed puts Britain at an advantage or disadvantage regarding assistance from European funds in the form of grants to fund schemes for unemployment.

Mr. Oppenheim: The United Kingdom, in common with most other European Union countries produces two official measures of unemployment: an administratively based count and a labour force survey measure based on the internationally standard measure of unemployment defined by the International Labour Organisation and which forms the basis for international comparisons. Details of the measures of unemployment used by the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Holland can be found in an article in the September 1992, *Employment Gazette* entitled, "How Unemployment is Measured in Different Countries".

The European Commission allocates money from the European social fund to member states using the ILO unemployment measure, published by the Statistical Office of the European Communities. This is an international standard across all EU countries. Allocations to the UK are, thus, made on the same basis as those to every other EU member state.

Trade Union Membership

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if employers are required to inform employees who do not re-authorise the renewal of their trade union membership subscriptions under the terms of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 that they will cease to be members of their trade union.

Mr. Oppenheim: No. An employee who does not authorise the continuance of deductions from pay for trade union subscriptions may have moved to another means of payment.

Labour Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *769-70*, if he will list for each region in the United Kingdom, since 1979, the number of persons in *(a)* full-time work and *(b)* part-time work earning (i) less than £1.50 an hour, (ii) between £1.50 and £2.50 an hour and (iii) between £2.50 and £3.50 an hour, also breaking these figures down by gender and the percentage each figure is of the work force.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on the distributions of hourly earnings of full-time adult workers in the regions of Great Britain is shown in table 115 of part E of the new earnings survey reports. Similar information on part-time women workers is shown in table 117 of part F. Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what was the ratio between the UK activity rate and the UK unemployment rate for each year since 1970; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what was the ratio between the Welsh activity rate and the Welsh unemployment rate for each year since 1970; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what was the ratio between the UK female activity rate and the UK female unemployment rate for each year since 1970; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what was the ratio between the UK male activity rate and the UK male unemployment rate for each year since 1970; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what was the ratio between the Welsh male activity rate and the Welsh male unemployment rate for each year since 1970; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what was the ratio between the Welsh female activity rate and the Welsh female unemployment rate for each year since 1970; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Job Opportunities

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment pursuant to the oral answer on 10 January to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin), *Official Report*, column 7, if he will list the international evidence in support of the assertion that more regulated economies are less successful in creating job opportunities; and what other information he has on this issue.

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) on 10 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *473–74*.

Unfair Dismissal

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the effect of the proposals to change the law on unfair dismissal for part-time workers and on those working fewer than eight hours per week.

Mr. Oppenheim: Following the coming into effect on 6 February of the Employment Protection (Part-Time Employees) Regulations 1995, all employees, including those working fewer than eight hours per week, qualify to bring complaints of unfair dismissal after completing two years' continuous service. The effect of this change on business and employment opportunities will be carefully monitored.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when Central London TEC will agree new contracts with the former providers of training and services to South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: CENTEC is currently drawing up its proposals to undertake training and enterprise council responsibilities in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. If these negotiations go well, CENTEC should be able to complete contracting arrangements for the beginning of the new contract year on 27 March 1995.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who is responsible for paying the money owed by South Thames TEC to Community Industry in Peckham for work up to 7th November 1994.

Mr. Paice: All payments owed to providers by South Thames training and enterprise council prior to 7 November 1994 are a matter for the receiver.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the Grant Thornton report on the circumstances that led up to the failure of South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: The Grant Thornton work was commissioned on the basis that it was for the internal consideration of the Department only and was not intended as a public document. However, for the information and inspection of hon. Members, a copy of the report is available in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *243-46*, if he visited Westminster Hall on 9 February; and if he will make a statement on the means of access and the facilities that were made available to disabled people attending the lobby by disabled people held on that day.

Mr. Ray Powell: I visited Westminster Hall during the course of the mass lobby and was satisfied that the arrangements for access to the hall itself were satisfactory. The Committee's proposals to improve access for disabled people to the Grand Committee Room from Westminster Hall are described in my answer to my hon. Friend on 8 February, columns *243-46*. The facilities provided for the organisation of a mass lobby are a matter for the Administration Committee and my hon. Friend may wish to refer any specific matter of particular concern to that Committee.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number and annual cost of staff at Doncaster prison; and what are the figures in respect of the agreed tender.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of and annual cost of staff at Doncaster prison.

The Prison Service pays a fee to Premier Prison Services Ltd to manage Doncaster prison. It is not broken down into elements such as pay. It is therefore not possible for us to say how much the annual cost of staff is. This is a matter for the company.

The tender assumed a staffing level of 356 staff. The contract signed with Premier Prison Services Ltd anticipated that additional staff or other resources might be necessary and allowed for the employment of further staff. Costs of additional staff who are authorised by the Prison Service are borne largely by the Prison Service. The price paid by the Prison Service is, however, limited to the maximum permitted by the contract, which equates to the cost per place of £295 per week published at the time of contract award. The Prison Service has authorised the employment of a further 55 staff.

I understand that Premier Prison Services has employed a further 24 staff for whom they have not sought reimbursement from the Prison Service and the costs of whose employment are borne entirely by the company. This brings the total number of staff to 435.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why he has not yet provided the information about the next step agencies requested by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton in his question of 20 January.

Mr. Howard: I wrote to the right hon. Member on 9 February.

Sikhs (Refugees and Asylum Seekers)

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many Sikhs have been granted exceptional leave to remain in each year since 1984.

(2) how many sikhs have been granted political asylum since 1984.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on Sikhs is not separately identifiable in the statistics. The number of Indian nationals recognised as refugees and granted asylum during the period 1 January 1994 to 31 December 1994 was five, and 30 were granted exceptional leave during the same period. Information for the years 1985 to 1993 is given in tables 3.1 and 3.2 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin: "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1993", issue 17/94 published on 14th July 1994, a copy of which is in the Library.

Long Lartin Prison

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the death in Long Lartin prison of Mr. Norman Manning; if he has established whether it was racially motivated; and if he will instigate further police investigations into the causes of his death.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 16 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the death of Mr. Norman Manning in Long Lartin prison on 29 September last year.

Mr. Manning's death was immediately reported to the police and their investigation started straight away. These inquiries are still in progress and as yet nobody has been charged with any offence. The conduct of the police investigation is a matter for the Chief Officer of the West Mercia Constabulary.

I am unable to say whether or not further inquiries may be necessary, nor in these circumstances can I comment on the motive for the killing.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, columns *896–98*, (1) how many and what proportion of in-country asylum seekers who were refused both asylum and exceptional leave to remain in 1992 to 1994 have been removed; how many of the balance remain in detention; how many others are required to report regularly to the police or immigration authorities; and in how many cases their addresses are unknown to the authorities;

(2) how many and what proportion of those citizens of foreign countries, whose in-country application for asylum or exceptional leave to remain were refused in the years 1992 to 1994 have not been removed or left voluntarily; what assessment he has made of the reasons for this; what steps he proposes to take to secure their removal; what reasons underlie the exclusion of people in this category from the statistics published by his Department for inward immigration to the United Kingdom; and if he will now publish revised figures in respect of each of the past five years including those and other categories of illegal entrants known to his Department

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to his question on 3 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *896–98*, which provided the available information on the number of refusals of in-country applications for asylum in 1992–1994, and the number of removals and voluntary departures in 1992–94, of failed in-country asylum applicants. Information before 1992 is not available. Those removed are not necessarily included in the figures for those refused in the same time period and thus it is not possible to determine the proportion of refusals who were not removed.

In-country asylum applicants are included in the Department's statistics on the number entering the United Kingdom who are subject to immigration control, most of whom enter as visitors or students. These figures are published in table 3.1 of the Command Paper "Control of Immigration Statistics 1993". In addition, separate statistics on asylum applications are published annually in the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics UK 1993". Copies of both are available in the Library.

The available figures for departures relating to those refused asylum or exceptional leave to remain are for those removed or who embark voluntarily after deportation or illegal entry action has commenced against them. The difference in the published statistics between the number refused asylum or exceptional leave to remain and the number removed or who voluntarily departed in a given year will include persons who are awaiting the outcome of an appeal; are allowed to remain after a successful appeal; have withdrawn their claim for asylum; have left the country before steps had been taken to enforce their departure; and those granted permission to stay in another capacity, for example, marriage.

Removal of failed asylum seekers who fail to leave of their own volition is possible only after all rights of appeal in this country have been exhausted. At that stage, the immigration service will take the appropriate steps to trace and remove failed asylum seekers.

As at 30 January 1995, 225 persons who had applied for asylum in country were detained, pending the outcome of an appeal or awaiting removal. In addition, as at 13 February 1995, 1,773 persons who had applied for asylum in-country and had been refused asylum or exceptional leave between 1992 to 1994, were placed on restriction orders or granted temporary admission, requiring them to report to the police on a regular basis and/or restricting their place of residence. A further 220 persons are known to have absconded or are classified as missing.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, columns *896–98*, by what date at the present rate of progress, he expects to clear the backlog of 55,255 applications for asylum dependants, outstanding at 31 December 1994; of these how many entered the United Kingdom claiming some grounds other than as asylum seekers; and how many are being detained under secure conditions.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The rate at which the backlog of undecided asylum applications can be reduced will depend in part on the number of applications received in the future. It is therefore not possible to give a reliable forecast of when it might be reduced to a minimum working level. Information is not available on the proportion of the backlog that applied in country for asylum.

As at 30 January 1995, 139 persons were detained who are awaiting an initial decision on their asylum applications.

Wild Birds

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences against wild birds were alleged, and how many of these resulted in successful prosecutions, in each year since 1990;

(2) how many cases of the persecution of birds of prey have been recorded in each year since 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The number of cases of persecution of birds of prey is not recorded centrally.

The numbers of defendants prosecuted and convicted under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 from 1990 to 1993, latest available, for offences related to birds are given in the table. Information is not collected centrally as to the species involved.

Number of defendants prosecuted and convicted under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 of offences related to birds, 1990–93
England and Wales

Offence description	Prosecutions 1990	1991	1992	1993	Convictions 1990	1991	1992	1993
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981								
Protection of wild birds [Section 1]	35	45	44	48	24	33	33	32
Protection of nests and eggs of wild birds [Section 1]	5	14	9	16	2	12	7	8
Illegal entry into bird sanctuaries [Section 3]	2	3	—	2	—	2	—	2
Protection of wild birds in sanctuaries [Section 3]	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Protection of the nests and eggs of wild birds in sanctuaries [Section 3]	3	1	—	1	3	—	—	1
Prohibition of certain methods of killing or taking wild birds [Section 5]	11	7	7	10	9	6	5	8
Protection of captive birds [Section 8]	7	1	4	3	7	—	4	2

Fire Service College

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present financial position of the Fire Service college; what assessment he has made of its future position and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Fire Service college became a next steps agency, operating as a trading fund on 1 April 1992. The published accounts for the financial year 1993–94 show a deficit of £2.7 million. A similar loss is predicted for 1994–95.

With the assistance of external consultants, a review is being undertaken of options for the college's future status and financial structure.

Football Offences

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminal proceedings involving alleged offences contained in sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Football (Offences) Act 1991 were pursued in 1993 and 1994; and how many convictions were secured.

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1992 and 1993 is given in the table below.

The 1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Number of defendants prosecuted and convicted of offences under The Football (Offences) Act 1991, 1992 and 1993
England and Wales

Offence description	1992 Prosecutions	1992 Convictions	1993 Prosecutions	1993 Convictions
Throwing a missile at or towards the playing area or any area in which spectators or other persons may be present [Section 2]	34	27	31	24
Taking part in indecent or racialist chanting [Section 3]	31	21	17	10
Going onto the playing or adjacent area without lawful authority or lawful excuse [Section 4]	275	246	268	218

Metropolitan Police Committee

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the names of nominees to the Metropolitan police committee from the London Boroughs Association and the Association of London Authorities;

(2) which serving members of local authorities in London were appointed to the Metropolitan police committee; and what was the source of their nomination or recommendation;

(3) if the local authority associations for London were consulted on the composition of, or invited to submit nominations for the Metropolitan police committee: and if he will make a statement;

(4) how many nominations to the Metropolitan police committee submitted by the Association of London Authorities or London Boroughs Association were accepted.

Mr. Maclean: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) on 9 February, columns *382-83*. Two of the 11 members of the Metropolitan police committee whose appointment my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 9 February are also serving members of local authorities in London. Councillor Heaster was suggested by the leader of Wandsworth borough and Councillor Mrs. O'Neill applied directly. A large number of organisations with an interest in the policing of London, including the London local authority associations, were invited to suggest the names of people who might be invited to apply for membership of the Metropolitan police committee but we made it clear that members would be appointed individually, and not as representatives of any particular body. There was no system of nomination. The names suggested by the London Boroughs Association were Councillor Mrs Hanham, Councillor Tope and Councillor Ms Walker; and those by the Association of London Authorities were Councillor Sawyer, Councillor Harris, Councillor Colman and Councillor Ms Hughes. None were appointed.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many payments have been made to applicants to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in 1993–94; and how much was paid out;

(2) how many payments have been offered to applicants to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in 1994–95; and how much in total has been offered;

(3) what was the average time taken to make an offer under the criminal injuries compensation scheme in 1994–95: and what has been the average time taken to make an offer under the tariff scheme.

Mr. Maclean: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board made 40,635 monetary awards in 1993–94, paying out £165.111 million in compensation.

In the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995, approximately 33,000 offers of payment totalling £129 million were made under the old, 1990 scheme, and some 1,560 offers of award totalling £4 million were made under the tariff scheme.

Comparable information about the average time taken to make awards under the two schemes is not available.

Horseracing Betting Levy

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums were raised by the off-course levy collected by the Horseracing Betting Levy Board in 1993 and 1994; and what sums were collected via the 0.25 per cent. duty reduction available to horseracing over the same periods.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The yield for the 32nd levy scheme was £51.6 million; figures for the previous two schemes were £46.9 million—31st levy scheme—and £36 million—30th scheme. The amount made available to the horseracing industry from the reduction in general betting duty in 1992 is not calculated centrally. The effect of the reduction was taken into account in determining the structure of the 31st levy scheme and in subsequent levy settlements.

British Greyhound Fund

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what receipts have been paid into the British Greyhound Fund for 1994, or to the latest available date: and if he will estimate the percentage that they represent of the total sum that would have been available if all off-course betting shops had contributed their 0.25 per cent. of betting duty during that period;

(2) what have been the main areas to benefit from the distribution of funds by the British Greyhound Fund since its establishment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand that the fund received income of £1.9 million in 1993–94 as payments from bookmakers in respect of the voluntary agreement arising from the duty concession in the 1992 Budget. Figures are not available centrally for the sum which would have been raised if all off-course bookmakers were contributing in full to the fund.

I understand that the fund allocates money to benefit areas such as prize money, integrity services and improvements to tracks, including maintenance and lighting.

Mr. Habid Ur Rehman

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mr. Habid Ur Rehman, the sponsor of his wife, Mrs. Amina Bibi, who has applied to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad to join her husband in the United Kingdom—Ref: IMM/C 3835—will be interviewed by immigration officials at Leeds/Bradford airport; when his Department recorded any request from Islamabad for Mr. Rehman to be interviewed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The request from the British high commission in Islamabad for an interview with Mr. Rehman was received by the Home Office on 7 November 1994 and the papers are, at present, in a queue at Leeds/Bradford airport awaiting the arrangements of an interview. There are other similar cases at Leeds/Bradford airport which have been awaiting a sponsor interview longer than Mr. Rehman and to offer him an earlier interview date would serve only to disadvantage others in the queue.

Prison Escapes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report,* column *810,* into which prison category escapes from prison in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1984–85 and *(c)* 1993–94 figures fell; and if the escapes include escapes from escorts to prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs Barbara Roche, dated 16 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question, pursuant to his Answer of 2 February, Official Report, Column 810, into which prison category escapes from prisons in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1984–85 and *(c)* 1993–94 figures fell; and if the escapes include escapes from escorts to prisons.

The tables below show the revised figures for the escapes from Prison Service establishments and prison escorts that occurred in the calendar year 1979, the period 1 January 1984 to 31 March 1985 and for the financial year ending 31 March 1994. The figures for 1979 and 1984–85 have been revised in line with my answer to your Question PO1470 I.

1 January 1979–31 December 1979	
Escapes from Category B Prisons	12
Escapes from Category C Prisons	94
Escapes from Closed Borstals	118
Escapes from Closed Detention Centres	8
Sub Total	232
Escapes from Escort	94

Note:

Information on Borstal and Detention Centres Escapes from Escort is not available.

Fifteen month period due to change from calendar to Financial Year 1 January 1984–31 March 1985	
Escapes from Category B Prisons	15
Escapes from Category C Prisons	105
Escapes from closed YCCs	73
Escapes from Closed Detention Centres	14
Escapes from Closed Female Establishments	4
Sub-total	211
Escapes from escort	195
Total	406

1 April 1993–31 March 1994	
Escapes from Category B Prisons	24
Escapes from Category C Prisons	96
Escapes from Closed YOIs	50
Escapes from Closed Female Establishments	1
Sub-total	171
Escapes from escort	[1]102
Total	273

[1] This figure does not include 23 escapes from escorts which were not the responsibility of the Prison Service prior to Agency status.

Prisoners

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what notice is given to prisoners in Her Majesty's prisons in the United Kingdom before a cell search takes place.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, dated 16 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the searching of prisoners' cells.

If a prisoner is available when a cell is to be searched, he or she will be informed that the search is to take place. He or she will be allowed to view the search from the cell doorway, under the observation of staff.

The Woodcock enquiry recommended that in future at all closed prisons prisoners should be excluded from the cell during search, to avoid intimidation. This was part of a wider recommendation on changes to searching procedures.

WALES

Local Government Employees

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* population, *(b)* number of employees, *(c)* number of employees per 1,000 population and *(d)* political party in control in each local authority; and if he will post the answer on his Department's pages on the Government's world wide web server, "www.open.gov.uk".

Mr. Redwood: The latest available information is shown in the following table. Local authority staffing figures are maintained by the Local Government Management Board. There are currently no arrangements for providing the information in the way requested.

Population, number of staff employed and political control of each local authority in Wales

	Population[1] (000s)	*Total Staff[2]*	*Staff per 1,000 population*	*Political control*
County Councils				
Clwyd	416	14,041	33.8	LAB
Dyfed	352	14,733	41.9	IND
Gwent	450	17,988	39.9	LAB
Gwynedd	240	9,342	38.9	IND
Mid Glamorgan	544	21,578	39.6	LAB
Powys	120	[3]—	[3]—	IND
South Glamorgan	413	14,531	35.2	LAB
West Glamorgan	371	14,109	38.0	LAB
Borough/District Councils				
Aberconwy	54	483	8.9	NOC
Alyn and Deeside	75	601	8.0	LAB
Arfon	57	561	9.9	PC
Blaenau Gwent	77	1,119	14.5	LAB
Brecknock	42	251	6.0	IND
Cardiff	299	3,630	12.2	LAB
Carmarthen	56	454	8.1	IND
Ceredigion	69	559	8.1	IND
Colwyn	57	465	8.2	LDEM
Cynon Valley	65	634	9.7	LAB
Delyn	70	661	9.4	IND
Dinefwr	39	246	6.4	LAB
Dwyfor	27	258	9.5	IND
Glyndwr	42	345	8.2	IND
Islwyn	67	736	11.0	LAB
Llanelli	74	732	9.9	LAB
Lliw Valley	65	568	8.8	LAB
Meirionnydd	33	349	10.7	PC
Merthyr Tydfil	60	771	12.9	LAB
Monmouth	78	570	7.3	CON
Montgomeryshire	54	460	8.5	IND
Neath	66	626	9.5	LAB
Newport	137	1,426	10.4	LAB
Ogwr	135	1,259	9.3	LAB
Port Talbot	51	533	10.4	LAB
Preseli Pembroke	71	585	8.3	IND
Radnorshire	24	207	8.5	IND
Rhondda	78	975	12.4	LAB
Rhuddlan	55	495	9.0	IND
Rhymney Valley	104	1,188	11.4	LAB
South Pembroke	43	331	7.7	IND
Swansea	189	2,528	13.4	LAB
Taff Ely	101	804	7.9	LAB
Torfaen	91	905	10.0	LAB
Vale of Glamorgan	115	868	7.6	LAB
Wrexham Maelor	117	1,297	11.1	LAB
Ynys Mon	69	536	7.7	IND

[1] OPCS 1993 mid-year estimate. [2] Joint staffing watch data, June 1994 (provisional) except for Aberconwy (March 1993 figure) and Cynon Valley (March 1994 provisional figure); number of persons, full or part-time, in general services (excluding law or order).
[3] —denotes data not available for 1993 or 1994.

Cadw

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when Cadw will reopen an office in Gwynedd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the agency and I have asked the chief executive, Mr. John Carr, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from E. A. J. Carr to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 13 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question in which you asked when Cadw would re-open an office in Gwynedd.

The Agency has never had a public office in Gwynedd although it does have a Works management unit at Caernarfon. Our professional and field staff, however, travel frequently throughout Wales, providing a direct point of contact for members of public who may be potential grant applicants; offering advice to local authorities on statutory procedures and best practice in conservation; and also liaising with a range of bodies and organisations which have an interest in preserving and promoting the built heritage of Wales.

Cadw is committed to improving the standard of services it provides to the public generally and its customers, in particular, across the range of Agency activities. The views of customers on how well they feel we deliver those services, and suggestions for how we may better meet their needs, are always welcome and given careful consideration.

At present, however, the Agency has no plans to open a public office in the North Wales area.

Nature Conservation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will issue planning policy guidance on nature conservation in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Draft guidance is being prepared and I intend to consult Welsh interests before the summer.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish a Welsh Office equivalent of planning policy guidance 9, "Nature Conservation".

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Draft guidance is being prepared and I intend to consult Welsh interests before the summer.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if it is his policy to implement in Wales the United Kingdom strategy for sustainable development in January 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government's strategy for sustainable development, published in January 1994, covers all parts of the United Kingdom; and provides a framework for action. In line with this, on 31 January 1995, my right hon. Friend published "The Environmental Agenda for Wales" setting out our plans for striking a sensible balance between development and conservation needs in the Principality. A copy of the agenda is available in the Library of the House.

Environmental Agenda

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what is the status of his statement on the environmental agenda for Wales in the planning system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The agenda reflects existing planning policies and should be taken into account by local planning authorities, where relevant, together with detailed planning policy guidance.

Community Areas and Councils

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each county and district council area in Wales and for Wales as a whole the number of *(a)* community areas, *(b)* community and town councils and *(c)* community or town councils which have (i) ceased to exist or (ii) been established during each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested by the hon. Member at *(c)* can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information requested at *(a)* and *(b)* is set out in the following table.

Numbers of community areas and town/community councils in Wales

County Councils	*District borough councils*	*Numbers of community areas*	*Numbers of town community councils*
Clwyd		*127*	*122*
	Alyn and Deeside	13	13
	Colwyn	19	16
	Delyn	21	21
	Glyndwr	35	35
	Rhuddlan	10	8
	Wrexham Maelor	29	29
Dyfed		*202*	*202*
	Carmarthen	41	41
	Ceredigion	51	51
	Dinefwr	23	23
	Llanelli	9	9
	Preseli		
	Pembrokeshire	52	52
	South Pembrokeshire	26	26
Gwent		*82*	*66*
	Blaenau Gwent	9	5
	Islwyn	12	0
	Monmouth	31	31
	Newport	14	14
	Torfaen	16	16
Gwynedd		*122*	*122*
	Aberconwy	18	18
	Arfon	17	17
	Dwyfor	17	17
	Meirionnydd	30	30
	Ynys Mon	40	40
Mid Glamorgan		*100*	*50*
	Cynon Valley	11	3
	Merthyr Tydfil	12	1
	Ogwr	22	22
	Rhondda	31	0
	Rhymney Valley	14	14
	Taff Ely	10	10
Powys		*108*	*108*
	Brecknock	36	36
	Montgomeryshire	45	45
	Radnorshire	27	27
South Glamorgan		*54*	*28*
	Cardiff	30	5
	Vale of Glamorgan	24	23
West Glamorgan		*68*	*42*
	Port Talbot	12	0
	Lliw Valley	14	14
	Neath	14	14
	Swansea	28	14
Total for Wales		863	740

Departmental Staff

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of staff employed by his Department *(a)* in Cardiff and *(b)* the rest of Wales.

Mr. Redwood: At 1 February, my Department, including Cadw, employed 1,701 permanent full-time equivalent staff in Cardiff and 566.5 permanent full-time equivalent staff throughout the rest of Wales.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of his Department in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1994.

Mr. Redwood: Public expenditure within the responsibility of the Welsh Office totalled £1,769 million and £3,028 million in 1979–80 and 1986–87 respectively and that for 1994–95 is estimated to be £6,585 million.

Quangos

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total remuneration paid to members of quangos in Wales in 1993–94.

Mr. Redwood: The remuneration paid to members of executive non-departmental public bodies in 1993–94 was £773,226.57—excluding national insurance and pension contributions—made up as follows:

	£
Agricultural Wages Committees	992.95
Arts Council of Wales	nil
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	102,000.00
Countryside Council for Wales	96,760.00
Curriculum and Assessment Authority	24,909.62
Development Board for Rural Wales	112,479.00
Further Education Funding Council	[1]32,358.00
Higher Education Funding Council	[1]31,417.00
Housing for Wales	57,965.00
Land Authority for Wales	78,500.00
National Library of Wales	nil
National Museum of Wales	nil
Royal Common Ancient and Historical Monuments	nil
Sports Council for Wales	24,753.00
Wales Tourist Board	71,000.00
Wales Youth Agency	4,900.00
Welsh Development Agency	[1]121,407.00
Welsh Language Board	[2]4,785.00
Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting	9,000.00

[1] Excludes chief executive.

[2] £1,712 was paid to chairman prior to the board's inception as an executive NDPB.

Artificial Limb and Appliance Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter dated 31 January from the British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association concerning the future management organisation of the artificial limb and appliance services Wales.

Mr. Redwood: With the agreement of the British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association, a copy of its letter of 31 January has been placed in the Library of the House.

Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answers of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *66*, 26 January, *Official Report*, columns *379–80*, and 30 January, *Official Report*, column *535*, what was the aggregate cost of prescribing for each family health services area authority divided by generic and brand name prescribing and for the total of fundholding GPs and non-fundholders.

Mr. Redwood: Data for October 1993 and October 1994 are as follows:

£'000

	October 1993		*October 1994*	
	Generic	*Other*	*Generic*	*Other*
Clwyd Fundholders	583	583	693	599
Non-fundholders	705	1,037	764	1,028
Dyfed Fundholders	202	180	501	469
Non-fundholders	914	1,183	791	929
Gwent Fundholders	314	403	427	489
Non-fundholders	929	1,277	994	1,209
Gwynedd Fundholders	18	14	174	202
Non-fundholders	708	1,051	665	1,080
Mid Glamorgan Fundholders	283	250	368	265
Non-fundholders	1,403	1,879	1,556	1,981
Powys Fundholders	104	128	174	209
Non-fundholders	206	296	178	230
South Glamorgan Fundholders	114	99	353	351
Non-fundholders	1,071	1,299	990	1,088
West Glamorgan Fundholders	560	608	702	644
Non-fundholders	605	867	619	816

Note:
Data for October 1992 are not readily available.

Child Abuse

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date his Department was first informed in writing by a child care officer of allegations relating to wide spread child sex abuse at north Wales children's homes; and what steps his Department took to investigate the allegations.

Mr. Redwood: The Department received in June 1991 allegations from a child care worker formerly employed by Gwynedd county council, about sexual abuse of children in children's homes in north Wales. These matters became the subject of inquiries by the North Wales police.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the Queen's counsel to be appointed to read the papers relating to child sex abuse cases in north Wales from the files of the Clwyd and Gwynedd county social services departments and the North Wales police also to be given duties to interview individuals who wish to volunteer statements to the Queen's counsel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Details of the investigation will be announced as soon as possible.

Local Agenda 21

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take to promote the drawing up of local agenda 21s.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Action by councils in this general area is being taken forward under their local Agenda 21 initiative, co-ordinated at the United Kingdom level by the local authority associations. Although local strategies under agenda 21 are for individual councils to develop, the environmental agenda for Wales, recently published by my right hon. Friend, encourages Welsh councils, and others, to take a range of practical "green" measures.

Minerals Planning Guidance

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest version of minerals planning guidance on aggregates provision which applies to Wales; when it went out of print; and what steps he intends to take to ensure that the guidance on this subject issued by his Department will be taken fully into account by local authorities in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Minerals planning guidance note 6—MPG 6—"Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales", is extant in so far as it relates to Wales: it went out of print in July 1994, although Her Majesty's Stationery Office can still supply copies through an out-of-print service. In October 1993, my right hon. Friend wrote to the leaders of all local authorities in Wales reminding them that government guidance must be fully taken into account when discharging their planning responsibilities.

NHS Suppliers (Payment)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *377*, if he will place a copy in the Library of the guidance issued on prompt settlement of bills to NHS organisations; if he will list which NHS organisations have been sent a copy of this guidance; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Redwood: The guidance has been placed in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Objective 1 Funding

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the projects that have been approved for European Union objective 1 funding for the highlands and islands in the first round of *(a)* the European regional development fund and *(b)* the European social fund; what was the expenditure approved for each project and what was the total expenditure; and if he will place this information in the Library;

(2) what limitations apply to Government Departments for applying for European Union objective 1 funding for projects in the highlands and islands;

(3) how much finance from objective 1 funds for the highlands and islands has so far been earmarked for *(a)* energy supply networks and *(b)* transport infrastructure; and if he will list the relevant projects;

(4) if he will list the projects that were not approved for European Union objective 1 funding for the highlands and islands in the first round of *(a)* the European social fund and *(b)* the European regional development fund;

(5) if he will list the successful applications for European Union objective 1 funding for the highlands and islands which are located in Argyll and Bute;

(6) what has been the total level of funding from objective 1 funds for the highlands and islands that has so far been earmarked for each Scottish Office Department; and what this is as a percentage of the total expenditure so far committed to projects.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Government Departments are able to compete for objective 1 funding on the same basis as other potential project sponsors.

To date, no funds have been allocated to the Scottish Office from the European regional development fund. Contributions from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund and the financial instrument for fisheries guidance of 47.08 million ecu, about £37 million, and 19.80 million ecu, about £16 million, respectively are expected over the life of the programme—1994 to 1999—in relation to schemes administered by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department for the benefit of farmers, crofters, food processors, fishermen, fish farmers, fishing industry organisations and local fishing port authorities and enterprises. Applications for support from the European social fund towards Government training programmes is made by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. These programmes will not take up any more than 40 per cent. of the European social fund resources.

In relation to the more specific questions on the first round of project consideration, as the information requested is lengthy, I shall arrange for copies of the tables to be placed in the House Library.

Cochlear Implants

Mr. Worthington : To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what calculation he has made of the numbers of profoundly deaf children who would benefit from cochlear implants;

(2) what is the cost of a cochlear implant operation for a profoundly deaf child; and how many children in Scotland have received this operation in the current financial year;

(3) what representations he has received from the surgeons carrying out cochlear implants in Scotland about the best age for carrying out this operation; and what he is doing to match funding to the number of children needing this operation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The national services division of the common services agency, which is responsible for purchasing this service, has commissioned an assessment of need for paediatric cochlear implantation in Scotland which will be published shortly. The findings of this report will inform future provision and funding levels for the service.

No representations have been received from surgeons carrying out cochlear implants in Scotland about the best age for undertaking the operation. A recent Medical

Research Council evaluation study has indicated that, in general terms, cochlear implantation has favourable outcomes up to the age of seven years.

The cost of a paediatric cochlear implant operation is £28,725 in 1994–95. Five children have received this operation in Scotland in the current financial year. The numbers of children referred for operation to centres outwith Scotland is not held centrally.

Coastal Policy

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the expected publication date for the Scottish Office coastal discussion paper;

(2) what progress has been made on producing national planning policy guidance on the coast;

(3) what initiatives the Scottish Office is undertaking to promote coastal zone management in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: My officials are working on a discussion paper on coastal policy issues, which will be published as soon as possible. The paper will provide an overview of existing policies affecting the coast and will consider the need for planning guidance. It will also discuss the concept of coastal zone management as it applies to Scottish circumstances putting particular emphasis on partnership and the voluntary principle.

NHS Abortions

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS abortions were performed under 13 weeks of pregnancy on women resident in each health board in 1993; and of these operations, how many involved admission and discharge on the same day.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is shown in the table below.

NHS therapeutic abortions performed in 1993 with an estimated gestation of under 13 weeks; by health board of residence

Health board of residence	*Total*	*Number discharged on day of admission*
All Areas	9,963	8,846
Argyll and Clyde	518	422
Ayrshire and Arran	633	623
Borders	152	146
Dumfries and Galloway	193	47
Fife	667	576
Forth Valley	445	418
Grampian	1,189	997
Greater Glasgow	1,974	1,858
Highland	405	332
Orkney/Shetland/Western Isles	85	13
Lanarkshire	848	642
Lothian	1,877	1,826
Tayside	977	946

Note:
Abortions performed on Scottish residents in England and Wales are excluded. All figures are provisional.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many abortions were performed on women resident in each health board in 1993; and, of these operations, how many were performed in NHS hospitals.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Therapeutic Abortions in 1993; by health board of residence

Health Board of Residence	*Total*	*Number performed in NHS hospitals*
All Areas	11,048	10,922
Argyll and Clyde	601	594
Ayrshire and Arran	671	668
Borders	164	164
Dumfries and Galloway	216	214
Fife	761	759
Forth Valley	493	485
Grampian	1,363	1,317
Greater Glasgow	2,142	2,115
Highland	453	451
Orkney/Shetland/Western Isles	96	96
Lanarkshire	906	896
Lothian	2,093	2,084
Tayside	1,089	1,079

Abortions performed on Scottish residents in England and Wales are excluded. All figures are provisional.

Sheriff Court Houses

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the Sheriff court houses in Scotland which do not satisfy the objectives set out in the justice charter for Scotland in respect of *(a)* accessibility for disabled people, *(b)* adequate and comfortable accommodation, *(c)* refreshment facilities and *(d)* services for defence witnesses and lawyers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Work is currently being undertaken to establish an independent assessment of the facilities provided in Sheriff court houses against the aims and objectives set out in the justice charter for Scotland. In recent years, a major programme of capital investment amounting to some £20 million per annum has been undertaken to improve facilities by providing new and refurbished court accommodation and this programme of work continues.

Scottish Avalanche Information Service

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase funding to the Scottish avalanche information service following the recent avalanche on Liathach, Torridon, Wester Ross; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Scottish avalanche information service is administered by the Scottish Sports Council and is funded from the grant in aid total provided to the council by the Scottish Office. Any increase in funding is therefore a matter for the council in the first instance. The coverage of the scheme is reviewed regularly and at the end of this winter season, the council will be considering whether changes to the existing arrangements are necessary.

Local Authority Schools (Recruitment)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the local authority schools in Scotland that seek to recruit nationally.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally. However, I am not aware of any local authority school that recruits nationally, either as regards staff or pupils, although education authorities do place advertisements from time to time.

Local Authority Schools (Funding)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the schools in Scotland that he directly funds independently of local authorities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office Education Department provides annual grants for the operation of the following schools:

Dornoch academy, Sutherland

Jordanhill school, Glasgow

and provides grants towards the costs of operating the following schools:

Royal Blind school, Edinburgh

Donaldson's college, Edinburgh

Harmeny school, Balerno, Midlothian

East Park Home school, Glasgow

Stanmore House residential school, Lanark

Corseford residential school, Kilbarchan

Craighalbert centre, Cumbernauld

The New school, Butterstone, Dunkeld

The Scottish Home and Health Department provides occasional grants towards the capital costs of secure accommodation provision at St. Mary's Kenmure, Bishopbriggs and at Rossie school, near Montrose.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the special circumstances of the music school attached to Douglas academy in Milngavie will be fully taken into account when he decides the financial allocation to the new East Dunbartonshire council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the October 1992 consultation paper "Shaping the New Councils" made clear, the distribution of aggregate external finance to the new councils following local government re-organisation will be subject to consultation with Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in the distribution committee of the working party on local government finance. As at present, the distribution will be determined by the client group assessment methodology. The distribution committee will be considering during the course of this year the preparation of grant aided expenditure assessment for each of the new councils.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to the music school attached to Douglas academy in Milngavie and similar establishments; and what plans he has to give special financial help to such ventures when the new councils are set up.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government recognise the important contribution which the music school and other similar schools in Scotland make to the education system. It was following recommendations in a report by the Scottish Education Department in 1976 that these schools were set up.

The framework in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 should ensure maximum continuity between the existing and the new authorities in terms of provision of education services.

Provisions already exist under section 23(2) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to safeguard the financial position of an authority which, as in the case of Douglas academy, is providing education for pupils from another authority's area. Section 23(2) provides a mechanism whereby such an authority may recoup the costs incurred by so doing.

Procurator Fiscals

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many procurator fiscals or deputy procurator fiscals were attached to each procurator fiscal office in Scotland and if he will provide a breakdown of the average number of cases per procurator fiscal or deputy procurator fiscal in each office in *(a)* 1974, *(b)* 1984 and *(c)* 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Precise staffing figures for 1974 are not available. In any event, the procurator fiscal service took over prosecution in the district court between 1975 and 1976 and this makes comparison of staffing levels prior to then inappropriate. The figures requested are provided below for the years 1976, 1984 and 1994. Little significance can be attached to them, since scope for comparison between staffing levels and bare case numbers is restricted by differing degrees of complexity and duration of cases, geographical considerations, and inter-office assistance.

1976	*PF*	*Deputes*	*Cases*	*Average per staff member*
Aberdeen	1	5	10,207	1,701
Airdrie	1	4	6,547	1,309
Alloa	1	—	1,478	1,478
Arbroath	1	—	1,929	1,929
Ayr	1	2	5,246	1,749
Banff	1	—	1,401	1,401
Campbeltown	1	—	826	826
Cupar	1	—	1,690	1,690
Dingwall/Tain	1	1	2,526	1,263
Dornoch	1	—	546	546
Dumbarton	1	4.5	5,663	1,030
Dumfries	1	2	5,311	1,770
Dundee	1	4.5	11,104	2,019
Dunfermline	1	1	4,716	2,358
Dunoon	1	—	1,349	1,349
Duns	1	—	902	902
Edinburgh	1	13.5	31,330	2,161
Elgin	1	1.5	3,268	1,307
Falkirk	1	2	5,143	1,714
Forfar	1	—	1,805	1,805
Fort William	1	—	904	904
Glasgow	1	35	63,852	1,774
Greenock	1	4	7,281	1,456
Haddington	1	1	2,761	1,381
Hamilton	1	7.5	12,366	1,455
Inverness	1	2	5,395	1,798
Kilmarnock	1	4	7,468	1,494
Kirkcaldy	1	2	5,578	1,859
Kirkcudbright	1	—	747	747
Kirkwall	1	—	612	612
Lanark	1	1	1,726	863
Lerwick	1	—	598	598

1976	PF	Deputes	Cases	Average per staff member
Linlithgow	1	2	5,259	1,753
Oban	0.5	—	993	993
Paisley	1	7	11,334	1,417
Perth	1	3	5,527	1,382
Peterhead	1	—	1,368	1,368
Portree	1	—	434	434
Rothesay	1	—	601	601
Selkirk/Jedburgh/Peebles	1	1	4,676	2,338
Stirling	1	2	3,987	1,329
Stonehaven	1	—	1,821	1,821
Stornoway/Lochmaddy	1	—	575	575
Stranraer	1	—	1,113	1,113
Wick	1	—	1,204	1,204

1984	PF	Deputes	Cases	Average per staff member
Aberdeen	1	7.5	14,888	1,752
Airdrie	1	5	7,817	1,303
Alloa	1	1	2,510	1,255
Arbroath	1	1	2,467	1,234
Ayr	1	3	7,316	1,829
Banff	1	—	910	910
Campbeltown	1	—	704	704
Cupar	1	—	2,212	2,212
Dingwall	1	—	1,513	1,513
Dornoch	1	—	641	641
Dumbarton	1	5	7,112	1,185
Dumfries	1	3	7,295	1,823
Dundee	1	7	14,061	1,758
Dunfermline	1	3	5,912	1,478
Dunoon	1	—	1,565	1,565
Duns	1	—	743	743
Edinburgh	1	19.5	57,952	2,827
Elgin	1	1	3,909	1,955
Falkirk	1	3	8,000	2,000
Forfar	1	—	2,822	2,822
Fort William	1	—	1,200	1,200
Glasgow	1	54.5	71,948	1,296
Greenock	1	4	6,641	1,328
Haddington	1	1	3,211	1,606
Hamilton	1	11	18,720	1,560
Inverness	1	3	6,004	1,501
Jedburgh	1	—	1,435	1,435
Kilmarnock	1	6	11,230	1,604
Kirkcaldy	1	3	7,294	1,824
Kirkcudbright	1	—	919	919
Kirkwall	1	—	592	592
Lanark	1	1	2,168	1,084
Lerwick	1	—	880	880
Linlithgow	1	3	6,987	1,747
Oban	1	—	1,499	1,499
Paisley	1	8.5	11,541	1,215
Peebles	1	—	611	611
Perth	1	3	7,951	1,988
Peterhead	1	1	2,204	1,102
Portree/Lochmaddy	1	—	708	708
Rothesay	1	—	605	605
Selkirk	1	—	1,639	1,639
Stirling	1	2	4,870	1,593
Stonehaven	1	—	2,581	2,581
Stornoway	1	—	817	817
Stranraer	1	—	2,164	2,164
Tain	1	—	1,443	1,443
Wick	1	—	1,116	1,116

1994	PF	Deputes	Cases	Average per staff member
Aberdeen	1	12	13,436	1,034
Airdrie	1	6	6,645	949
Alloa	1	1	2,588	1,294
Arbroath	1	1	3,060	1,530
Ayr	1	4.5	7,353	1,337
Banff	1	—	923	923
Campbeltown	1	—	693	693
Cupar	1	1	2,111	1,056
Dingwall	1	—	1,295	1,295
Dornoch/Tain	1	—	1,738	1,738
Dumbarton	1	5.5	7,339	1,129
Dumfries	1	4	6,457	1,291
Dundee	1	6.5	11,044	1,473
Dunfermline	1	3	7,035	1,759
Dunoon	1	—	1,145	1,145
Duns/Jedburgh	1	—	3,323	3,323
Edinburgh/Peebles	1	26.5	30,243	1,100
Elgin	1	1	3,658	1,829
Falkirk	1	5	7,348	1,225
Forfar	1	—	2,235	2,235
Fort William	1	—	1,524	1,524
Glasgow	1	61	69,451	1,120
Greenock/Rothesay	1	4	5,504	1,101
Haddington	1	1	3,997	1,999
Hamilton	1	17	17,255	959
Inverness	1	3	6,634	1,659
Kilmarnock	1	7	9,489	1,186
Kirkcaldy	1	3.5	7,687	1,708
Kirkwall/Lerwick	1	—	1,487	1,487
Lanark	1	1	3,723	1,861
Linlithgow	1	2.5	6,973	1,992
Oban	1	—	1,123	1,123
Paisley	1	11	10,746	896
Perth	1	4.5	7,623	1,386
Peterhead	1	—	2,617	2,617
Portree/Lochmaddy	1	—	721	721
Selkirk	1	—	1,781	1,781
Stirling	1	3.5	4,656	1,035
Stonehaven	1	—	2,008	2,008
Stornoway	1	—	904	904
Stranraer/Kirkcudbright	1	1	3,481	1,741
Wick	1	—	1,038	1,038

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what resources were allocated to each procurator fiscal's office in Scotland for each of the last 10 years; and if he will break down this figure to show the average amount allocated per case dealt with by each office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Resources are not allocated to individual offices on a per-case basis; they are allocated and managed regionally for the departmental settlement on a basis of past performance, local factors and forecast work load. Allocations per case would be unreliable, there being no meaningful comparison to be made on such a basis because of differing degrees of complexity and duration of cases, geographical variations and inter-office assistance.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of cases dealt with by each procurator fiscal's office giving the numerical and percentage breakdown of cases which *(a)* were marked no proceedings, *(b)* were dealt with through fiscal fines, *(c)* proceeded to court, *(d)* resulted in charges being proved and *(e)* resulted in persons receiving a custodial sentence for the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: As the information requested is lengthy I have arranged for it to be placed in the Library of the House.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioner fundholders in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole have over-run their budgets; and what was the average amount of the over-run in each of the last two years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* There are as yet no operational fundholders in Inverclyde area. In 1992–93, of a total of 10 GP fundholding practices in Scotland, one fundholding practice, located in the Grampian health board area, spent in excess of its allocated fund. The overspend was £4,754, approximately 0.5 per cent. of the allocated fund.

In 1993–94, 12 GP fundholding practices of a total of 70 throughout Scotland spent in excess of their allocated sum. One of these practices was located in the Argyll and Clyde health board area within Strathclyde region. The average overspend was £17,840 which represented approximately 1 per cent. of the average fund allocated by the health board.

In each case, the health board reviewed the reasons for these small overspends and considered them acceptable under the regulations governing the scheme.

Scottish Early Music Consort

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State of Scotland how much Scottish Office sources contribute to the Scottish Early Music Consort; and what help he will give the Glasgow International Early Music Festival in 1996.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 10 February 1995]:* The Scottish Arts Council, which is the main channel of Scottish Office support for the arts in Scotland, will contribute £15,600 to the Scottish Early Music Consort in 1995–96. It is for the Scottish Arts Council to determine whether it should support the Glasgow International Early Music Festival in 1996.

M77

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place a copy of the informal letter of inquiry from the European Commission about the Ayr road route, M77, in the Library; and if he will make available the response to this letter.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* No. Correspondence between the European Commission and member states on infraction proceedings, including preliminary contacts of this sort, is regarded as confidential between the parties.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies he has undertaken in the Scottish water industry to compare build own and operate, and build own operate and transfer schemes with traditional methods of local government financing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. George Kynoch *[holding answer 8 February 1995]:* In November 1994, a commentary on the benefits of build own and operate schemes was prepared by the Scottish Office in response to a study produced by Strathclyde regional council. A copy of the commentary is in the Library. It concludes that the private sector should offer terms which compare favourably with public funding costs. Under current rules, build own operate and transfer schemes would count as public expenditure.

NORTHERN IRELAND

United Kingdom Integrity

10. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the policy of his Department in the maintenance of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ancram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold).

Public Bodies

11. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many non-departmental public bodies there are in Northern Ireland; how many people serve on two or more of them; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 6 February, *Official Report*, columns *44-5.*

Criminal Justice

12. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to bring the criminal justice system into line with that elsewhere in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: We are preparing a range of measures to improve the working of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. They reflect Northern Ireland's circumstances, though drawing on experience in the rest of the United Kingdom, and elsewhere.

Town Centres

13. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance his Department is giving to regenerate town centres in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: In Belfast and Londonderry the urban development grant scheme encourages private sector investment in development projects. Regeneration in town centres other than Belfast and Londonderry is encouraged through grant assistance, totalling around £4 million annually, for comprehensive development, environmental improvement, pedestrianisation and conservation schemes. My Department also administers and co-funds with the international fund for Ireland, IFI, the community regeneration improvement special programme.

Benefit Applicants

14. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Social Security Agency offices located in Northern Ireland administer

cases for applicants residing in Great Britain in addition to applicants from Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: None.

Peace Process

15. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further discussions he has had with the Dublin Government on the progress of the peace process.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I met Mr. Spring in Belfast on 14 February. This was a regular meeting of the intergovernmental conference and we discussed a range of issues.

22. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received about future prospects for peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland.

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for hon. Members to further the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had about furthering the peace process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Mayhew: I refer hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field).

Northern Ireland-Scotland Bodies

16. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to create joint Northern Ireland-Scotland bodies with executive powers.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Tourism

17. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the increase in tourism and visitor bookings in Northern Ireland since the ceasefire last year.

Mr. Ancram: It is estimated that since the ceasefire, visitor bookings have increased by 30 per cent. over the same period in 1993. During the period September to December 1994, hotel room occupancy figures rose by an average of 8 percentage points when compared with the same period in 1993. The occupancy figures recorded in October, November and December 1994 were the highest for those months since records began in 1973.

The Northern Ireland tourist board's Dublin office has reported a 155 per cent. increase in bookings since the ceasefire.

Figures for travel to Northern Ireland have also risen since the ceasefire. Sea passenger movements have increased by 6.3 per cent. over the same period in 1993. Belfast international airport and Belfast harbour airport reported inward passenger increases of 3 per cent. and 6 per cent. respectively on the figures for December 1993.

Local Government Employees

18. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are estimated to be currently employed in local government; in how many local authorities they are operating and at what overall cost per head of the population; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The total number of people employed by the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland at 31 March 1994 was 8,607. The average cost per head of the total population of the Province, based on the salaries and wages for the financial year ended 31 March 1994, was £61.12. It is not possible to compare this figure with the position of local authorities in Great Britain in any meaningful way because of the much smaller range of functions undertaken by district councils in Northern Ireland.

Framework Document

19. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how far the cross-border initiatives in tourism, health and the arts, announced by his Ministers in November last year, are a precursor for the all-Ireland bodies proposed in the framework document.

Mr. Ancram: The initiatives announced in November were made on their own merits. I will not be drawn on the proposals likely to be contained in the joint framework document, except to reiterate that they will be for the consideration and agreement of the parties. Obviously if there has already been a declared mutual interest, these might be suitable subjects for north-south co-operation.

Unemployment

20. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are currently unemployed; and what was the figure in December 1992.

Mr. Ancram: The latest available seasonally adjusted figures show that at January 1995 there were 91,100 people unemployed in Northern Ireland. The corresponding figure for December 1992 was 105,900.

Irish Republic

21. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding relations between his Department and the Government of the Irish Republic.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am glad to say that relationships are close and constructive.

Environment Protection Agency

23. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration is being given to the establishment of an environment protection agency in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The Environment Service of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has responsibility for the control of pollution, the conservation of the natural environment and the protection of the man-made heritage. The service is currently the subject of a prior options study. The Government will decide whether any proposals for change in the implementation of environmental policy in Northern Ireland should be made when the results of the study are known shortly.

Scottish Transport Links

24. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland about transport links between Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: In view of the satisfactory arrangements for discussing these matters at official level I have not needed to discuss the subject of transport links between Northern Ireland and Scotland with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Firearms

25. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the number of firearms currently illegally held by terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: Terrorist organisations have access to a considerable quantity of weapons and equipment of various types; however, it would not, on security grounds, be appropriate to provide detailed estimates. The Government continue to regard substantial progress on the question of decommissioning paramilitary arms as a vital element in advancing the political process in Northern Ireland.

Housing

26. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are his priorities for action to improve housing conditions and prospects in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: The Government's housing priorities for Northern Ireland are set out in Command Paper No. 2516 "Expenditure Plans and Priorities", a copy of which is available in the Library.

The Government are committed to building on the significant progress made over the last 20 years in terms of increasing home ownership, improving housing conditions and meeting housing need.

27. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums he is making available for housing grants in Northern Ireland in the current financial year.

Mr. Moss: Government, through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, is making £32.5 million available for housing grants to the private sector in this financial year.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Sir John Wheeler: The information has been placed in the Library.

Generating Companies

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the level of efficiency improvements achieved in generating companies since privatisation; and what consideration he has given to requiring these companies to absorb more costs rather than pass them on to electricity consumers.

Mr. Ancram: None. Following the privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland efficiency improvements achieved in generating stations are matter for the private company concerned. The absorption of the costs of generating electricity is a matter for negotiation and contractual agreement between the generating companies and Northern Ireland Electricity plc.

The Director General of Electricity Supply for Northern Ireland has responsibility for ensuring that consumers' interests as regards price and quality of service are protected.

Islander Marine

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the contracted crew from Islander Marine Strangford, on the Portaferry-Strangford ferry service, is operating to the satisfaction of the Marine Safety Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: Crewing arrangements on the Portaferry-Strangford ferry service have been approved by the Marine Safety Agency.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the postal address of Islander Marine in the village of Strangford; if the premises are occupied; and if he will make a statement about the

contribution of Islander Marine to the operation of the Portaferry-Strangford ferry.

Mr. Moss: The registered postal address of Islander Marine (Ireland) Ltd is 1 the Slip, Strangford, County Down, BT30 7NE. The Department is not aware if these premises are occupied. Islander Marine (Ireland) Ltd provides part of the crew of the Strangford-Portaferry service.

Transport Companies

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the studies which have been conducted into the re-organisation of the transport companies in Northern Ireland including Northern Ireland Railways, Ulsterbus and Citybus; and when a report is due to be published.

Mr. Moss: My Department commissioned a study into the scope for introducing a private element into the management and operation of Northern Ireland Railways and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 11 January, *Official Report*, column *146*. In addition, the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company commissioned a study into the potential for the co-ordination of bus and rail services in Northern Ireland and any necessary restructuring required for this to be achieved.

Following consideration of a report of that study, and of the study into Northern Ireland Railways, I announced in Belfast on 17 January 1995 plans for co-ordinating bus and rail services; restructuring the boards of Northern Ireland Railways, Ulsterbus and Citybus on the basis of common membership; unifying the senior management structure of these companies; and selling their non-core services and applying market tests and contracting out where appropriate. There are no plans to publish reports of either study.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *400*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Seventy-five appointments have been made to Cabinet Office and Office of Public Service and Science public bodies in the last year. Of these, 57 were to the new research councils announced in the White Paper "Realising Our Potential".

Sick Leave

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *125–28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sick absence at the Department of Social Security in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Secretary of State for Social Security to the hon. Member for Eastleigh of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *85*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham on 7 February represents the average number of days sick leave taken by staff in DSS headquarters—excluding staff in DSS agencies. The figure given in the answer of 23 January by the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People to the hon. Member for Eastleigh represents the average number of days sick leave taken by staff throughout DSS.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *125–28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sick absence at the Office of Public Service and Science in 1993 and the figure given in his answer to the hon. Member for Eastleigh of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *754*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eastleigh on 2 February inadvertently used an incorrect figure for staff in post. The correct figure for OPSS excluding any weekends and public holidays which occurred within a single period of sickness absence is as given in my answer of 7 February to the hon. Member for Eltham. I apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *125–28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sick absence at the Treasury Solicitor's Department in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Attorney-General to the hon. Member for Eastleigh on 27 January, *Official Report*, column *409*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham on 7 February is based upon working days lost—excluding weekends and public holidays—solely due to sickness. The figure given in the answer of 27 January by the Attorney-General was calculated including weekends, public holidays and certain absences which were not attributable to sickness.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *125–28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sick absence at the Department of Transport in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Secretary of State for Transport to the hon. Member for Eastleigh on 31 January, *Official Report*, column *585*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The calculations which produced the figures given in the answer of 31 January by the Secretary of State for Transport inadvertently omitted one category of sickness absence. The correct figure for sickness absence at the Department of Transport in 1993 is given in my answer of 7 February.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *125–28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sick absence at the

Department of Trade and Industry in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the President of the Board of Trade of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *477*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham on 7 February is based on working days lost—excluding weekends and public holidays. The figure given in the answer of 30 January by the President of the Board of Trade to the hon. Member for Eastleigh was calculated using data which for reasons of administrative control, included both weekends and public holidays.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *125–28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sick absence at the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency in 1993 and the figure given in his answer to the hon. Member for Eastleigh of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *755*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February is based upon working days lost—excluding weekends and public holidays. The figure given in my answer of 2 February was calculated including both weekends and public holidays.

EDUCATION

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she keeps central statistics about the specific details of individual learning difficulties in accordance with the recommendations of the Warnock committee.

Mr. Forth: A key recommendation of the Warnock report in 1978 was that statutory categories of handicap should be abolished. Central statistics giving details of pupils' individual learning difficulties are not collected.

Departmental Employees

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* full-time employees and *(b)* part-time employees were employed in her Department in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: The number of staff in post at 1 April was as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
1990	2,514	155	2,669
1991	2,607	182	2,789
1992	2,645	186	2,831
1993	1,962	148	2,110
1994	1,915	150	2,065

These figures include throughout staff in post in the Teachers Pensions Agency. The figures for 1990, 1991 and 1992 include HMI and staff responsible for science and sport. Those responsible for science and sport transferred respectively to the Cabinet Office and the Department of National Heritage in July 1992. The majority of Her Majesty's inspectorate and their support staff transferred to the Office for Standards in Education in September 1992.

Further Education Funding Council

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* full-time employees and *(b)* part-time employees were employed in the Further Education Funding Council for each quarter since it commenced operation.

Mr. Boswell: The questions raised by the hon. Member are matters for the funding council. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Funding Agency for Schools

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* full-time employees and *(b)* part-time employees were employed in the Funding Agency for Schools in each quarter since it commenced operation.

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked its chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Ministerial Travel (Hong Kong)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: None.

Schools, London

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the actual spending per child at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the London boroughs of (i) Camden, (ii) Southwark, (iii) Westminster and (iv) Haringey for (i) 1993 and (ii) 1994.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows expenditure by these local education authorities on pre-primary and primary pupils combined, and on secondary pupils, for 1992–93, and provisional figures for 1993–94. Equivalent information on grant-maintained schools is not available.

Net institutional spending per pupil cash terms

	Nursery/ Primary 1992–93 £	*Nursery/ Primary 1993–94* £	*Secondary 1992–93* £	*Secondary 1993–94* £
Camden	2,067	2,047	2,726	2,721
Southwark	1,846	1,806	2,506	2,421
City of Westminster	2,292	2,592	2,486	2,739
Haringey	2,102	2,236	2,897	3,041

School Teachers Review Body

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will estimate the cost to her Department's budget in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of the School Teachers Review Body, assuming no changes in staff numbers; and how much of the cost would be borne by *(a)* direct expenditure by her Department and *(b)* grants and loans to local authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire: The School Teachers Review Body has recommended an increase of 2.7 per cent. in teachers' pay for 1995–96. The cost of this to local authorities in England is likely to be in the order of £275 million. There will be no costs borne directly by the Department.

Oxford and Cambridge Universities

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to change the system of the payment of college fees to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has been reviewing the experience of the last college fee settlement and expects to make an announcement shortly.

Teachers

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the percentage increases for the main grades of local education authority school teaching staff for each year since 1989.

Mr. Robin Squire: The percentage increases in the main pay scales for heads and deputies and classroom teachers since 1989 are set out in the table:

Year	*Heads and deputies*	*Classroom teachers*
1989	7.5	6.0
1990	10.4	8.3
1991	12.75	9.5
1992	7.5	7.5
1993	1.5	1.5
1994	2.9	2.9
1995 (proposed)	2.7	2.7

Independent School Closures

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what information her Department has of the number of independent schools which *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in each year since 1988.

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of independent schools which have registered with the Department upon opening, and the number which have been removed from the register because of closure, are given, for each calendar year, in the following table:

Year	*Number of independent schools opened*	*Number of independent schools closed*
1988	40	30
1989	65	33
1990	50	45
1991	60	59
1992	56	68
1993	63	51
1994	67	79

Note: The numbers relate to England only and from 1990 include city technology colleges.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list, for each local education authority, the average amount of capital expenditure per pupil for 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not yet available.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her estimate of actual spending on education by local education authorities *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by individual local education authority in 1994–95; and what is the education standard spending assessment (i) nationally and (ii) by individual local education authority for 1995–96.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 10 February 1995]:* Total current spending on education by English local authorities in 1994–95, as recorded on their revenue accounts returns, is estimated to be £17.510 billion. This figure includes expenditure funded by current education specific grants within aggregate external finance, but excludes expenditure funded by specific grants outside AEF. Education standard spending in 1995–96 is £17.204 billion; within that, education standard spending assessments, which include neither current education specific grants within AEF nor specific grants outside AEF, total £17.024 billion. The table gives for each local education authority budgeted spending in 1994–95, and its SSA for 1995–96.

£ million

LEA	*1994–95 budget*	*1995–96 SSA*
Corporation of London	2.2	0.8
Camden	64.7	78.8
Greenwich	100.3	114.3
Hackney	109.1	92.8
Hammersmith and Fulham	61.5	57.2
Islington	79.8	80.4
Kensington and Chelsea	41.5	37.3
Lambeth	125.4	102.1
Lewisham	102.2	108.0
Southwark	100.3	109.9
Tower Hamlets	119.0	120.2
Wandsworth	93.9	88.7
Westminster	53.5	59.9
Barking and Dagenham	71.0	65.7
Barnet	106.6	113.7
Bexley	77.9	84.5
Brent	107.0	106.3
Bromley	100.5	99.6
Croydon	118.7	114.3

£ million

LEA	1994–95 budget	1995–96 SSA
Ealing	114.8	108.9
Enfield	114.1	112.1
Haringey	96.5	89.1
Harrow	76.1	70.4
Havering	85.3	84.1
Hillingdon	85.8	88.9
Hounslow	81.1	90.2
Kingston upon Thames	44.0	45.9
Merton	57.4	56.3
Newham	110.8	123.8
Redbridge	85.9	94.2
Richmond upon Thames	39.2	44.3
Sutton	61.4	64.5
Waltham Forest	95.6	94.1
Birmingham	448.0	427.2
Coventry	120.8	115.7
Dudley	108.3	98.9
Sandwell	117.2	113.8
Solihull	67.2	69.2
Walsall	103.1	103.7
Wolverhampton	103.2	96.1
Knowsley	74.1	69.6
Liverpool	199.0	202.7
St. Helens	70.6	63.3
Sefton	102.9	102.3
Wirral	126.8	124.1
Bolton	99.0	95.7
Bury	63.9	57.8
Manchester	173.5	182.5
Oldham	88.8	90.3
Rochdale	84.3	79.7
Salford	82.6	78.7
Stockport	95.7	86.1
Tameside	82.1	76.3
Trafford	74.8	72.5
Wigan	108.3	104.9
Barnsley	73.3	73.1
Doncaster	115.5	113.7
Rotherham	93.5	96.3
Sheffield	167.4	162.8
Bradford	196.2	201.9
Calderdale	72.0	72.8
Kirklees	146.6	136.7
Leeds	262.7	240.4
Wakefield	106.4	106.4
Gateshead	74.3	68.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	102.4	97.3
North Tyneside	69.0	65.4
South Tyneside	57.0	56.3
Sunderland	113.2	110.9
Isles of Scilly	1.2	1.2
Avon	329.3	298.0
Bedfordshire	208.5	212.0
Berkshire	260.8	273.3
Buckinghamshire	250.7	244.5
Cambridgeshire	238.9	226.1
Cheshire	353.6	332.0
Cleveland	223.1	219.0
Cornwall	163.8	156.2
Cumbria	168.3	161.5
Derbyshire	333.3	302.8
Devon	329.0	328.4
Dorset	204.5	198.0
Durham	219.5	206.9
East Sussex	216.8	212.5
Essex	549.6	540.5
Gloucestershire	172.5	174.5
Hampshire	541.6	502.6
Hereford and Worcester	217.3	219.8
Hertfordshire	360.6	371.4
Humberside	334.4	310.8
Isle of Wight Council	43.2	43.6
Kent	539.3	559.1
Lancashire	521.6	484.0
Leicestershire	326.8	316.4
Lincolnshire	223.3	199.2
Norfolk	252.3	234.8
North Yorkshire	234.7	223.6
Northamptonshire	214.5	209.8
Northumberland	110.9	107.6
Nottinghamshire	378.7	346.7
Oxfordshire	188.8	186.6
Shropshire	141.8	137.1
Somerset	160.0	143.5
Staffordshire	349.6	348.8
Suffolk	215.1	205.9
Surrey	303.3	299.4
Warwickshire	168.0	156.2
West Sussex	235.0	226.8
Wiltshire	198.0	188.6
Total	17,510.1	17,024.1

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

European Union Frontiers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he or his predecessor have received since 1991, concerning the legality of the opt-out negotiated by Her Majesty's Government to the Single European Act in 1985 relating to frontiers; what such representations he has conveyed to the Prime Minister; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: By convention, neither the advice of the Law Officers nor whether they have advised on a particular issue is normally disclosed.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Museums Policy

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to announce the results of his Department's review of museums policy.

Mr. Dorrell: I am currently considering the results of the consultation process undertaken last year.

Oflot

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member of Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *779-80*, what are the extra costs for consultancy, professional and legal advice associated with the grant of licences by Oflot; and which firms have provided the advice.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a matter for the Director General of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked him to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his letter in the Library of the House.

Radio Broadcasts (Monitoring)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what monitoring he carries out of radio broadcasts to ensure that they comply with the Race Relations Acts or Public Order Acts;

(2) how many staff are employed in monitoring radio broadcasts to consider whether they are racially offensive or incite racial hatred.

Mr. Dorrell: None. These are matters for the Radio Authority or the BBC.

Hotel and Tourism Industry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to tackle low motivation in the hotel and tourism industry caused by low pay.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no such proposals; pay and personnel issues are a matter for the industry itself.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to encourage investment in the tourist industry to offset jobs lost in the manufacturing industry in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands.

Mr. Dorrell: Funding is made available to the Heart of England tourist board through the English tourist board to undertake marketing and development activities in its regions, which includes Coventry and the west midlands. In the 1994–95 financial year, the HETB will receive £364,000—indicative figure. In addition, RTBs may bid for funding from the ETB's £2.25 million tourism development fund for specific projects. The public funds made available to the RTBs lever in substantial funding from the private sector.

Local authorities and the regional tourist boards are also eligible to bid for support from the European structural funds and the single regeneration budget. The Government office for the west midlands has allocated £28.4 million—indicative figure—from the European regional development fund for projects in the cultural, media and tourism industries in its programme for 1994–96.

English Tourist Board

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment his Department has made of the impact of reduced funding for the English tourist board on the number of holidays taken in Britain.

Mr. Dorrell: Recent changes, upward and downward, in funds provided to the ETB and British Tourist Authority reflect the Government's view of spending priorities in the tourism sector.

Muslim Community Radio

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information he has on the connection between Muslim Community radio and Hizb ut Tahir.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Television Licence Fee

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will bring forward proposals to authorise the increase in the television licence fee.

Mr. Dorrell: Regulations to bring into force from 1 April the new fees which I announced on 1 December of £86.50 for a colour licence and £28.50 for a black and white licence—*Official Report*, column *805*, will be laid before the House at the beginning of March.

Television (Digital Licences)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he is required to bring forward proposals to allocate digital licences for television channels.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government intend to ensure that television broadcasters are in a position to take advantage of new digital technology, and are seeking their views before bringing forward proposals.

Channel 4

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he is next required to review Channel 4 funding.

Mr. Dorrell: The Broadcasting Act 1990 does not require me to review Channel 4 funding. However, the threshold percentages in the funding formula may be amended by order, but not before the end of 1997.

Football Transfers

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with the Australian Government in respect to the Australian inquiry into football transfers, with particular reference to transfers affecting English clubs.

Mr. Sproat: None.

Millennium Commission

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if the promotion of environmental education falls within the remit of the Millennium Commission.

Mr. Dorrell: Under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, the Millennium Commission may make grants to such projects as it considers appropriate to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium. More detailed information on the kinds of project which the commission will fund can be found in the commission's guidelines for applicants, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Arts Grants, Wales

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *619*, if he will list the sponsor company which made the corresponding application to the Association for Business Sponsorship for the Arts for each of the cultural organisations or events listed in the answer.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is in the following table:

Organisation	*Award £*	*Sponsor company*
Theatr Bara Caws	4,000	Cwmni'r Castell
	7,200	Penadur
Y Faner	5,000	Ffilmiau Elidir
	10,000	Delwyn Sion
Dalier Sylw	4,000	Cambrensis
	5,000	Atsain
Ewrosgol	2,500	Dime Goch
Creu Cof	2,500	Ffilmiau Matinee
Cwmni Dawns Camre Cain	4,000	Fflic
Welsh International Film Festival	3,000	Y Wennol
	3,000	Ffilmiau'r Ty Gwyn
	4,000	Eurofocus
	5,000	Ffilmiau'r Bont
Wales Actors Company	4,750	Tiger Bay Productions
Arad Goch	4,000	Pendefig Dyfed
	2,000	Intrada
Hwyl a Fflag	7,500	Ffilmiau Eryri
	8,000	FiTi-TiFi
National Film and Video Archive of Wales	6,500	Hel Straeon
Clwyd Arts and Exhibition Service	3,000	Ffilmiau Llifon
Taliesin Trust	2,500	Llun y Felin
Theatr Gorllewin Morgannwg	7,500	Dyffryn
Barddas: Y Gymdeithas Gerdd Dafod	2,000	Cwmni'r Gannwyll
Theatr Had	2,000	Mintai
Model House Llantrisant	1,500	Cartwn Cymru
Rhiniog	1,500	Ffilmiau Hiraethog

Welsh Television Channels

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures he will take to enable television viewers in Clwyd to receive the Welsh television channels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: It is for the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority to determine their own engineering priorities for the coverage of their television services in Wales within the resources they have available.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of television viewers in *(a)* Alyn and Deeside and *(b)* Clwyd can receive (i) BBC Wales, (ii) Harlech TV and (iii) Granada TV; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available in the form requested. The BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority respectively have responsibility for coverage of their television services in Wales. The Government have no independent figures.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* Since it was established in April 1992, neither my Department nor its agencies have taken legal action against a consultancy firm.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *587*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* In 1994, my Department made 82 appointments. In addition, the Prime Minister made 40 appointments and Her Majesty the Queen made 23 appointments on the recommendations of my Department.

Concessionary Television Licence Scheme

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to extend the concessionary television licence scheme to cover all housing schemes which have the services of a warden who is either residential or on call.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* As indicated in paragraph 5.17 of the White Paper "The Future of the BBC" (Cm 2621) published in July 1994, the Government considers that any review of the concessionary scheme aimed at removing perceived anomalies would most likely have the effect of creating fresh ones. We therefore have no plans for any amendments to the concessionary scheme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mortgage Protection Insurance

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the average duration of cover received after claiming against a mortgage protection policy; and what discussions his Department has had with the insurance industry in respect of proposals to extend coverage of benefits beyond the present normal fixed period following Government plans to compel all new mortgagees to take out protection policies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government have no intention to compel purchase of mortgage protection insurance but wish to encourage personal responsibility wherever possible.

There have been no specific discussions with the insurance industry on extending maximum duration of mortgage protection benefit beyond what is currently available—commonly, a total of 12 months, but up to 24 months in some cases. New, more flexible products are anticipated to arise from wider take-up of the insurance.

The Government do not collect information on average claims duration. However, soundings taken by the Association of British Insurers suggest average claim payment periods, in excess of a typical 60-day waiting period, of six to eight months for unemployment, four to six months for sickness and five months for incapacity following an accident.

Television Channels (Access)

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last discussed conditional access to television channels with another EU member state; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: At the EU Telecommunications Council last November, conditional access was discussed in the context of the draft directive on standards for TV transmission. Agreement was reached on the regulation requiring all conditional access systems used with digital broadcasts to use a standardised scrambling algorithm.

Steel

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the level of investment in the United Kingdom steel industry.

Mr. Eggar: The figures for treaty of Paris products are as follows:

Investment in the UK steel crude industry

(SIC 221 Iron and steel industry treaty of Paris definition)

Net capital expenditure

(£ million)

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Land and Buildings	11.6	11.7	9.4	24.5	18.8
Plant and Machinery	327.7	413.2	383.7	252.2	182.1
Vehicles	2.4	3	1.8	–0.3	0.8
Total	341.7	427.9	394.9	276.5	201.8

Source:
Report on the census of production, PA221.

In addition, and perhaps more important, the industry has invested in its people and British Steel now spends some 5 per cent. of its employment costs on training. The United Kingdom has a world-class steel industry, but one which is far from complacent and is working with my Department to tackle a whole range of competitiveness issues.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what was the level of steel in *(a)* tonnes and *(b)* percentage terms imported into the United Kingdom from (i) the EU, (ii) east Europe, (iii) the Russian Federation, (iv) Turkey, (v) North America, (vi) Latin America and (vii) Asia in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The information is in the table.

United Kingdom imports of steel 1993[1]

Source	*'000 tonnes*	*Percentage total*
EU 15[2]	4,305.6	87.6
Eastern Europe[3]	131.5	2.7
Former USSR[4]	89.6	1.8
Turkey	n/a	n/a
North America	46.9	1.0
Latin America	36.4	0.7
Asia	75.4	1.5
Others	231.5	4.7
World	4,916.9	100

Source:
Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.
[1] Products of the steel industry in the Standard Industrial classification (1980), groups 221, 222 and 223.
[2] EU includes Austria, Finland and Sweden.
[3] Not including former USSR.
[4] Figures for Russian Federation alone are not available.
n/a: not available.

Mr. Whitney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about his Department's plans for strengthening the enforcement of European Coal and Steel Community rules on the provision of subsidies to steel producers.

Mr. Eggar: I am determined to fight for a level playing field for the United Kingdom steel industry. The exceptional granting of state aid to steel producers in countries such as Italy, Spain and Germany must be rigorously monitored. The Commission has the central role of ensuring that state aid is used only for the agreed purpose of restructuring, but this is a considerable task. It is also important to watch developments which have not yet been considered in the European Council, such as those in Ireland and Germany. I am therefore setting up the steel subsidies monitoring committee to help gather information—including any evidence of illegal subsidies—and to pass this on to the Commission for action. The committee will include representatives of British Steel, the British Iron and Steel Producers Association, Department of Trade and Industry and other Government Departments.

Mines (Working Facilities and Support) Acts

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when a consultative document will be published on the review of the Mines (Working Facilities and Support) Acts.

Mr. Eggar: A consultative document on the review of the Mines (Working Facilities and Support) Acts is published today. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House, and further copies can be obtained from my Department.

As I announced to the House on 2 December 1993, *Official Report,* columns *735–36*, the review has a remit to establish what amendment, revision or reform is needed to the powers to grant compulsory access to minerals in order to provide an integrated regime for all minerals for the next century. Following the privatisation of the coal industry, the special procedures which are available to opencast coal operators—and not to other operators—will expire on 31 December 1999. Subsequently, the procedures for opencast coal are to be unified with the general regime contained in the mines (Working Facilities and Support) Acts. In considering the issues, the review is to have regard to the need to exploit the country's mineral resources, to the perception that the current general procedures are expensive and time-consuming and to the need to protect the rights of landowners.

The consultative document takes into account representations received following the announcement of the review. It puts forward options on a number of issues which are of concern to those involved in, or likely to be affected by, mineral development activities. It covers the need for rights of compulsory access, and their nature: the system that should be used to determine applications for the grant of such rights; the criteria to be employed; the compensation to be payable; the relationship with the system for determining land planning applications; and a number of subsidiary issues.

Views on the issues and options set out in the consultative document, and any others relevant to this review, are requested to reach my Department by 31 July 1995.

Insurance

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress towards the implementation of the third Council directive on non-life insurance, 92/49/EEC and the third Council directive on life assurance, 92/96/EEC by the other states of the European Economic Area.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: According to information currently available Finland, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden have still to complete their implementation of the directives. To the extent that these states have not fully or substantially implemented the directives, the provisions of regulation 71 of the Insurance Companies (Third Insurance Directives) Regulations 1994 or regulation 15 of the Insurance Companies (Amendment) Regulations 1994 will apply to any insurance company whose head office is in one of these states. Such companies will continue to require authorisation under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 to carry on direct insurance business in the United Kingdom. They will also still be required to submit returns to the Department, in accordance with the Insurance Companies (Accounts and Statements) Regulations 1983, in respect of their UK business.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* No central records are kept, but as far as I can ascertain, on no occasion during the last five years has my Department or its agencies taken legal action against a firm providing consultancy services to the Department.

ENVIRONMENT

Single Regeneration Budget

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the expected expenditure under the single regeneration budget in 1995–96 and what was the annual expenditure in each of the last five years for each of the schemes that have been incorporated into the single regeneration budget *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Birmingham; and what proportion of those budgets has been spent and will be spent on housing investment.

Mr. Curry: Planned single regeneration budget expenditure in 1995–96 is £1,331.5 million. Expenditure nationally and in Birmingham in each of the last five years for each of the programmes brought together in the SRB is set out in tables A and B.

The proportion spent each year on the specific housing programmes—estate action and housing action trusts—which are now part of the SRB is set out in table C. Housing investment is also achieved through the urban development corporations, city challenge, English Partnerships and from 1995—96 new SRB partnership schemes, although the proportions of these programmes' total budgets spent on housing investment cannot easily be separated out.

The whole purpose of the SRB is to promote an integrated approach to development with the local parties defining their priorities.

Table A—Expenditure on SRB programmes nationally

£ million

	1990–91 outturn	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94 outturn*	*1994–95 estimated outturn*
Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)					
UDCs and Docklands Light Railway	607.2	601.8	515.0	371.2	296.6
English Partnership[1] (URA)	117.4	97.4	151.5	152.9	193.0
Housing Action Trusts—	10.1	26.5	78.1	90.7	
Other SRB					
Estate Action	180.0	267.5	348.0	357.4	372.6
City Challenge[2]	—	—	52.1	206.6	212.7
Urban Programme	225.8	237.5	236.2	166.5	77.2
Task Forces	20.9	20.5	23.6	18.0	16.0
Business Start-Up Scheme[3]	*113.1	*90.1	62.1	82.9	70.1
Local Initiative Fund	9.9	48.2	49.7	47.7	28.6
Compacts	5.8	5.5	5.4	5.7	5.7
Teacher Placement Service	—	3.7	3.4	3.3	3.3
Education Business Partnerships	0.7	3.2	2.0	1.7	1.4
TEC Challenge	—	—	—	9.1	4.3
Programme Development Fund[3]	*2.1	1.9	3.5	2.9	3.3
Regional Enterprise Grants	8.4	7.3	5.8	8.2	11.7
Section 11 programme (part)	74.1	61.8	70.9	74.8	60.5
Ethnic Minorities Grant	—	—	4.0	5.4	5.7
Safer Cities	—	—	—	—	2.0
Ethnic Minority Business Initiative	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.6
GEST 19	—	—	3.3	6.1	4.3
City Action Terms	7.7	8.4	4.6	3.4	0.4
Total SRB	1,373.5	1,465.3	1,567.9	1,602.5	1,460.7

Notes:

[1] English Partnerships figures include English Estates, City Grant and Derelict Land Grant.

[2] City Challenge—an additional £19 million per year is provided from Housing Corporation provision.

[3] *=pro rata expenditure on related programmes.

Table B—Expenditure on SRB programmes in Birmingham

£ million

	1990–91 outturn	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94 outturn*	*1994–95 estimated outturn*
Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)					
UDCs	—	—	5.412	10.191	7.000
English Partnerships[1] (URA)	6.467	4.934	4.507	2.673	2.600
Housing Action Trusts	—	—	—	2.000	6.000
Other SRB					
Estate Action	8.074	15.476	15.780	19.100	26.404
City Challenge	—	—	—	6.921	7.823
Urban Programme	21.808	21.955	21.819	13.829	6.966
Task Forces	0.782	1.089	1.532	1.449	1.238
Business Start-Up Scheme	[2]0.356	3.866	4.062	2.282	1.172
Local Initiative Fund	[2]0.122	1.232	0.472	0.661	0.431
Compacts	[2]0.005	0.109	0.100	0.059	0.050
Teacher Placement Service	—	0.032	0.054	0.052	0.052
Education Business Partnerships	—	0.030	0.020	0.024	0.025
TEC Challenge	—	—	—	0.286	0.105
Programme Development Fund	0.063	0.033	0.150	0.155	0.098
Regional Enterprise Grants	—	—	0.007	0.065	0.425
Section II programme (part)	6.539	7.660	7.446	7.991	5.714
Ethnic Minorities Grant	—	—	0.050	0.052	0.017
Safer Cities	—	—	—	—	—
Ethnic Minority Business Initiative	0.030	0.053	0.044	0.076	0.055
GEST 19	—	—	0.162	0.238	0.408
City Action Teams	0.790	0.940	0.500	0.413	—
Total	45.036	57.409	62.117	68.517	66.583

Notes:

[1] English Partnerships figures include City Grant and Derelict Land Grant but exclude English Estates.

[2] Figures for 1990–91 for BSUS, LIF and Compacts relate only to expenditure from October 1990, the date at which Birmingham TEC became operational.

Table C—Proportion spent on Estate Action and Housing Action Trusts

Percentages

	1990–91 outturn	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94 outturn*	*1994–95 estimated outturn*	*1995–96 plans*
Nationally	13.1	18.9	23.9	27.2	31.7	30.3
Birmingham	17.9	27.0	25.4	30.8	48.7	51.2

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent the Rural Development Commission advised on bids made under the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: Government offices for the regions were responsible for making recommendations to Ministers on SRB bids taking account of comments from the Rural Development Commission as appropriate. Where, for example, the Rural Development Commission was a party to the bid, it was not consulted.

Construction Industry Board

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the conclusions of the meeting with the standing strategic group for construction on 7 February on legislation to enact the Latham report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State and I agreed with representatives of the construction industry and their clients on 7 February to set up a construction industry board. The first task of the board—which will be chaired by Sir Michael Latham—will be to take forward proposals of the Latham report for restructuring the construction process.

We have noted the extent of industry support for legislation, on the basis of which we intend to move to the next stage of full public consultation on detailed proposals. The board will provide a channel to Government for industry and client comment on any legislation proposals.

Local Plan, Plymouth

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his planning inspector's report from the public inquiry into the City of Plymouth local plan first alteration 1992 will be published.

Sir Paul Beresford: The inspector's report on objections to the Plymouth city council local plan—first alteration—was issued to the council on 30 December 1994. I understand that the council is currently considering when to publish the report. I have asked the Planning Inspectorate's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Gary Streeter, dated 14 February 1995.

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply to your question about the Inspector's report from the public inquiry into the City of Plymouth local plan first alteration 1992.

The report was issued to the Council on 30 December 1994 and I understand that the Council is currently considering when to publish it.

Housing

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many households currently on social housing waiting lists have been waiting for more than *(a)* six months, *(b)* a year, *(c)* two years, *(d)* three years, *(e)* five years and *(f)* 10 years in each region of England;

(2) what is the total number of households currently on social housing waiting lists in each region of England.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities in England report the number of households on their council housing waiting lists in their annual housing investment programme returns.

Figures for each region, as at 1 April 1994, can be found in section B of the "1994 HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

Information on the length of time households have been on waiting lists is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much of the 1994–95 approved development programme funding was allocated to *(a)* each region and *(b)* each housing authority area in England and Wales; and what is the allocation for 1995–96;

(2) how much of the 1994–95 housing investment programme funding was allocated to *(a)* each region and *(b)* each housing authority area in England and Wales; and what is the allocation for 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested for England is in the Library. For information about Wales I refer the hon. Member to the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the Government's total 1994–95 housing budget was allocated to *(a)* each region and *(b)* each housing authority area in England and Wales; and what is the allocation for 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: For housing investment programme and approved development programme allocations in England, I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to her questions earlier today. Housing investment programme allocations comprise local authority credit approvals and resources for private sector renewal.

The Department is providing additional credit approvals in 1994–95 for the housing partnership fund, £30 million, the cash incentive scheme, £30 million, and the flats-over-shops scheme, £10 million. I have placed in the Library copies of the Department's press notices which announced allocations by English local authority area for these schemes for 1994–95. In 1995-96 the housing partnership fund will again provide £30 million and the cash incentive scheme will provide £60 million. Individual allocations have not yet been made for 1995–96.

The estimated cost of housing revenue account subsidy for England in 1994–95 is £4.1 billion. Final claims for the year will not be received by the Department until early in 1996, but I have placed in the Library a list of the latest provisional claim figures for each authority and region. all of these are still subject to validation.

The estimated cost of housing revenue account subsidy in 1995–96 is £4.2 billion. No claims have yet been received from authorities.

The remainder of the Government's housing resources for England is allocated through a wide range of smaller programmes, and further information can be found in chapter A6 of the Department's "Annual Report 1994", published in March 1994, and in its "Annual Report 1995" which will be published shortly.

Housing in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mrs Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in respect of how many social housing units work was started during the last 12 months for which figures are available in *(a)* each region and *(b)* each housing authority area in England and Wales.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The publication "Local Housing Statistics" shows estimates of housebuilding starts for each region and each local authority area in England and Wales. It shows starts by sector, including activity by housing associations and by local authorities. Figures for 1993 and provisional figures for the first quarter of 1994 are in issue No. 110, March quarter 1994.

A copy of this publication is in the Library.

North Yorkshire County Council

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he requested an estimate from North Yorkshire county council of the cost to it changing the name of the county council prior to his announcement on 1 February; and what estimate he has now made.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has concluded that the county's name should not be changed.

Homelessness

Mrs Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households were found to be homeless during the most recent 12 months for which figures are available in *(a)* each region and *(b)* each housing authority area in England and Wales.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today placed in the Library a table giving the numbers reported by each local authority in England of homeless households for which they had accepted responsibility to secure permanent accommodation in the year ending September 1994, under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act. The table includes grossed regional totals which include estimates for missing data.

For information about Wales I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mrs Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of homelessness and living in temporary accommodation on children's education.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

HM inspectors published "A Survey of the Education of Children Living in Temporary Accommodation" in 1990. It considered the effect of homelessness on the educational attainment of a sample of individual children and the response of the schools and local education authorities to their educational needs. It identified ways in which the educational arrangements for pupils who lived in temporary accommodation could be improved and noted that the national curriculum should ensure greater continuity and progression.

Woodspring District Council

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of Woodspring district council under the draft Avon (Structural Change) Order; if it will have the functions currently exercised by *(a)* county or *(b)* district councils; how it will be treated for ceremonial purposes; and what assessment he has made as to the effect of the proposed changes on public understanding of local government arrangements.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Under the Avon (Structural Change) Order, Woodspring district council will be a continuing district council on its existing boundaries, but will be renamed North West Somerset district council and will have both county and district functions. The order makes no provision for ceremonial functions in north-west Somerset but the Government's intention is that the area of north-west Somerset will be deemed to be part of Somerset for ceremonial purposes. I believe the creation of a unitary local authority will improve the accountability of local government in the area.

North West Somerset

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for a county council covering north-west Somerset.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None.

Avon (Structural Change) Order

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers are to be given under article 20 of the draft Avon (Structural Change) Order to Bristol city council and Woodspring district council additional to those available to Northavon, Kingswood, Bath or Wansdyke district councils or Avon county council before the preliminary period.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None.

Debt

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by local authority *(a)* the total level of debt and *(b)* the level of debt expressed in pounds per head of the local population.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today placed the information requested in the Library of the House.

Council Houses

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been built in each local authority in the northern region in each year since 1980.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Revenue Support Grant

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average amount of revenue support grant for 1995–96 per dwelling for *(a)* Bedfordshire county council and *(b)* each of the four Bedfordshire district councils.

Mr. Curry: The average amount of revenue support grant for 1995–96 per chargeable dwelling is as follows:

	£
(a) Bedfordshire County Council	757
(b) Bedford	114
Luton	164
Mid Bedfordshire	56
South Bedfordshire	81

The amounts are determined by the relative needs, taxable capacity, and population of each authority, as measured by each authority's standard spending assessment, RSG council tax base, and resident population as at 30 June 1993, respectively.

Review Bodies

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will estimate the cost to local authorities' self-financed expenditure in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of *(a)* the School Teachers' Review Body, *(b)* the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration and *(c)* the Review Body on Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors, and Professions Allied to Medicine, assuming no changes in staff numbers;

(2) if he will estimate the cost to his Department's budget in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of *(a)* the School Teachers' Review Body, *(b)* the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration and *(c)* the Review Body on Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors, and Professions Allied to Medicine, assuming no change in staff numbers; and how much of the cost would be borne by (i) direct expenditure by his Department and (ii) grants and loans to local authorities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The School Teachers' Review Body has recommended an increase of 2.7 per cent. in teachers' pay for 1995–96. The cost of this to local authorities in England is likely to be in the order of £275 million. The recommendations of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration and the Review Body on Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine will not directly affect local authorities' budgets. There will be no direct cost to my Department's other programmes.

The Government took account of a range of possible pay settlements for all local authority employees, including teachers, in deciding the overall level of the local government settlement.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the amount of government support to county councils in England in the local government financial settlements for 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 compared with the rate of inflation in each year.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Under the local government finance system in operation prior to 1 April 1993 both revenue support grant and non-domestic rates for an area were paid into the collection funds administered by the charging authorities in that area. It is therefore not possible to provide a figure for the amount of RSG and NDR for county councils for 1992–93.

The total of RSG and NDR entitlements for county councils in England was £13,287.431 million in 1993–94 rising to £13,641.681 million in 1994–95, an increase of 2.7 per cent.

The GDP deflator is a general measure of domestically-generated inflation in the economy. In 1994–95 it is estimated to be 2 per cent. higher than in 1993–94.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what increase took place in the amount of government grant offered to Surrey in the local government financial settlement for 1995–96 as a result of representations received during the consultation period, and for what specific reasons the increase was made.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Surrey county council, in common with a number of other local authorities, made representations that the number of pupils involved in the calculations in the consultation paper was inaccurate. In each case we have incorporated the new figures where they were notified prior to the settlement being laid before the House.

The effect on Surrey was to increase the revenue support grant by £2.934 million.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, columns *910–11*, if he will set out by council the value of the bid for redundancy and new building costs.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The bids for redundancy and staff compensation and for accommodation costs, which may include new building costs, are as follows:

	Redundancy and compensation costs £000s	*Accommodation £000s*
Isle of Wight		
Isle of Wight Council	500	960
Avon		
Avon County Council	2,625	*Nil
Bath City Council	1,020	*Nil
Bristol City Council	2,000	125
Northavon District Council	461	*Nil
Kingswood Borough Council	430	*Nil
Wansdyke District Council	632	*Nil
Woodspring District Council	275	1,162
Cleveland		
Cleveland County Council	2,140	*Nil
Hartlepool Borough Council	294	931
Langbaurgh on Tees Borough Council	628	8,936
Middlesbrough Borough Council	600	250
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	544	3,165
North Yorkshire		
North Yorkshire County Council	1,000	*Nil
Ryedale District Council	100	*Nil
Selby District Council	213	*Nil
City of York Council	330	*Nil
Humberside		
Humberside County Council	8,960	*Nil
Beverley Borough Council	583	*Nil
Boothferry Borough Council	600	*Nil
Cleethorpes Borough Council	300	*Nil
East Yorkshire Borough Council	959	*Nil
Glanford Borough Council	500	*Nil
Great Grimsby Borough Council	762	*Nil
Holderness Borough Council	333	*Nil
Hull City Council	Nil	600
Scunthorpe Borough Council	477	*Nil

Note:

A *Nil entry indicates an authority that is to be abolished and that is therefore ineligible under the transitional costs scheme to bid for accommodation costs.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what bids he received from local authorities in the Isle of Wight, Avon, Cleveland, North Yorkshire and Humberside for supplementary credit approvals for 1995–96; and what allocation by service block had been made for each authority.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The bids to which the hon. Member refers are set out in the answer I gave on 3 February, *Official Report*, columns *910–11*. The allocations—which I shall announce very shortly—are not hypothecated to specific services.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the usable capital receipts as at 31 March 1994, for each local authority, and in total for England.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The total of usable capital receipts held by English local authorities at 31 March 1994 was £2.1 billion. The information for each local authority has been placed in the Library of the House. It is open to authorities to spend these receipts or to use them to repay debt. The gross debt of English authorities at 31 March 1994 was £38 billion.

Century House

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *249*, what has been the cost of maintenance of Century house, Westminster Bridge road since 24 November, and what progress has been made in negotiations over the short-term and long-term future of the building.

Sir Paul Beresford: The cost of maintenance at Century house since 24 November 1994 amounts to £13,000 plus fees and VAT. The majority of expenditure relates to security cover.

Property Holdings arranged with the landlord for the building to be offered for use as a winter shelter in 1994–95 as part of the Government's rough sleeper's initiative in central London. The planning application was refused by London borough of Lambeth and the proposal did not proceed. The interest in re-use by a Government Department is no longer current and a marketing campaign is being produced. As an interim measure short-term car parking lettings are under consideration.

Discussions with the landlord and freeholder about the future of the building are continuing. Progress is hampered by the substantial negative value of the Secretary of State's lease.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he will make available to authorities that are to be reorganised on 1 April 1995 or 1996 for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1995–96, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I announced on 2 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *921*, that I was inviting authorities in the county areas of Avon, Cleveland, Humberside, North Yorkshire and the Isle of Wight to submit estimates of the amount of expenditure they expect to incur on reorganisation in 1995–96. On the basis, inter alia, of the information provided by the authorities, I have decided the maximum amounts that it would be appropriate to allocate at this stage towards eligible costs incurred in 1995–96.

I propose to make further allocations during the course of 1995–96 to shadow authorities when they are elected; to all eligible authorities in the light of revised estimates to be submitted at the end of September, especially in respect of redundancy and staff compensation costs; and to some authorities who are being asked to look again at certain expenditures that they are proposing to incur, especially on accommodation. Authorities for whom reorganisation orders are made under section 17 of the Local Government Act 1992 during the course of 1995–96 may also qualify under the scheme. I propose to hold back £27 million out of the total provision of £50 million for these purposes. The balance of £23 million will be allocated to authorities as set out. Authorities will be notified within the next few days of their maximum amount and of the considerations underlying my decision. The amounts are as follows:

Authority	*Maximum amount £ thousand rounded*
Avon	
Avon County Council	500
Bristol City Council	2,800
Woodspring District Council	2,500
Bath City Council	250
Wansdyke District Council	240
Kingswood Borough Council	250
Northavon District Council	250
Cleveland	
Cleveland County Council	500
Hartlepool Borough Council	2,750
Langbaurgh on Tees Borough Council	1,850
Middlesbrough Borough Council	1,160
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	2,280
Humberside	
Humberside County Council	500
Hull City Council	2,800
Beverley Borough Council	250
Boothferry Borough Council	300
East Yorkshire Borough Council	250
Holderness Borough Council	250
Glanford Borough Council	250
Scunthorpe Borough Council	250
Cleesthorpes Borough Council	250
Great Grimsby Borough Council	250
North Yorkshire	
North Yorkshire County Council	500
Ryedale District Council	60
Selby District Council	60
City of York Council	250
Isle of Wight	
Isle of Wight Council	1,450
Total	23,000

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment under what provisions a local authority which is due to change its name may use powers assigned to the authority under the new name before the date of the change.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* Where a local authority's name is changed, this does not affect the authority's legal status and provisions apply to that authority regardless of its name.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the estimates he has received from the Local Government Commission for transitional costs connected with proposed reorganisation in the Isle of Wight, Avon, Cleveland, North Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The Local Government Commission's estimates of transitional costs of reorganisation are:

	Transitional costs £ million
Isle of Wight	4–5
Avon	13–18
Cleveland	13–18
North Yorkshire	3–4

Note:
They did not publish a separate estimate for Humberside.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that no further

orders will be laid before Parliament under section 17 of the Local Government Act 1992 until he has responded to the letter dated 26 January from the chair of the Association of County Council's regarding the disqualification of new unitary authorities.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* I replied to this letter yesterday.

Tyre Dumping

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has undertaken of the dumping of tyres, with particular reference to *(a)* their environmental impact and *(b)* the means to combat the practice.

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The Government are aware that a large number of used tyres need to be disposed of each year and that without proper disposal they can create environmental problems. Used tyres are controlled waste and as such are subject to stringent controls under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Section 34 of the Act places a duty of care on everyone with a responsibility for waste to ensure that it is properly managed from production to disposal.

In addition to these controls on the handling and disposal of controlled waste, the Government are supporting a number of initiatives designed to reduce the quantity of used tyres requiring disposal. These have the potential significantly to reduce the problem of scrap tyres in the future.

A consultation draft of "A Waste Strategy for England and Wales" was published by the Department of the Environment and Welsh Office in January this year. The issue of used tyres is discussed in greater detail in this document. A copy is being sent to the hon. Member.

Gas Safety Regulations

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue clear and detailed guidelines on the responsibility for costs to private landlords in the implementation of the requirements of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994 in both cases where gas appliances were bought and installed by the landlord or bought and installed by the tenant.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

No. However, the Government and the Health and Safety Commission considered the costs to landlords of the specific duties placed upon them by the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994, and concluded that these would not be significant, and were justified by the benefits that the duties were designed to secure in reduced incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning from dangerous gas appliances. These specific duties do not apply to tenants.

New Forest Committee

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the 1994–95 budget of the New Forest committee; and how it is funded.

Mr. Atkins: The New Forest committee budget for 1994–95 is £114.500, of which £20,000 is provided by the Department of the Environment and a contribution of up to £18,900 is paid by each of the Forestry Commission, English Nature, the Countryside Commission, New Forest district council and Hampshire county council.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the actual expenditure of the New Forest committee in 1993–94.

Mr. Atkins: A total of £109,300.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the boundaries of the proposed New Forest heritage area have now been decided; and if he will place definitive maps in the Library.

Mr. Atkins: The boundary of the proposed wider New Forest heritage area will emerge from the preparation and adoption of local plans. Proposals to define the boundary are being carried forward in four local plans in the New Forest district—the Avon valley, the Forest and Downlands villages and the New Forest, east—together with the Salisbury district plan and the Test valley borough plan.

Copies of the local plans will be deposited in the Department of the Environment's library.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will define the duties of *(a)* the New Forest committee and *(b)* the New Forest consultative panel.

Mr. Atkins: The New Forest committee's terms of reference include the promotion of the conservation of the traditional character of the New Forest heritage area; the review of action to maintain the balance of natural and socio-economic forces which determine its character; and the preparation and promotion of a strategy for co-ordinated management of the area.

The New forest consultative panel has a membership of 71 organisations to include representatives from the whole of the wider New forest heritage area. It is administered by the New Forest Committee, and contributes to the committee's task of ensuring that its members are working together to promote the conservation of the traditional character of the forest. It encourages monitoring of the practical effects of policies or initiatives carried out in the forest.

HEALTH

NHS Appointees (Payments)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by health authority and NHS trust for 1993 payments made *(a)* to chairmen, *(b)* to chief executives and *(c)* to directors.

Mr. Malone: Information will be placed in the Library on the remuneration of members of the boards of individual regional and district health authorities and national health service trusts, as extracted from their annual accounts for 1993–94. The figures need to be treated with caution. The payments listed represent remuneration in respect of the total gross salary, bonus payments, monetary value of benefits in kind, taxable expenses allowances and compensation payments in relation to the offices described—rather than to an individual. Thus, payments listed for chairmen and chief executives could well refer to more than one individual.

Private Patients

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage change in the number of finished consultant episodes on private patients on NHS premises between 1990–91 and the latest period for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) on 14 February, column *640*.

Embryos

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evaluation she has conducted on the research into the effects of freezing the human embryo on its DNA and the molecular interactions within its cells;

(2) what contact her Department has had with its French counterparts to study the long-term effects of freezing human embryos in the last two years;

(3) what research has been undertaken by her Department into the long-term effects of freezing human embryos following test tube baby treatments in the last two years.

Mr. Sackville: Recent research at Cambridge on embryo freezing has been reported in a paper entitled "Birth characteristics and perinatal outcome of babies conceived from cryopreserved embryos" by I. Wada et al, published in Human Reproduction Vol.9 No.3, pages 543–546. A research project entitled "Outcome in children from cryopreserved embryos" at Manchester university has been completed and publication is expected soon. Research under way at the university of York includes consideration of whether biochemical changes accompany human embryo freezing.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority keeps developments in research and treatment under review, including reports of work undertaken in other countries. The authority set up a working group on embryo freezing in 1993 to consider the social and ethical issues in this field. The outcome of its work was reported in the authority's 1994 annual report, copies of which are available in the Library.

GP Fundholding

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many total purchasing general practitioner fundholding practices have been given the ability to purchase residential nursing home care.

Mr. Malone: There are four existing national total purchasing pilots, in which general practitioner fundholders purchase all hospital and community health services for their patients. A further 49 sites are now to join the national evaluation programme. The pilot sites are listed below. Fundholders and health authorities working in partnership are demonstrating what can be achieved, and have made clear their commitment to this important project.

Total Fundholding - All Regions

Region	*Pilot Site*	*Number of Practices*	*Population covered*
South and West[4]	Romsey	3	29,062
	Plymouth and Torbay	7	73,000
	Trowbridge, Bath and Frome	4	59,257
	Dorset	1	17,105
	North and Mid Hants (Winchester)	1	20,000
	Saltash	1	17,200
Trent[5]	High Peak Consortia	5	39,700
	Keyworth	1	11,500
	Belper (South Derby)	2	21,930
	Melton Mowbray	1	33,132
	Rotherham	1	14,668
	North Lincolnshire (Market Rasen)	4	29,500
	South Derbyshire (Long Eaton)	6	45,664
	Sheffield South	12	61,445
West Midlands[6]	Coventry Health	3	20,107
	Bromsgrove[1]	4	40,000
	Bridgnorth	1	15,024
	Worcester	1	12,300
	Bewdley	1	12,943
	Solihull	1	18,944
South Thames[6]	Kingston and Richmond	4	45,000
	West Sussex (East Grinstead)	3	32,746
	East Sussex (Bexhill)	5	42,000
	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	8	80,800
	West Surrey (Byfleet)	3	30,000
	East Surrey (Epsom)	3	22,800
North Thames[7]	Brent and Harrow	3	32,000
	Enfield and Haringey	5	59,870
	Essex	4	44,300
	Hillingdon	4	39,204
	Herts (St. Albans)	14	85,018
	Herts (Hemel Hempstead)	11	95,839
	Hertford	7	35,466

Total Fundholding - All Regions

Region	Pilot Site	Number of Practices	Population covered
Anglia and Oxford[5]	Berkshire Integrated Purchasing Project[1]	6	65,000
	Bucks	4	55,423
	Thatcham	1	25,000
	North West Anglia (Kings Lynn)	1	18,086
	Attleborough	1	13,900
Northern and Yorkshire[7]	Wakefield	5	54,000
	Newcastle	2	25,300
	North Bradford Health Gain Consortium	3	30,000
	Durham	3	46,053
	Worth Valley[1]	8	60,000
	North Yorks (York)	1	21,027
	Tynedale	12	55,700
North West[8]	Runcorn[1]	1	12,000
	Ellesmere Port	7	67,000
	Newton Le Willows (St. Helens)	8	45,664
	Liverpool Neighbourhood	8	48,600
	Clitheroe and Whalley	3	31,600
	South Lancs (South Bank)	5	24,000
	South Cheshire	3	20,000
	Wilmslow	4	35,000

[1] Existing Projects

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the north of England are registered with fundholding general practitioners.

Mr. Malone: Some 34 per cent. of the population in the north of England as defined by the area covered by the Northern, and Yorkshire, and North West regional health authorities and Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield family health services authorities, are served by a fundholding general practitioner.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the research her Department has done or commissioned in each of the last eight years, on fundholding.

Mr. Malone: Research on fundholding has been carried out by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development, King's Fund Institute and individual researchers. No research has been carried out internally.

Abortions

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions were performed on women resident in each district health authority and each regional health authority in England and Wales in 1993; and of these operations, how many were performed in NHS hospitals, and how many in private clinics under agency arrangements.

Mr. Sackville: This information will be published in April 1995 in the Office of Population Censuses surveys monitor AB 95/2, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS abortions were performed under 13 weeks on women resident in each district health authority and each regional health authority in England and Wales in 1993; and of these operations, how many involved admission and discharge on the same day.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not yet available.

Regional Health Authority Finance

Ms. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the outturn figures for each regional health authority of the revenue and capital expenditure for each year since 1992; and what were the revenue and capital allocations.

Mr. Sackville: This information will be placed in the Library.

Waiting Lists

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were removed from hospital waiting lists in each regional health authority in each year since 1991.

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table. Removals are patients removed from a waiting list for in-patient or day-case treatment for any reason other than admission for treatment from that list. They include patients who have been admitted for treatment as emergencies for the same condition or at hospitals other than those on whose waiting lists they were originally placed.

Removals from in-patient and day case waiting lists

Region	1991	1992	1993
Northern	9,299	11,890	18,049
Yorkshire	23,383	24,667	34,353
Trent	19,415	24,050	29,446
East Anglia	15,277	17,033	16,084
North West Thames	30,920	40,941	34,504
North East Thames	44,574	43,247	36,007
South East Thames	43,242	52,482	54,052
South West Thames	19,858	24,716	21,473
Wessex	21,188	18,033	20,568
Oxford	13,735	20,291	18,861
South Western	25,359	26,470	24,767
West Midlands	35,039	44,942	50,520
Mersey	22,641	22,870	31,523
North Western	24,275	34,279	42,255

Childhood Leukaemia

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of childhood leukaemia were

treated as in-patients at Birmingham children's hospital in each of the last five available years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Bryan Stoten, chairman of South Birmingham health authority for details.

Junior Doctor Ratios

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the ratio of junior doctors, defined as house officer, senior house officer, registrar and senior registrar to consultant posts in each year since 1991.

Mr. Malone: The ratio of junior doctors to consultants in England at 30 September each year is as follows:

1991: 1.53:1
1992: 1.52:1
1993: 1.53:1

Note: The figures above are based on numbers

Minimally Invasive Treatment

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the surgical procedures now carried out by minimally invasive treatment; and what was the average length of hospital stay for patients undergoing these procedures in each year since 1991.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

HIV/AIDS London

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the incidence of AIDS and HIV per 1,000 population in the London boroughs of *(a)* Southwark, *(b)* Hammersmith, *(c)* Wandsworth, *(d)* Haringey, *(e)* Sutton, *(f)* Kingston, *(g)* Waltham Forest and *(h)* Ealing in each year since 1991.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the incidence of HIV and AIDS per 1,000 population is not collected by the Public Health Laboratory Service. Currently the PHLS does not make public numbers of cases of HIV and AIDS below regional health authority level to protect the confidentiality of individuals with HIV/AIDS and in order not to deter people from coming forward for testing.

Transaction Costs

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total budget allocated to health authorities for transaction costs rather than the clinical treatment and care for each year since 1991; and what proportion of health authority spending these costs represented.

Mr. Sackville: There is no specific allocation to health authorities for transaction costs and the proportion of health authority spending which these costs represent is not available centrally.

Pregnancy (Screening Tests)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) what guidance her Department has on the provision of the triple test as a screening test for abnormalities in pregnant women;

(2) if she will indicate the percentage of purchasers and hospitals who are providing the triple test for abnormalities in pregnancy.

Mr. Sackville: A report by a working party of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists into maternal serum screening for the detection of fetal Down's Syndrome, including the triple test, was published in 1993 to assist those in the national health service who are considering the introduction of such a screening programme, or who are already running one.

Information about the percentage of purchasers and hospitals providing the triple test is not available centrally. The provision of ante-natal screening for abnormalities remains a matter for individual health authorities, which decide what tests are offered as part of antenatal care in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Patients Charter

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the organisations with whom she consulted about the new patients charter before its publication; what were the methods of consultation with these organisations; what account was taken of their views in the final document; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Consultation on the new patients charter has taken place since spring 1994. Organisations we consulted on the draft patients charter are as shown in the table. These consultations were both written and oral and all comments were carefully considered in finalising the text.

Action for Sick Children
Action for Blind People
Action for Victims of Medical Accidents
Age Concern
Alzheimer's Disease Society
Arthritis and Rheumatism Council
Arthritis Care
Association of Optometrists
Association for Management, Education and Development
Association of Community Trusts and Foundations
Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales
Barnado's
Bereavement Support Services
Birthright
Blind Association
Bobath Centre
Bridges
British Diabetic Association
British Health Care Association
British Epilepsy Association
British Heart Foundation
British Cardiac Society
British Association for the Hard of Hearing
British College of Optometrists
British Dietetics Association
British Red Cross Society
British Medical Association
British Lung Foundation
British Dental Association
Campaign for Freedom of Information
Cancer Care Society
Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund
Cancerlink
Carers National Association
Caring for Children in the Health Service
Centre for Health Service Management
CHAMP
Co-operative Technical Panel
College of Health

Company Chemists Association
Consumers Association
Contact a Family
CRUSE
Disabled Living Foundation
Disablement Information and Advice Lines
Disability Alliance
District Nursing Association UK
English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
Family Planning Association
Federation of Independent British Optometrists
Federation of Opthalmic and Dispensing Opticians
General Medical Services Committee
General Dental Council
General Optical Council
Greater London Association of Community Health Councils
Health Rights
Health Visitors Association
Health Service Commissioner
Health Services Management Services
Health Service Management Unit
Help for Health
Help the Aged
Home from Hospital: Continuing Care
Hospital Caterers Association
Institute of Health Service Management
Institute for Health Policy Studies
Institute for Health Studies
International Voluntary Health Association
Joint Consultants Committee
Kings Fund College
Lifeline
Long Term Medical Conditions Alliance
MENCAP
Mental Health Foundation
MIND
National Childbirth Trust
National Forum for Coronary Heart Disease Prevention
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
National Association for Health Care Security
National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts
National Consumer Council
National Association of Fundholding Practices
National Eczema Society
NHS Trust Federation
NHS Health Advisory Service
Nuffield Institute for Health Services Studies
Parkinson's Disease Society
Patient's Association
Royal College of Midwives
Royal College of General Practitioners
Royal College of Nursing
Royal College of Physicians
Royal College of Surgeons
Royal National Institute for the Blind
Royal National Institute for Deaf People
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults
Scottish Consumer Council
Special Hospitals Service Authority
Stroke Association
Stroke Support Group
The Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee
The National Pharmaceutical Association
The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
York Health Economics Consortium

Private Finance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those NHS projects involving private finance initiative which *(a)* have been completed and *(b)* are in progress.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on 3 November 1994, column *1269*, for the latest information available.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those projects that Newchurch has advised her Department are suitable for private investment.

Mr. Sackville: Newchurch and Co. does not advise the Department on the suitability of projects for private investment.

It was engaged to set up and operate a database and inquiry point. This database provides market intelligence on both new and existing private finance experience in the national health service.

Colchester General Hospital

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many geriatric beds and psychiatric beds were available in the district health authority area containing Colchester general hospital in each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis: The number of geriatric beds and mental illness beds in the North Essex district health authority area is shown in the table:

Average available beds, wards open night and day

	Geriatric	*Mental illness*
1989–90	876	698
1990–91	708	643
1991–92	666	598
1992–93	668	580
1993–94	626	532

Note:
For 1991–92 and earlier years, figures are for three district health authorities Mid Essex, North East Essex and West Essex. In 1992–93 Essex Rivers Healthcare trust was formed 1993–94 figures are for Mid Essex Hospital Services trust, Essex Rivers Healthcare trust, Essex and Herts health services, and Mid-Essex mental health services.
Source:
KHO3 returns.

Bed numbers have declined because of the move from secondary care to care in the community, through for example nursing home contracts and general practitioner managed beds.

Mixed Wards

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on mixed wards containing acute medical, geriatric and psychiatric patients; and what guidance she issues on the mix of such patients.

Mr. Bowis: Hospital doctors are responsible for making decisions about the appropriate placement of individual patients, based on what is best for the patient's condition and in the light of available beds.

General Practitioner Savings

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the advertisement placed

in the *East Anglian Daily Times* on 4 February by the Brett-Stour non-fundholding consortium in respect of savings it claims to have achieved for public funds.

Mr. Malone: None.

Drug Addiction

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will indicate what percentage of general practitioners provide a comprehensive service for patients with drug addiction problems.

Mr. Bowis: General practitioners are contracted to provide general medical services to all their patients, including those with drug addiction problems.

Core Values

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on care values in the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: I understand the question refers to core values. The core purpose of the national health service is to secure through the resources available the greatest possible improvement in the physical and mental health of the people of England by promoting health, preventing ill health, diagnosing and treating injury and disease and caring for those with long-term illness and disability.

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the cash allocations for hospital and community health services in total and for each district health authority and health commission purchase trust and special health services authority for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* subsequent financial years.

Mr. Sackville: The 1994–95 initial revenue cash allocations for each district health authority and in total will be placed in the Library. From 1994–95, the postgraduate special health authorities acquire the status of provider, and we no longer make allocations to them, beyond the specific funding for research and development. The 1994–95 initial revenue cash allocations for the remaining special health authorities are:

National Blood Authority—£5,185,000

UK Transplant Support Services Authority—£3,706,000

Information for 1995–96 has not been collected yet and for subsequent years decisions have not been taken.

Trusts and health commissions receive no direct allocations: trusts because they must earn all their income; and health commissions because they exist only as a managerial arrangement for some district health authorities and family health services authorities, and are not statutory bodies.

Pay Awards

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate the cost to her Department's budget in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors, and Professions Allied to Medicine, assuming no changes in staff numbers; and how much of the cost would be borne by *(a)* direct expenditure by her Department, *(b)* national health service trusts and *(c)* grants and loans to local authorities.

Mr. Malone: The cost in England of implementing in full the recommendations of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors, and Professions Allied to Medicine amounts to between £105 million and £211 million for national health service trusts and health authorities, of which between £800,000 and £1.6 million is direct expenditure by the Department. The costs represent the upper and lower levels of the range of improvements expected by the review body. Information is not available centrally in respect of grants and loans to local authorities.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate the cost to her Department's budget in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration, assuming no changes in staff numbers; and how much of the cost would be borne by *(a)* direct expenditure by her Department, *(b)* national health service trusts and *(c)* grants and loans to local authorities.

Mr. Malone: The cost in England of implementing in full the national recommendations of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration amounts to £120 million for national health service trusts and health authorities of which £160,000 is direct expenditure by the Department. Information is not available centrally in respect of grants and loans to local authorities.

Residential Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if she will review her policy on local authorities making top-up payments towards the cost of residential or nursing home care for residents with preserved entitlements to Department of Social Security benefits; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: We have no plans to bring forward legislation to amend local authorities' current powers to provide financial support for people with preserved rights to the higher levels of income support. Levels of benefits to which preserved rights apply are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Residential Child Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will establish a formal inquiry into residential child care provision run by Buckinghamshire county council social services department; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what reports she has received from the social services inspectorate with regard to child care provision in Buckinghamshire; what action has been taken as a consequence; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I have not received any reports from the social services inspectorate with regard to child care provision in Buckinghamshire. I have received a copy of a letter from Buckinghamshire social services to the editor of *The Independent* in response to newspaper stories in that paper, which I understand has been copied to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett).

The social services inspectorate will be carrying out one of its regular inspections in Buckinghamshire in the next few months and will, no doubt, report back to me if it has any concerns.

If the hon. Gentleman has any evidence of which he thinks it or I should be aware, I should be grateful if he would forward this to me without delay.

Generic Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to her answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *874*, if she will give the aggregate cost of *(a)* generic and *(b)* brand named prescriptions for each year for each family health service authority, broken down by fundholders and non-fundholders.

Mr. Malone: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the total surpluses and deficits made by trusts in each region in 1993–94.

Mr. Sackville: This information is shown in the table.

Total Surpluses and Deficits made by Trusts in each Regional Health Authority in 1993–94

Regional health authority[1]	*Total surpluses £000s*	*Total deficits £000s*
East Anglia	8,740	0
Oxford	7,161	332
Mersey	10,256	2,144
North Western	6,697	0
North East Thames	27,771	2,713
North West Thames	28,585	5,078
Northern	10,656	0
Yorkshire	10,490	447
South East Thames	12,494	0
South West Thames	9,142	1,538
South Western	24,196	437
Wessex	7,740	1,441
Trent	17,806	0
West Midlands	21,107	3,259
Total	202,842	17,389

Source:
1993–94 NHS Trust Published Accounts.
Note:
[1] Regional Health Authority boundaries as existed in the financial year 1993–94.

TRANSPORT

Security Services

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what precise proportion of the posts identified in the efficiency savings exercise for security services provided by Transec is currently engaged on inspectorial and investigatory duties.

Mr. Norris: Forty three per cent. The reduction in posts is part of my Department's general drive for increased efficiency, and will be achieved through a combination of more efficient working practices and the fact that several projects are nearing completion. It is the responsibility of industry to provide front-line security staff and equipment, the level of which will not be affected by these changes.

Tyre Pressure Gauges

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what monitoring he is carrying out of the accuracy of tyre pressure gauges at garages and service stations.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have been asked to reply.

None. Under Council directive 86/217/EEC on tyre pressure gauges, some garage forecourts may be equipped with gauges carrying the mark of EEC initial verification, in which case their performance would be monitored by trading standards officers.

DEFENCE

Tendering Process

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to give greater weight to the assessment of the quality of bids during the tendering process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We would expect tenderers to present their proposals in the format requested in the invitation to tender, and to a standard commensurate with a professional organisation. Tender evaluation takes into account all relevant factors and the quality or standard of a tender would be one such factor. In a close competition in which bidders' proposals were evenly matched, the quality of a proposal could offer an indication of the commitment and management capabilities of the competitors and assist in final selection.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking so that tendering procedures are improved by allowing greater flexibility in the choice of procurement route; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: To secure the best value for money, taking account of quality, performance, delivery, risk and cost, it has been our practice with market testing exercises positively to encourage tenderers to submit solutions which, through a reasonable relaxation of the terms of the invitation to tender, or the adoption of an alternative approach to meeting the essential requirement, might prove cost effective. We are now extending that approach to equipment procurement to ensure contractors are aware of our willingness to consider innovative bids in this area also.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to streamline tendering procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: A number of initiatives from a comprehensive review of contractual policy and procedures carried out in 1992, and more recently the defence costs study, are in the course of implementation. These include the use of pre-qualification procedures to reduce the number of tenderers to those best qualified to meet the requirement; providing greater visibility of tender evaluation criteria; and making increased usage of the "Possible Future Purchases" section in the "Defence Contracts Bulletin".

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to improve the standard of specifications in tendering procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We recognise the importance of stating our requirements in clear and unambiguous terms and will continue to work to improve the quality of specifications and related material such as acceptance criteria and configuration control arrangements, supported by taut contractual terms. This can include consultation with

industry on draft specifications to encourage innovation and optimise possible trade-offs between performance and price. We have also taken steps to improve training for staff in the preparation of specifications.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to restrict tender lists to no more than three companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Our aim in producing tender lists is to select a field that is likely to lead to the keenest competition between firms which are considered capable of meeting all the obligations set out in the invitation to tender. To achieve this aim, and reduce the cost of the competitive process to both the Department and industry, we would normally develop tender lists of around six bidders for each competition. We consider that this approach, which was agreed in consultation with industry, strikes the right balance.

Rhine Forces (Returning Personnel)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what arrangements are being made in respect of married quarters in the United Kingdom for service personnel formerly serving in the Rhine forces and posted to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

(2) how many married families will return to Britain from the Rhine forces in the next 12 months.

Mr. Soames: An estimated 7,500 Army families will return from Germany this year, and around 1,400 RAF families are expected to return between 1 April 1995 and 31 March 1996. There are at present no significant numbers of naval personnel serving in Germany.

A number of accommodation options are open to service personnel returning to the United Kingdom on posting from Germany. They may either move into their own homes or seek to purchase their own property; move into vacant service families accommodation at or near their place of duty; or, if no suitable vacant SFA is available, they may claim excess rent allowance which will allow them to rent a property in the private sector. A number of SFA properties have been held vacant to accommodate returning families.

Three Para

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long the mock-up from of the Vauxhall Astra car involved in the incident for which Private Lee Clegg was jailed was on display in the mess of Three Para; why it was removed; what disciplinary action was taken against *(a)* the soldiers who made it and *(b)* the officers who allowed it to be displayed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The mock-up of the Vauxhall Astra was put up in the cookhouse shortly before the battalion's Christmas lunch. It was noticed by officers in the battalion during the lunch and it was immediately ordered to be removed. No disciplinary action was taken against the soldiers involved in making it, but the officer who should have taken steps to prevent the mock-up from being displayed was not permitted to convert his short service commission to become a regular officer.

Nuclear Programme

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work is carried out by *(a)* the Sandia National Laboratories, *(b)* the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories and *(c)* the Los Alamos National Laboratories on behalf of the United Kingdom Government.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom defence nuclear programme benefits from some of the work carried out in these laboratories by virtue of technology exchanges under the 1958 United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement.

Agreement

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the exchange of information and visit reports that have occurred in the last five years as part of the 1958 United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement, the Polaris sales agreement and the Trident sales agreement.

Mr. Freeman: This information could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British personnel are stationed in the United States as part of *(a)* the 1958 United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement, *(b)* the Polaris sales agreement and *(c)* the trident sales agreement; and where they are located.

Mr. Freeman: The number of British personnel stationed in the United States as part of the 1958 United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement is five; they are located in the United Kingdom embassy, Washington DC. There are 20 British personnel stationed in the United States as part of the Polaris sales agreement, as amended for Trident; they are located as follows:

	Number of Personnel
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory	—1
Crystal City, Arlington, Virginia	—15
King's Bay, Georgia	—1
New London, Connecticut	—1
Laurel, Maryland	—1
Dahlgren, Virginia	—1

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel were employed in the renegotiation of the 1958 United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement; and what was the total cost of the renegotiation.

Mr. Freeman: A number of officials were involved in the amendment to the 1958 United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement. It is not possible to identify separately the costs of this work.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the joint working groups that are at present operating as part of the 1958 United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement, the Polaris sales agreement and the Trident sales agreement.

Mr. Freeman: The joint working groups are the means for technical exchanges under the 1958, United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement. Full details of their activities are classified, but I can confirm that the current programme of exchanges includes the following subject areas:

Neutron Sources
Irradiation Effects on Materials and Components
High Explosives for Nuclear Weapons
Chemistry and Compatibility of Materials
Test Diagnostics
Test Monitoring
Metallurgy of Weapons Materials
Non-Nuclear Components
Underground Effects Testing
Non-Metallic Materials
Weapons Material Management
Nuclear Weapons Engineering
Physics Design
Weapons Hydrodynamics
Computational Technology
Penetration Aid Technology
Aircraft Hardening
Nuclear Weapons Physics
Nuclear Forces and Counter Proliferation Studies
Manufacturing Technology
Experimental Activities
Nuclear Warhead Accident Response Technology
Nuclear Weapon Computer Code Development
Nuclear Weapon Environment and Damage Effects

There are separate arrangements for exchanges under the Polaris sales agreement, as amended for Trident.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have visited *(a)* the Pantex plant in America, *(b)* the Sandia national laboratories, *(c)* the Los Alamos national laboratories, *(d)* the Lawrence Livermore national laboratories, *(e)* the Nevada test site and *(f)* the Rocky Flats plant on behalf of the United Kingdom Government in each of the last five years as part of the 1958 United States/United Kingdom Mutual Defence Agreement.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Atomic Co-ordinating Offices

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed in the atomic co-ordinating offices in London and Washington; and what are their civil service grades.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table below:

Grade	*Number*
Atomic control office (London)—(6 staff)	
Senior Executive Officer	1
Executive Officer	1
Administrative Officer	2
Administrative Assistant	1
Atomic co-ordinating office (Washington)—(5 staff)	
Unified Grade 6	1
Unified Grade 7	1
Executive Office	1
Administrative Officer	1
Personal Secretary	1

It should be noted that all staff employed in the atomic control office, London have additional duties as members of the assistant chief scientific adviser, nuclear's organisation.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the annual running costs of the atomic co-ordinating offices in London and Washington; and out of which budget they are taken.

Mr. Freeman: Running costs of the atomic co-ordinating office, Washington, are £300,000, under the budget of the vice-chief of the defence staff. Running costs of the atomic control office, London, fall within the assistant chief scientific adviser, nuclear's intermediate higher level budget, and are not separately identified.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role and function of the atomic co-ordinating offices in London and Washington.

Mr. Freeman: The staff of ACO(L) and the administrative staff of ACO(W) are responsible for the transmission of information, documents and material, arrangements of visits and submission of clearances as required by the 1958 United States/United Kingdom mutual defence agreement. Professional staff of ACO(W) represent UK interests in technical and procurement matters pertaining to the UK defence nuclear programme by liaison with the United States Department of Defence, Department of Energy, and their contractors.

Defence Export Service Organisation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which *(a)* foreign Governments and *(b)* British companies were the source of the DESO administrative receipts shown in the supply estimates for 1993–94 under the headings vote 1, section ABC, vote 2 subhead A2 and vote 2 subhead H4 and H2(1).

Mr. Freeman: There are no DESO receipts shown in the supply estimates 1993–94 under the headings quoted. DESO receipts are shown in table 2.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the administrative expenses of the DESO shown in the supply estimates for 1986–87 and 1987–88 are a net figure; and what was the expenditure on an expenses and receipts basis.

Mr. Freeman: The administrative expenses shown in the supply estimates for 1986–87 and 1987–88 gross expenditure figures. The DESO receipts are included within paragraph 6 of table 4.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the receipts in respect of administrative expenses for the DESO were generated in 1994–95.

Mr. Freeman: The receipts for administrative expenses shown in table 2 of the supply estimates 1994–95 are generated by fees paid by overseas customers to cover project management work undertaken on their behalf.

C-130J Programme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what export licences in respect of 130J purchases have been granted by the United States of America.

Mr. Freeman: The United States Department of State has granted Lockheed Aeronautical Systems Co. an exception to the 1994 export licence suspension in respect of the C-130J programme.

Dispersal Programme, Glasgow

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost to public funds of the dispersal programme to Glasgow between 1982 and 1989,

inclusive of redundancy, early retirement and relocation costs.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the numbers and grades of civil servants relocated to Ministry of Defence, Glasgow during the dispersal programme.

Mr. Freeman: Some 1,400 posts relocated to Glasgow as part of the dispersal programme by 1987, of which over 1,000 were filled by local recruitment. Records of the numbers and grades of staff relocated are not kept centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost to public funds of the current proposals to relocate existing Ministry of Defence jobs in Glasgow, away from the city.

Mr. Freeman: Plans to collocate support staff throughout the United Kingdom where it is most sensible and cost-effective to do so are an integral part of the defence costs study. Among other things, present plans include moves of posts into as well as out of Glasgow. Although final costs are not yet known, they are expected to be outweighed significantly by the savings in running costs which will accrue.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the numbers and grades of posts in the Glasgow headquarters buildings, after the establishment of the Army personnel centre.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers and grades of posts at present in Glasgow headquarters is set out below. The exact staffing of the Army personnel centre requires further work before it is finalised and it would not be possible at this time to say how the expected substantial increase in staff will affect these figures.

Number of non-industrial posts in Glasgow as at 31 December 1994

Grade	*Numbers*
5	2
Naval Regional Officer	1
6	4
7	15
SEO	55
HEO	127
EO	200
Retired Officer 2	10
AO	403
AA	171
Typing Manager	4
PS	7
Typist	47
Librarian	1
Assistant Librarian	1
Support Manager 2	1
Support Manager 3	7
Support Grade Band 1	27
Support Grade Band 2	65
CO3	1
CO4	4
Technical Grade 1	1
Total	1,154

Note: Administration Grade numbers include Technical equivalents.

Departmental Employees, Scotland

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees of his Department are located in Scotland; and what that figure will be when the full effect of the defence costs study is implemented.

Mr. Freeman: As at 1 January 1995, more than 10,900 of my Department's 117,450 UK-based civilian staff were located in Scotland. Although these figures can be expected to reduce as a result of the defence costs study, the implementation of the study is not complete and its full effects cannot be judged at this stage.

Courts Martial

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up an inquiry into the courts martial system of justice.

Mr. Soames: No. The system of discipline in the armed forces, including courts martial, is provided for in the Service Discipline Acts approved by Parliament. The quinquennial Armed Forces Bills are an opportunity to review the Service Discipline Acts. The next such Bill is due to be introduced in the 1995–96 Session.

Chemical Warfare Agents, RAF Llandwrog

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *562*, what was the chemical composition of the chemical warfare agents which were stored at RAF Llandwrog.

Mr. Soames: The chemical warfare agent stored at RAF Llandwrog was the nerve agent Tabun. The chemical composition of this agent is Ethyl N, N—Dimethylphosphoramidocyanidate.

Helicopter Accident, Llanberis Lake

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the progress that has been made on the inquiry into the fatal accident involving a helicopter which crashed into Llanberis lake in August 1993; what changes in safety regulations have been made following the inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The board of inquiry process into the accident is continuing. RAF boards of inquiry are necessarily comprehensive and exhaustive to ensure all circumstances are investigated. The board has been protracted by the complex nature of the technical investigation carried out by the air accident investigation branch. In the meantime, a number of precautionary engineering inspections have been introduced. As explained in the letter from the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence of 13 August 1993, an advance copy of the military aircraft accident summary will be sent to the hon. Member as soon as it is available.

Pay Awards

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost to his Department's budget in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of the Review Body on Armed Forces Pay, assuming no changes in staff numbers.

Mr. Soames: We estimate that the cost of implementing in full the recommendations of the Review Body on Armed Forces Pay will be some £140,000,000.

Service Accommodation

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 10 February to the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir. P. Lloyd), *Official Report*, columns *465–67*, if he will publish in the *Official Report*, the full list of residences where significant failures of budgetary control were found; and if he will make a statement on the two occasions when wrong information was provided to Parliament.

Mr. Soames: The relevant information on residences where significant failures of budgetary control were found are contained in paragraphs 5 and 11 to16 of the paper on official service residences, which I have placed in the Library of the House.

The two occasions on which the House was provided with incorrect information on this subject were in the answers given by the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, first to the hon. Member on 9 February 1994, *Official Report*, columns *362–63*, which put the figure at some £250,000 and, subsequently to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) on 29 March, *Official Report*, column *732*, which gave a figure of around £260,000. In his answer to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) on 4 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *85*, the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces provided the revised figure of £387,000 and expressed his regret that an incorrect figure had been given in the preceding answer.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *465–67*, if he will provide a full breakdown of expenditure at the official residence known as Air house, Rheindahlen in Germany during the financial years 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Soames: The figures are as follows:

£000s

	1991–92	*1992–93*
Maintenance	34	17
Improvement	6	8
Furnishings and Equipment	33	3
Security	115	38
Utilities	17	18
Total	205	84

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the reasons that led him not to publish the full text of the KPMG Peat Marwick report into service accommodation for senior officers;

(2) pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Fareham, (Sir P. Lloyd), *Official Report*, columns 465–67, if he will specify the name of those people who were shown an advance copy of the KPMG Peat Marwick report into service accommodation; and what assurances of confidentiality were made to them;

(3) what assessment he has made of the legal implications in relation to the publication in full of the KPMG Peat Marwick report into official accommodation for senior officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The report by KPMG Peat Marwick on the outcome of its investigation into expenditure at Haymes Garth is a confidential report that was prepared for the use of senior management and Ministers, not for publication. That was the clear basis on which, as I explained in my reply of 27 January, *Official Report*, columns 445–46, those named in it were shown in confidence draft extracts to enable them to comment on the passages that dealt with their involvement. I have no intention either of naming the individuals concerned or of publishing the full report. The question of legal implications does not therefore arise.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if Mr. David Hart was shown an advance copy of the KPMG Peat Marwick report into service accommodation for senior officers; and what undertakings he was required to give in respect of the report;

(2) on what occasions Mr. David Hart briefed journalists on the KPMG Peat Marwick report into service accommodation for senior personnel.

Mr. Soames: Mr. David Hart was not shown a copy of the KPMG Peat Marwick report into Haymes Garth, and he has not briefed journalists on it.

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Sir Peter Cazelet will be provided with an unedited copy of the KPMG Peat Marwick report into official accommodation for senior personnel.

Mr. Soames: Sir Peter Cazalet has been provided with a copy of the Ministry of Defence paper on the maintenance of official service residences which was issued last week. The terms of his study, which cover the requirement to entertain and how this entertainment is to be carried out, do not require him to have further detailed knowledge of the KPMG Peat Marwick report.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the report by Sir Peter Cazelet has cost to date; and what is the estimated total cost of the report.

Mr. Soames: Sir Peter Cazalet is generously undertaking his study into representational entertainment in the armed forces without reimbursement. Costs for travel and accommodation during the study for Sir Peter and for MoD officials accompanying him, amount to some £3,000.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to hold investigations into expenditure at official residences of senior officers which were not part of the audited sample in the KPMG Peat Marwick report.

Mr. Soames: Twelve residences, accounting for some 40 per cent. of expenditure in the relevant period, have been audited to evaluate systems and control. A comprehensive programme of measures to improve control over expenditure on official service residencies has been set in motion, but there are at present no plans for further audit work.

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Mr. David Hart will be providing advice for the report by Sir Peter Cazelet.

Mr. Soames: Sir Peter Cazalet has not consulted Mr. David Hart during the preparation on his report.

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department's attention was brought to the allegations concerning expenditure at the official residence known at *(a)* Haymes Garth and *(b)* Air house, Rheindallen.

Mr. Soames: The question of expenditure at Haymes Garth was raised in the summer of 1993—after completion of most of the work. The extent of the problem only became clear, however, when the results of an internal audit investigation started to become available in the spring of 1994. KPMG Peat Marwick was then commissioned to undertake a high-level independent external investigation. In parallel, a separate audit of expenditure on other official service residences was set in hand, and Air house was one of a sample of residences chosen for examination. The results of both investigations were reported to Parliament on 10 February 1995.

Mr David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which consultants are being used on the report by Sir Peter Cazelet; and what is the total cost of these services.

Mr. Soames: No consultants have been employed on Sir Peter Cazalet's report into representational entertainment in the armed forces.

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Fareham, (Sir P. Lloyd) of 10 February, *Official Report* columns *465–67*, if he will specify the exact date on which he received the KPMG Peat Marwick report into service accommodation for senior officers.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and I first received the report by KPMG Peat Marwick on the results of its investigation into expenditure at Haymes Garth on 16 December 1994.

Air Chief Marshall Sir Andrew Wilson

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the full terms and conditions of the early retirement settlement for Air Chief Marshal Sir Andrew Wilson; and what is the total cost of the settlement including pension rights.

Mr. Soames: In accordance with standard regulations, precise details of individual pension benefits are confidential between my Department and the recipient. He will, however, receive the normal benefits of an officer of his rank who seeks voluntary retirement.

The scale of retired pay for an Air Chief Marshal currently runs from £41,875 at 30 years' service to a maximum of £46,099 at 34 years' service. The terminal grant is three times the annual rate of retired pay.

Land Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will urgently make an assessment of the report, "The Military Utility of Landmines: Implications for Arms Control", published by the United States Department of Defence; and if he will publish his findings;

(2) for what reasons he has not made an assessment of the report published by the United States Department of Defence in June 1994 entitled the "Military Utility of Landmines: Implications for Arms Control".

Mr. Freeman: We have noted that the basic conclusion of this report—which was carried out by the Institute for Defence Analyses—is that issues of military utility need not preclude further consideration of any form of land mine arms control. That is the United Kingdom's position: we are at the forefront of international efforts to introduce tighter restrictions on the use and export of anti-personnel land mines.

My Department intends to assess the report later in the year as part of its continuing review of our military requirements for land mines. Following completion of this review, I will consider what information might be published.

Millbay Docks

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence police have been deployed at Millbay docks recently during protests against live animal exports; and what cost; and for what purpose.

Mr. Soames: Up to 14 Ministry of Defence policemen have been deployed in the vicinity of Millbay docks during recent protests against live animal exports. Their purpose was to assist Devon and Cornwall police with particular regard to the protection of adjacent Ministry of Defence property. Provision for this was made from existing resources and no additional costs were incurred.

Drug Offences

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will update the figures referred to in his answer of 5 February 1993, *Official Report*, columns *371–72*, for the number of service personnel who have been discharged for drugs-related offences.

Mr. Soames: In 1992, 229 personnel were dismissed from the services following court martial, summary proceedings or civilian court conviction for importing, supplying or possessing drugs. Figures for 1993 and 1994 are not yet available. Updated figures for Army and Royal Air Force personnel discharged administratively for drug offences are as follows:

1992–93: 333

1993–94: 200

1994–95: 122 (to date)

Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland's operational headquarters based at the Maritime Headquarters, Pitreavie.

Mr. Freeman: A consultative document was issued on 21 October 1994 setting out proposals to transfer the operational headquarters of Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland from Pitreavie to Faslane. Having given careful consideration to all the views expressed on these proposals during the consultation period, I have decided to proceed with the relocation of FOSNNI's operational headquarters to Faslane by April 1996. This measure will save some £22 million over the next 10 years. Of the service and civilian posts affected some 70 service and 52 civilian posts will no longer be required. We will continue to consult with staff and the trade unions about the detailed implementation of the measure and its implications. The move of FOSNNI's operational headquarters will entail the closure of the maritime headquarters at Pitreavie which is expected to become surplus to defence requirements. My officials have been in close contact with the Scottish Office and Fife Enterprise concerning the future development of the site, and I am pleased to be able to announce that the opportunity has arisen for MOD to make available to Fife Enterprise a 5.5 acre site to the south of the Pitreavie estate that is needed by the BSkyB company in connection with its inward investment project on an adjacent site. This area can be released in advance of the remainder of the Pitreavie site which will also be sold to Fife Enterprise, at open market rates, when MOD finally withdraws from Pitreavie in 1996.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 17 February 1995

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Discipline Procedures

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his proposals for the reform of police discipline procedures in Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I issued a consultation paper on police discipline procedures on 26 August 1993. The consultation paper proposed a new system for dealing with unsatisfactory performance, as well as suggesting improvements to existing disciplinary procedures. I have carefully considered the responses which I received, the majority of which were supportive of the reforms.

The changes which I have decided to make will create a more streamlined and up-to-date system for dealing with unsatisfactory performance and instances of misconduct. The reforms will take the form of new regulation-making powers on the conduct, efficiency and effectiveness of police officers and the maintenance of discipline, and will not prevent the pursuit of disciplinary action, when appropriate, if an officer has been acquitted of a criminal charge. There will be a new appeals tribunal, to replace the right of appeal to the Secretary of State. The right of officers to be legally represented when facing the most severe penalties will continue. Consistency will be maintained with Great Britain on the standards of proof for police disciplinary breaches.

These changes will establish a flexible framework for reform in this important area and maintain consistency across the United Kingdom.

Emergency Provisions Act

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now publish the report of Mr. J. J. Rowe's fundamental review of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991; and what arrangements he has made to review the operation of the Act in 1994.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I announced on 24 May 1994 that Mr. J. J. Rowe QC would be undertaking a fundamental review of the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991. This review would assist the Government in reaching decisions about what to do when the present Act reaches the end of its life in August 1996. Mr. Rowe's report is being published in full today as a Command Paper. I am most grateful to Mr. Rowe for his valuable work.

As Mr. Rowe himself makes clear, most of his work was completed before the Provisional IRA cessation of violence and it was wholly completed before the Loyalist cessation. His recommendations do not, therefore, take full account of the new situation which these events created, nor of the Government's working assumption that the ceasefires are intended to be permanent. The Government's hope is that a lasting peace will prove to be established and that the need for the exceptional powers provided by this Act will accordingly be removed. In the meantime, the Government will keep the need for such powers under continuing review.

Mr. Rowe has also accepted my invitation to prepare a report on the operation of the Act during 1994. As the temporary provisions of the Act will lapse on 15 June 1995 unless continued in force by order, I have asked Mr. Rowe to submit his report in sufficient time to facilitate Parliament's consideration of the Emergency Provisions Act.

At the same time, and as part of the Government's continuing review of the use of powers under emergency legislation, I have concluded on the basis of security advice that there is no longer a need to maintain those exclusion orders for which I am responsible and which are in force under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts. I have, therefore, directed the revocation of those orders. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will announce in due course the outcome of a review of the 56 exclusion orders for which he is responsible.

Planning Applications

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what requirement there is for alterations in the number of dwellings in a planning application from that first advertisment to be advertised in the press.

Mr. Moss: There is no requirement to advertise alterations to planning applications. However, where an amended proposal would significantly alter the character or description of the original proposal, it would normally be the practice to re-advertise.

Belfast Urban Area Plan

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many trees have been removed from the sites identified as site 8 Beechill in the document, "Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001: development of suburban housing sites: Development Control Guidance Note. DOE (NI), June 1991", since June 1991;

(2) how many healthy trees identified as to be protected in site 8 Beechill in the document entitled, "Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001: development of suburban housing sites: Development Control Guidance Note. DOE (NI)", dated June 1991, have been removed.

Mr. Moss: The information requested is not immediately available. I will write to the right hon. Gentleman once it is.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the estimated total cost of producing the document, "Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001: development of suburban housing sites: Development Control Guidance Note DOE(NI)", dated June 1991;

(2) if he will make a statement of the place of the document entitled "Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001: development of suburban housing sites: Development Control Guidance Note DOE(NI), June 1991" in the Belfast urban area plan 2001;

(3) what is the legal status of the document entitled, "Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001: development of suburban housing sites: Development Control Guidance Note DOE(NI), June 1991"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The cost of producing the document is not available. The BUAP 2001 committed the Department to the publication of this document. The document is a material planning consideration.

Child Abuse and Rape Allegations

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* child abuse and *(b)* rape allegations have been made against teachers in each of the last five years; how many cases have not been proceeded with; and in how many cases the teacher has been found guilty.

Sir John Wheeler: The RUC does not hold any statistics relating to allegations as there may be many which are never investigated because no formal complaint is made.

In cases where a prosecution ensues, RUC statistics show persons proceeded against but, in normal circumstances occupation is not recorded.

Housing Executive

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the policy of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on allocating grant aid as regards religious belief, what considerations underlay the questions as to the religious and political affiliation of households; and if he will ban the practice of seeking to obtain this information

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I am advised by its chief executive that completion of the religious affiliation question on the Executive's preliminary inquiry form for grants is optional and has no bearing whatsoever on either the executive's decision to accept or reject an application or the payment of any grant aid, which is made entirely on the basis of house condition and other eligibility factors. The question was introduced following a recommendation by the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights that the executive should monitor the impact of its policies and practices on each of the main sections of the community. The collection of this information has a valuable and important role to play in the promotion of equality of opportunity and equity for all the people of Northern Ireland. There are no questions about an applicant's political affiliation on the form.

Water and Sewerage Service

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were employed by the water and sewerage service in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Moss: The information, at 31 March of each financial year, is as follows:

Number of Water Executive Employees

Year	*Number*
1989–90	2,569
1990–91	2,598
1991–92	2,633
1992–93	2,543
1993–94	2,533

HEALTH

999 Telephone Calls

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measure her Department is taking to reduce the number of non-urgent 999 telephone calls.

Mr. Sackville: The new patients charter, launched on 18 January, advises the public on how they can help the national health service by remembering that the emergency ambulance service is there for people in the most urgent need of hospital treatment. Improvements in primary care should reduce the incidence of non-urgent calls. Further action is best taken by local initiatives.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account is taken of the closure of the accident and emergency departments at St. Bartholomew's, Guy's and other units within their operational area in the financial provisions for the London Ambulance Service recommended in the report to her from the chairman of the South Thames health authority.

Mr. Sackville: The future work load and configuration of accident and emergency departments are taken into account in the forward planning of the London Ambulance Service. The funding of the LAS is a matter for the purchasers of its services.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has that desirable standards in respect of London Ambulance services can be achieved by *(a)* unified and *(b)* fragmented service with equivalent resources.

Mr. Sackville: I look to the London Ambulance Service to improve its performance to the standards achieved by other ambulance services and believe that it should remain as a single unit provided it does so.

Anti-Malarial Tablets

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if anti-malarial tablets are available on prescription on the NHS; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Anti-malarial tablets for prophylaxis when travelling to endemic areas are available from travel clinics or from general practitioners on private prescription. Anti-malarial drugs may be prescribed on the national health service if they are being used for the treatment of malaria or for other medical conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Female Circumcision

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many girls have been admitted to hospitals in England suffering from complications following female circumcision in each year since such records were kept.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she proposes to assist younger people suffering from Alzheimer's disease; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Purchasers have been advised in "The Health of the Nation" key area handbook to take account of the needs of particular groups and conditions; this includes those suffering from pre-senile dementia.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by age the numbers of women who become pregnant within 12 months of abortions performed upon them in the latest year for which such figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not collected.

Organ Donor Register

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the NHS organ donor register was launched; and when the first advertisements appeared inviting potential donors to register;

(2) how many people have registered with the NHS organ donor register since its launch;

(3) when the NHS organ donor register will be fully operational;

(4) when the registration forms for the NHS organ donor register were first available.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service organ donor register was launched on 6 October 1994. Registration forms were available from that date. Over 4 million have been issued since that date and have been available in main post offices, libraries, chemists and other public places. The first advertisements appeared in the national press the following week. About 250,000 people have registered with it at present and numbers are growing rapidly.

Correspondence

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *843*, when she now expects to respond to the open letter from the *Islington Gazette*, about the planned closure of St. Bartholomew's hospital and the future of health services for the people of Islington, a further copy of which was sent to her on 10 February.

Mr. Malone: A reply from the chairman of Camden and Islington health authority was printed in the *Islington Gazette* on 2 February. I have nothing further to add to that reply.

Prescribing Costs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to her answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *874*, what was the average prescribing costs per 1,000 patients in *(a)* fundholding and *(b)* non-fundholding practices on each of dates specified; and what comparable information she has on the prescribing costs of non-fundholding practices participating in incentive prescribing schemes at those dates.

Mr. Malone: Available information is shown in the table. Practice-based prescribing incentive schemes did not commence until 1993–94; comparable information is not available centrally.

Average prescribing cost per 1,000 patients (net ingredient cost)

	1991–92 £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Fundholders:	51,000	56,000	61,000
Non-fundholders:	54,000	61,000	67,000

Note:
Net ingredient cost refers to the cost of the drugs before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

GP Training

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what are the numbers of GP doctors currently in training who are from a member state of the European Union beside the United Kingdom; how their training costs are being met; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* Figures are not available centrally on the number of general practitioner doctors from European Union member states training in this country. The costs of training both in the general practice setting and in hospitals are met by the national health service.

NHS and Departmental Staff

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will give the number of general and senior managers in *(a)* regional health authorities, *(b)* district health authorities, *(c)* family health services authorities, *(d)* trusts, *(e)* general practitioner practices, *(f)* the national health service executive and *(g)* her Department in each year since 1989–90.

(2) if she will give the salary costs of general and senior managers in *(a)* regional health authorities, *(b)* district health authorities, *(c)* family health services authorities, *(d)* trusts, *(e)* general practitioner practices, *(f)* the national health service executive and *(g)* her Department in each year since 1989–90.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The available information is shown in the tables.

The increase in the number of managers in health authorities and trusts and therefore in costs, is largely due to the reclassification of administrative and professional staff—including many senior nurses—as general and senior managers. In family health services authorities, the increase is due to new or greater managerial responsibilities for primary care development, including medical audit advisory groups, budgetary control and health promotion monitoring, and developments in community care.

Information is not available centrally on general practitioner practice managers. The national health service executive and the Department of Health do not categorise staff in terms of general and senior managers in any way which permits comparison with those defined in this way in health authorities and trusts. Numbers of general and senior managers for 1991 and 1992 cannot be provided because the figures were collected on an aggregate basis and it is not possible to identify such staff in regional and district health authorities and FHSAs separately. The number of general and senior managers in DHAs cannot be provided for 1989, 1990 and 1993 because the aggregate figures collected for those years do not identify such staff in DHA headquarters separately. Information on salary costs is not available centrally for managers in FHSAs because their accounts and financial returns do not contain any breakdown of expenditure between staff groups.

Table 1
General and senior managers within regional health headquarters or headquarter units, family health services authorities and trusts—whole time equivalents at 30 September

	1989	1990	1993
Regional health authorities	360	1,010	1,400
Family health services authorities	30	640	1,060
Trusts	—	—	9,210

Source:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

Table 2
Salary costs of general and senior managers 1989–90 to 1993–94

	1989–90 £000s	1990–91 £000s	1991–92 £000s	1992–93 £000s	1993–94 £000s
Regional health authorities	11,145	24,142	46,922	58,560	58,984
District health authorities	145,337	223,221	277,179	287,987	229,765
Trusts	—	—	54,296	143,145	313,704

Source:
Annual accounts—1989–90 and 1990–91—and annual financial returns—1991–92 to 1993–94—of regional and district health authorities. Annual financial returns of NHS trusts—1991–92 to 1993–94.

Notes to tables:
1. The number of general and senior managers in trusts in 1993 differs from that published in October 1994 in table E of the Statistical Bulletin—the latter erroneously included some 280 staff from Wales.
2. Salary costs are based upon gross pay costs including employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions.
3. Salary costs for 1992–93 differ from those given previously due to validation work carried out in 1994.
4. Salary costs for 1993–94 are provisional.
5. First wave trusts did not become operational until 1 April 1991.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Illegal Residents

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the main provisions of the specimen treaty produced by the K4 group of the European Union; when he approved this specimen treaty; when he intends to report his approval of the specimen treaty to the House; if he will place a copy of the specimen treaty in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The standard bilateral readmission agreement adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council at its meeting on 30 November and 1 December 1994, provides a standard format and text as a basis for the negotiation of bilateral agreements between individual member states and third countries governing the readmission to their country of origin of those found to be illegally resident in the territories of the contracting parties. A copy of the document has been placed in the Library.

Prevention of Terrorism

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the report from Mr. J. J. Rowe QC on the operation in 1994 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Mr. Howard: I have today arranged for copies of Mr. Rowe's report to be placed in the Library. The Government are considering Mr. Rowe's recommendations on the future of the legislation and will shortly be arranging for debates in both Houses.

Firearms Licensing

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make available the report by the Association of Chief Police Officers on firearms licensing.

Mr. Maclean: A copy of the report on firearms administration produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers has been placed in the Library.

Bulgarian Vessel (Detention)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure that the crew of the Rotalia are fed by the Bulgarian state while the vessel remains under Marine Safety Agency detention in United Kingdom waters in Lerwick harbour.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The provision of food for the crew of the Rotalia is a matter between them and their employers and not something in which the immigration service can become involved. However, it is my understanding that the crew are in possession of sufficient provisions on board the vessel.

Mr. Neil Jones

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what inquiries he has commissioned into the circumstances which led to Mr. Neil Jones being placed on probation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I understand that Mr. Jones was sentenced to probation on 21 July 1994 at Chester magistrates court. It was for the court to decide on the appropriate sentence in the circumstances of that case, and I cannot comment on that decision.

Anthony Charles Jeffs

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimated date of release has been given to Anthony Charles Jeffs; when he is to be released on licence; and what warnings have been given to him to avoid making statements after release which may be offensive to the victim's family or colleagues.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No estimated date of release has been given to Anthony Charles Jeffs. My right hon. and learned Friend has no power to consider the release of this prisoner unless the Parole Board so recommends. The next review of Mr. Jeffs's case by the Parole Board is not due to begin until March 1996.

Mr. Jeffs is detained in closed prison conditions where specific attention is being paid to his attitude and behaviour towards his victims' families or their colleagues.

Prisoners, Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of convicted and remand prisoners resident in Wales who were detained in prisons outside Wales in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1993; if he will express *(a)* and *(b)* as a percentage of the prison population who were, prior to their incarceration, residing in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 17 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, if he will give the number of convicted and remand prisoners resident in Wales who were detained in prisons outside Wales in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1993; if he will express *(a)* and *(b)* as a percentage of the prison population who were, prior to their incarceration, residing in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

No information is available centrally regarding the principal address of those committed to custody. The available information on where prisoners originate from is for the court first committing to custody. The table shows the provisional number of receptions recorded centrally into Prison Service establishments in England who were first committed into custody by a Welsh Court in 1993 and 1994.

Receptions[1] into a Prison Service establishment in England from a Welsh Court, 1993–1994

Type of custody	*Number committed to an establishment in England*	*As percentage of total committed by Welsh courts*
1993		
remand[2]	1,400	40
sentenced[3]	1,000	34
1994		
remand[2]	1,900	49
sentenced[3]	1,150	33

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] Includes convicted unsentenced prisoners.
[3] Excludes fine defaulters and person held in police cells; includes some prisoners previously held on remand.

Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the International Labour Organisation convention on forced labour in prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on what representations he has received concerning the International Labour Organisation convention on forced labour in prisons.

We have received from the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Committee of Experts observations on representations submitted by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) concerning ILO Convention 29 on forced or compulsory labour.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the technical and practical difficulties of compulsory drug testing in Her Majesty's prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 17 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question concerning representations received on the technical and practical difficulties of compulsory drug testing in prisons.

No specific representations have been received on this matter by the Secretary of State. Two organisations raised issues concerning the potential operational and practical difficulties associated with drug testing within prisons at routine meetings with Ministers last year. I have received recently one letter which highlights similar concerns.

The difficulties associated with drug testing within prison have been examined in depth by the project team set up to implement mandatory drug testing for prisoners. Procedures developed for this are currently being introduced initially in eight prison establishments. Lessons learnt during this phase will help ensure the effective implementation of the drug testing programme in the remaining establishments.

Commercial Gambling (Advertising)

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to relax the press and other media advertising restrictions on licensed bingo clubs in line with recent relaxation of restrictions in the broadcast media for football pools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We are currently reviewing restrictions on the advertising of bingo and other forms of commercial gambling and hope to go out to consultation in May.

Prisoners (Tariffs)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were sentenced pursuant to *(a)* section 53(1) and *(b)* section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 have now been notified of their tariff; how many of them have been given tariffs of (i) five years or less, (ii) six to 10 years,

(iii) 10 to 15 years, (iv) 15 to 20 years, (v) over 20 years and (vi) life; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Some 217 persons in Prison Service custody and sentenced under section 53(1) have been notified of their tariff. The details are as follows:

	Number
Five years or less	2
Six to nine years[1]	33
10 to 14 years[1]	139
15 to 20 years	43
Over 20 years, less than whole life	0
Whole life	0

[1] These bands have been given to avoid the double counting of 10 and 15 year tariffs.

Some 21 persons in Prison Service custody and sentenced under section 53(2) have been told the relevant part—the tariff—of their sentence. The details are as follows:

	Number
Five years or less	7
Six to nine years[1]	8
10 to 14 years[1]	6
15 to 20 years	0
Over 20 years, less than whole life	0
Whole life	0

[1] These bands have been given to avoid the double counting of 10 and 15-year tariffs.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the functions for which further orders will be required to give full effect to structural change in Cleveland, together with when these orders will be laid before the House.

Mr. Curry: No further orders are required to give full effect to structural change in Cleveland. Depending on our decision on the county area of Cleveland, there may be further provision to redefine the county area and to address ceremonial functions, such as the Lord Lieutenancy. My right hon. Friend and colleagues in other Government Departments may wish to make regulations or issue guidance in due course in relation to the provision of services where there is to be unitary local government.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which bodies have commented on the draft Avon, Humberside and North Yorkshire (Structural Change) Orders and the Selby District (Boundary Change) Order; and if he will place copies of those comments in the Library.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My answer to the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) on 3 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *911*, listed the bodies consulted on the draft orders. We have also received comments from other bodies such as parish councils as well as individuals. We will make available copies of comments from official bodies on request unless we are asked not to do so.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the provision for a transferor authority affected by structural change under the Local Government Act 1992 to seek information from a transferee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We intend that the individual orders made under section 17 of the Local Government Act 1992 will provide for transferor and transferee authorities alike to co-operate with one another so as to facilitate the implementation of structural change.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether article 20 of the draft Avon Structural Change (Order) grants powers to district councils transferring functions to South Gloucestershire which it does not grant to the county council also transferring powers to the new authority.

Mr. Curry: No.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date he announced his decision to create new counties in Avon and Humberside.

Mr. Curry: Our decision to abolish the counties of Avon and Humberside was announced on 25 October 1994. In accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, when we abolish the counties of Avon and Humberside, we must at the same time provide for their areas to be included in other counties.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what role he envisages for the Local Government Commission once the current set of reviews is completed.

Mr. Curry: The Local Government Commission is responsible, under the Local Government Act 1992, for undertaking periodic electoral reviews of local government areas in England, as well as for conducting structural and boundary reviews at the direction of the Secretary of State. I expect that, once the current round of structural reviews is complete, its main business will be with the periodic electoral reviews.

Audit Commission

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations underlay his decision to appoint a serving local authority chief executive to the membership of the Audit Commission; and what assessment he has made of the impact of this appointment on the independence of the Audit Commission from those bodies it supervises.

Mr. Curry: The Secretary of State appoints to the Audit Commission those whom he considers have the most appropriate skills and experience. Mr John Foster was appointed on this basis. Members do not represent particular interests, and the independence of the Audit Commission is not affected by the appointment of a serving chief executive, any more than it has been by the appointment in the past of serving local authority members.

Council Houses

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for the number of council houses without tenants for each local authority in England.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities in England report the numbers of their dwellings that are vacant at

1 April in their annual housing investment programme returns. Data for individual local authorities for 1994 can be found in section A of the "1994 HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) of 13 February, *Official Report*, columns *514–15*, what funding his Department has *(a)* set aside from current funds and *(b)* negotiated as extra funds from Her Majesty's Treasury to give to the Energy Saving Trust after it is designated under section 153 of the Environment Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I shall decide on any appropriate contribution to the costs of the Energy Saving Trust once it has reviewed its plans and discussed them with my officials.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he plans to make any changes to the provisional capping criteria which he announced on 1 February.

Mr. Curry: Following representations, I have concluded that the six metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities outside London face unique circumstances: as single service authorities with relatively small budgets, operating within detailed requirements governing minimum service provision, their flexibility is exceptionally constrained. I therefore propose to revise the provisional capping criteria that will apply to them.

My original proposals would have limited single service fire and civil defence authorities that are budgeting above their standard spending assessment to an increase in budget compared to 1994–95 of a 0.5 per cent. I now propose to revise the provisional capping criteria that apply to the metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities. The effect of my intended criteria is:

i. any increase in budget of more than 2 per cent. over 1994–95 would be considered excessive if it gives rise to a budget requirement above the authority's SSA;

ii. any increase of more than 1.25 per cent. would be considered excessive if it gives rise to a budget requirement over 5 per cent. above SSA;

iii. any increase of more than 0.5 per cent. would be considered excessive if it gives rise to a budget requirement over 10 per cent. above SSA.

The capping criteria are necessarily provisional. We cannot take decisions on capping until authorities have set their budgets for 1995–96.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what is the cost of legal aid awarded to Mr. Bryce Taylor.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No money has been paid on account to the solicitors acting for Mr. Bryce Taylor under legal aid, and no final bill has been received.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what steps he plans to take to ensure that every individual wishing to complain about treatment at the hands of the Legal Aid Board is automatically given the board's leaflet about its complaints procedures as soon as the complaint is drawn to the board's attention.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Board does not require that complaints are lodged with it on a particular form. On receipt of a complaint—whether by telephone, letter, or on the form included in its complaints leaflet—the board takes immediate steps to resolve the problem. Where appropriate, a copy of the complaint leaflet is sent to the complainant but this would not be appropriate in every case—for example where the complaint has been satisfactorily resolved immediately over the telephone.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what mechanisms exist for setting and ensuring that Legal Aid Board staff responsible for assessing expert medical and other reports possess the necessary scientific or professional expertise.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Board ensures through its quality management system, which includes detailed work allocation, supervision procedures and quality control mechanisms, that all work is allocated to staff with the appropriate degree of training and experience to deal with it.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what mechanisms exist for setting and ensuring minimum standards for quality of expert medical and other reports in legally-aided cases.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Individual solicitors are responsible for obtaining expert medical and other reports in legal aid cases. The Legal Aid Board does not, itself, commission such reports. The board has introduced its franchising arrangements to ensure that there is a quality assured legal aid service available to clients. It is a mandatory requirement of franchising that all franchisees have documented procedures for using experts which include, among other things, clear criteria for selecting experts which must be followed and arrangements for checking opinions and reports when they are received to ensure they adequately provide the information sought.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what mechanisms exist to ensure that, where a legally aided individual makes a complaint about a particular Legal Aid Board official or office, that individual's application for legal aid will not be prejudiced.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Board has adopted "justifiability of decision-making" as one of its guiding principles and seeks to ensure that all decisions are taken objectively and are uninfluenced by prejudice of any kind. To ensure that it meets this objective, it has obtained accreditation as a quality assured organisation under BS EN ISO 9002, formerly BS 5750. The board uses its quality management system—which includes detailed and comprehensive supervision, work allocation and quality control procedures—to ensure that decisions in individual cases are made objectively.

EMPLOYMENT

Trade Union Membership

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many employees have not given re-authorisation for their trade union membership subscriptions to be renewed, as laid down by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993;

(2) if he will list the abuses of the process of employer check-off of trade union membership subscription remedied by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993;

(3) if he will issue guidance to employers regarding information that they should give to employees about whether their trade union membership has been cancelled under the terms of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 because of failure to re-authorise;

(4) how much the process of seeking re-authorisation of trade union membership subscriptions under the terms of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 by trade unions has cost so far in terms of *(a)* labour costs, *(b)* administrative costs and *(c)* overall, breaking the information down by every trade union;

(5) what is the consequence for any individual who does not re-authorise the renewal of trade union membership subscriptions as laid down by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993;

(6) if he will make a statement on the outcome of the first three-yearly exercise of re-authorisation of trade union membership subscription renewal laid down by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993.

Mr. Oppenheim: There is no statutory requirement for re-authorisation of union membership subscriptions. Provisions in the 1993 Act require prior written consent from the worker, and renewed consent at least every three years, if an employer is lawfully to make check-off deductions from a worker's pay for union membership subscriptions.

The Department has no information on how many workers have consented to such deductions since these provisions came into force.

The case for changes to the law on check-off as it then stood was set out in the 1991 Green Paper "Industrial Relations in the 1990s". Paragraphs 6.18-6.27 of the Green Paper identified the potential problems which could arise for individuals, as well as particular instances of concern about the operation of check-off arrangements.

Guidance on the law is given in the Department's published "Guide to the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993"—Ref: PL 945—and in the booklet "The Payment of Union Subscriptions Through the Check-off"—Ref: PL 944. Both were published when the provisions came into force.

How employers may have responded to these requirements, and the consequential costs that they, or trade unions, may have incurred, are matters for them. No employer is required to offer check-off facilities.

If an employee does not authorise the continuance of such deductions, it will be unlawful for the employer to continue to make them.

I am unaware of any complaints having been made to industrial tribunals about unlawful deduction of check-off since the provisions came into effect. This may indicate that employers are complying with the law.

Labour Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by occupation, the work force in *(a)* full-time employment and *(b)* part-time employment in Islwyn in each year since 1979, also expressing the information by gender.

Mr. Oppenheim: Occupational information is not available for Islwyn.

Youth Training

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's responsibility for ensuring that non-employed status YT trainees are paid their basic weekly allowance; who is responsible for reimbursing training providers who make such payments in advance but who are not paid by their local training and enterprise council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: The Department contracts with training and enterprise councils for the delivery of youth training. The contract requires TECs to ensure that non-employed YT trainees are paid a regular training allowance at least to the level specified by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The arrangements TECs make with training providers is governed by the contracts agreed between the parties. Recovery of any ensuing debts is subject to the law of contract.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance he has issued to TEC directors about *(a)* their legal liability for the activities of their TEC and *(b)* the availability and advisability of taking out personal indemnity insurance to cover such liabilities; what information he has about the number of TECs and TEC directors who have insured themselves against such risks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: None. Training and Enterprise Councils are private companies. It is for TEC directors to take such advice as they consider appropriate as to their liabilities and the advisability of personal indemnity insurance. The TEC operating agreement requires a TEC to take out and maintain adequate insurance against any losses and damages arising from fault or negligence on the part of the TEC including, but not limited to, employers' liability; public liability; directors' and officers' liability; professional indemnity and damage to property. Information relating to indemnity insurance is not collected by the Department.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what is the liability of the directors of South Thames TEC for the losses incurred before the official receivers were appointed; how these directors will be asked to account for their actions as directors for the year up to the appointment of the receivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: South Thames training and enterprise council is a private company limited by guarantee. The liability of the directors will be determined in accordance

with company law. I understand that the directors are preparing a statement on the companies affairs for the receiver in accordance with the requirements of the Insolvency Act 1986.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *619*, what was the total number of redundancies at South Thames TEC from December 1994 to date.

Mr. Paice: I understand from the receiver that 68 employees of South Thames training and enterprise council have so far been made redundant. This include employees of Routeways, a wholly owned subsidiary of South Thames TEC.

Greenwich Training Company

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from hon. Members and others regarding the future of the Greenwich Training Company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: I have received a number of representations from hon. Members and others about the future of the Greenwich Training Company. I understand that a meeting was held on Wednesday 15 February at which the directors of the Greenwich Training Company agreed to continue trading. The decision was made after the directors received assurances from South London training and enterprise council that it will contract with the company for 1995–96 if its proposals for assuming TEC responsibilities in the London borough of Greenwich are successful.

Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the costs of legal aid made available to complaintants by the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action, broken down by *(a)* those relating to arrangements for legal aid, *(b)* legal representation to complainants, *(c)* legal advice given to inquirers and *(d)* sundry costs associated with cost of proceedings and preliminary activities associated with the preparing for those proceedings, for each year since 1993;

(2) how many complainants provided their own legal representatives or advisers and were reimbursed by the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action, broken down by *(a)* nature or category of complaint and *(b)* category of company, organisation or individual for each year since 1993;

(3) how many of the inquiries and complaints made to the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action were from *(a)* trade union members, *(b)* executive members of companies or organisations and *(c)* non-executive members of companies or organisations, broken down by (i) managerial and professional grades and (ii) manual and non-manual workers for each year since 1993;

(4) how many applications made to the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action were withdrawn for each year since 1993;

(5) how many cases were brought to the courts by the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial action for each year since 1993, broken down by *(a)* the number of cases lost and *(b)* the number of cases successfully brought by the commission on behalf of complainants for each year since 1993;

(6) if he will list the costs of legal aid and legal advice made available to complainants, broken down by *(a)* nature or category of complaint and *(b)* category of complainant or inquirer paid for by the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for each year since 1993;

(7) how many *(a)* formal applications and *(b)* inquiries have been received by the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action in each year since 1993;

(8) if he will list the formal applications made to, and inquiries received by the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action in each year since 1993 broken down by the categories of applicant and inquirer;

(9) if he will list the previous legal, industrial relations or labour law work experience of Gill Rowlands, prior to her appointment as Commissioner to the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action;

(10) if he will give a breakdown of all income received by the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for each year since 1993;

(11) if he will give a breakdown of the nature of complaints made to the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for each year since 1993;

(12) if he will list those organisations in the private and public sectors who received a mailshot letter from the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994;

(13) if he will list the overseas visits and activities undertaken by the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for each year since 1993;

(14) if he will list United Kingdom visits and activities undertaken by the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for each year since 1993;

(15) if he will list the request for information regarding the role of the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action from overseas countries in each case giving a summary of the nature of the information provided for each years since 1993;

(16) if he will list the costs of the overseas and United Kingdom visits made by the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for each year since 1993 breaking down the individual costs incurred for each country visited;

(17) what are *(a)* the salary costs and *(b)* the number of hours worked in respect of the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for each year since 1993;

(18) how many staff currently work for the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action; and what are the direct and indirect pay costs and operating expenses associated with the provision of his service, for each year since 1993.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answers 15 February 1995]:* There is no Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action. The independent Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action can

provide material assistance to individuals contemplating or taking certain proceedings against trade unions.

The present commissioner, Mrs. Gill Rowlands, has also, since 1988, been the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members. Prior to her appointment, she was chairman of the Liverpool and Manchester industrial tribunal from 1978 to 1988, and was for 12 years a justice of the peace on the Wirral bench. She read law at Kings college, London and was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn in 1952.

The salary costs of the Commissioner for the relevant years are:

1993–94 £8,299.00 (August 1993 to March 1994)
1994–95 £15,213.44 (April 1994 to date)

The Commissioner is contracted to work for seven and a half hours, one day per week.

I understand from the Commissioner that:

One formal application for assistance was made in 1994 which was withdrawn in the same year. The application was made on the basis that the National Union of Teachers was organising industrial action without the protection of the statutory immunities.

Some 140 inquiries were received by her office in 1993–94, and 476 in the 1994–95 year (to date).

No legal costs have been incurred or paid.

No information on the occupations or union membership of those making inquiries or complaints to the Commissioner is held.

Apart from grant in aid from my Department, no income has been received by the commissioner.

No mailshots were carried out in 1993. In 1994, mailshots were sent to:

Advice centres
Citizens advice bureaux
Employment Service offices
Training and enterprise councils
Solicitors
Libraries
Law centres
ACAS offices
All Members of Parliament

No overseas visits or activities have been undertaken.

It is not possible to list all the visits and activities undertaken in the United Kingdom as to do so would, in certain instances, breach the Commissioner's guarantee of confidentiality. However, they include meetings with lawyers, Government Departments, academics and others, presentations, public speaking engagements and media interviews.

Requests for information regarding the role of the commissioner were received from the following overseas countries:

1993

Kenya

Request for information on the commissioner's role and on any other United Kingdom industrial relations matters. A copy of the commissioner's guide and a selection of Employment Department leaflets were provided.

1994

Japan

A guide and annual report were requested by a student at Shimane university. They were provided.

Spain

A guide and annual report were requested by the Director of Documentation, Council of Social and Economic Affairs. Copies were provided.

France

General information was requested by a student. Copies of the commissioner's annual report and guide were sent together with a selection of Employment Department industrial relations leaflets.

Greece

General information requested by a professor at Athens—University. Copies of the guide and annual report were provided.

Information regarding the commissioner's travel costs is not held separately. The costs of domestic travel and subsistence for the Commissioner's office for the relevant years are as follows:

1993–94 £1,503.00 (August 1993—March 1994)
1994–95 £1,492.68 (to date)

Five staff provide support for both the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members and the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action. The pay and operational costs apportioned to the latter's office have been:

1993–94 (August 1993—March 1994)
Staff salaries: £19,151.00
Accommodation: £3,737.00
Fuel and Utilities: £1,454.00

1994–95 (to date)
Staff salaries: £33,309.00
Accommodation: £8,108.33
Fuel and Utilities: £1,585.33

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what were the costs of all overseas and United Kingdom visits made by the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989 broken down by individual country;

(2) if he will give a breakdown of the income received by the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989;

(3) if he will list all United Kingdom visits and activities undertaken by the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989;

(4) if he will list the costs of legal aid made available to complainants by the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members, broken down by *(a)* those involving arrangements for legal aid, *(b)* legal representation to complainants, *(c)* legal advice given to inquirers and *(d)* sundry costs associated with the cost of proceedings and preliminary activities associated with preparing for those proceedings for each year since 1989;

(5) of the inquiries and complaints made to the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members how many were from *(a)* trade union members, *(b)* executive members of companies or organisations and *(c)* non-executive members of companies or organisations, broken down by (i) managerial and professional grades and (ii) manual and non-manual workers for each year since 1989;

(6) how many cases were brought to the courts by the Commission for Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989 broken down by *(a)* the number of cases lost and *(b)* the number of cases successfully brought by the commission on behalf of complainants for each year since 1989;

(7) if he will list *(a)* the formal applications made to and *(b)* inquiries received by the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989 broken down by category of applicant and inquirer;

(8) if he will list the legal, employment and industrial relations work experience of Gill Rowlands, prior to her appointment as Commissioner to the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members;

(9) if he will list *(a)* the salary costs of and *(b)* the number of hours worked by the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989;

(10) if he will list those organisations in the private and public sectors who received a mailshot letter from the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members for *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994;

(11) if he will list all overseas visits and activities undertaken by the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989;

(12) if he will list the conclusions contained in the evidence provided by the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members to Mr. Fujikawa from the University of Tokyo in respect of his research project on United Kingdom industrial relations conducted in 1994;

(13) if he will place in the Library a copy of the papers delivered to *(a)* the International Conference of Labour lawyers at Lodz university and *(b)* the lecture given to Torun university in Poland in 1994 by the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members;

(14) if he will list the requests from overseas countries for information regarding the role of the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members; and if he will give a summary of the information provided to these countries for each year since 1989;

(15) how many complainants who provided their own legal representatives or advisers were reimbursed by the Commission for Rights of Trade Union Members, broken down *(a)* by nature or category of complaint and *(b)* by category of company, organisation, or individuals, for each years since 1989;

(16) how many applications made to the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members were withdrawn for each year since 1989;

(17) if he will list the cost of legal aid and legal advice made available to complainants paid for by the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members broken down by *(a)* nature of category of complaint and *(b)* category of complainant or inquirer for each year since 1989;

(18) how many *(a)* formal applications and *(b)* inquiries were received by the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989;

(19) if he will give a breakdown of the nature of complaints made to the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members for each year since 1989;

(20) how many staff are employed by the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members; and what were *(a)* the direct and indirect pay costs and *(b)* the operating expenses associated with the provision of this service for each year since 1989.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answers 15 February 1995]:* There is no Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members. The independent Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members can provide material assistance to individuals contemplating or taking certain proceedings against trade unions, their officials or trustees.

Prior to her appointment, the present Commissioner, Mrs. Gill Rowlands, was chairman of the Liverpool and Manchester Industrial Tribunal from 1978 to 1988, and was for 12 years a justice of the peace on the Wirral bench. She read law at Kings college London, and was called to the Bar at Grays Inn in 1952.

The salary paid to the Commissioner has been as follows:

1989–90	£18,795.00
1990–91	£23,265.00 (12 month period)
1991–92	£31,174.00 (13 month period)
1992–93	£29,400.00
1993–94	£32,715.00
1994–95	£30,426.50 (to date)

The commissioner is contracted to work two days per week, seven and a half hours per day.

I understand from the Commissioner that the total travel and subsistence costs for herself and her staff have been as follows:

1989–90	£3,200.00 (all within the UK)
1990–91	£7,147.00 (all within the UK)
1991–92	£8,332.00 (all within the UK)
1992–93	£19,121.00 (all within the UK)
1993–94	£5,580.00 (UK and two visits to Poland)
1994–95	£6,052.80 (to date—all within the UK)

The total cost of the Commissioner's only overseas visits—to Poland on a lecture tour organised by Torun university and for a presentation to the International Conference of Labour Lawyers at Lodz university during 1993–94—was £1,265.00. The papers delivered by her on these visits will be placed in the Library.

Other than grant in aid from my Department, the Commissioner receives no "income" other than receipts representing the return of legal costs. These receipts, all of which have been returned to the Consolidated Fund, have been as follows:

1989–90	nil
1990–91	nil
1991–92	£32,477.00
1992–93	£5,462.00
1993–94	£35,643,00
1994–95	£4,427.04 (to date)

To list the Commissioner's visits and activities in the form requested would, in certain instances, breach the guarantee of confidentiality which the Commissioner provides to those who contact her. Visits within the UK have involved meetings with lawyers, Government Departments, trade union members and others, as well as presentations, speaking engagements and media interviews.

The Commissioner is not involved in the provision of legal aid, nor does she offer legal advice to inquirers. The assistance made available to enable applicants to obtain legal advice and—if necessary—bring proceedings has been as follows:

1989–90	£17,893.00
1990–91	£75,803.00
1991–92	£85,588.00
1992–93	£193,265.00
1993–94	£93,763.00
1994–95	£108,002.00 (to date).

No statistics about inquirers' background or status are available before 1991–92. Even then, a number of inquirers were not prepared to release information about themselves. The number who have identified themselves as trade union members is as follows:

1991–92 277
1992–93 237
1993–94 234
1994–95 190 (to date)

No further information is available about the status of inquirers.

While the Commissioner herself does not bring cases to court, proceedings brought with her assistance have been as follows:

	Won by assisted person	*Lost by assisted person*
1988–89	Nil	Nil
1989–90	Nil	2
1990–91	Nil	Nil
1991–92	5	Nil
1992–93	4	1
1993–94	1	Nil
1994–95	3	[1]Nil

Note:
The majority of complaints for which assistance was granted were settled without the need to bring cases to court.
[1] To date.

The subject matter of formal applications for the Commissioner's assistance has been as follows—where no figure is given, there were no relevant applications in the year concerned; complaints about breaches of certain union rules have been in scope of the Commissioner's assistance only since the 1990–91 year:

Union failure to ballot on industrial action
1988–89 1
1989–90 6
1990–91 1
1991–92 1
1992–93 1
1994–95 1 (to date)

Union failure to allow inspection of accounting records
1988–89 2
1989–90 6
1992–93 3
1993–94 2
1994–95 7 (to date)

Unlawful use of trade union property
1988–89 1
1989–90 1
1990–91 1
1991–92 3
1992–93 2
1993–94 1

Unlawful union expenditure on party political activities
1991–92 1

Union failure to comply with statutory duties for election to certain union offices
1988–89 7
1990–91 8
1991–92 9
1992–93 6
1993–94 3
1994–95 2 (to date)

Application of union property to pay a penalty imposed on an individual by a court
1994–95 1 (to date)

Union failure to maintain, and provide access to, its membership register
1994–95 1 (to date)

Breach of union rules concerning election to/removal from office
1990–91 7
1991–92 13
1992–93 8
1993–94 10
1994–95 13 (to date)

Breach of union rules concerning disciplinary action
1990–91 6
1991–92 2
1992–93 10
1993–94 10
1994–95 8 (to date)

Breach of union rules concerning balloting of members
1991–92 7
1992–93 4
1993–94 3
1994–95 2 (to date)

Breach of union rules concerning application of funds or property
1991–92 2
1992–93 1
1993–94 1
1994–95 1 (to date)

Constitution or proceedings of union conference, committee or similar body
1990–91 3
1991–92 7
1992–93 5
1993–94 5
1994–95 7 (to date)

Out of scope
1988–89 6
1989–90 9
1990–91 8
1991–92 19
1992–93 10
1993–94 12
1994–95 4 (to date)

The subject matter of inquiries received, with figures on a similar basis, is classified as follows:

Commissioner's role (general)
1988–89 10
1989–90 15
1990–91 9
1991–92 26
1992–93 194
1993–94 231
1994–95 80 (to date)

Member's right to a ballot before being called on to take official industrial action
1989–90 16
1990–91 5
1991–92 5
1992–93 3
1993–94 4

Balloting of union members (general)
1991–92 12
1992–93 18
1993–94 14
1994–95 12 (to date)

Union withholding information from members
1988–89 1
1989–90 2
1990–91 1
1994–95 1 (to date)

Union disciplinary action
1988–89 4
1989–90 96
1990–91 31
1991–92 9
1992–93 5
1993–94 6
1994–95 3 (to date)

Operation of union disciplinary procedures
1991–92 19
1992–93 26
1993–94 14
1994–95 13 (to date)

Closed shop/union membership requirements for employment
1988–89 4
1989–90 15
1990–91 21
1991–92 20
1992–93 15
1993–94 4
1994–95 1 (to date)

Selection/election of union officials
1988–89 1
1989–90 14
1990–91 11
1992–93 3
1993–94 2
1994–95 1 (to date)

Lack of/inadequate union representation by officials
1988–89 8
1989–90 57
1990–91 50
1991–92 88
1992–93 91
1993–94 121
1994–95 97 (to date)

Control/organisation of union meetings
1988–89 1
1989–90 4
1990–91 3
1991–92 1
1992–93 5

Access to union accounting records
1988–89 1
1989–90 19
1990–91 2
1991–92 9
1992–93 4
1993–94 2
1994–95 5 (to date)

Unlawful use of union funds by trustees
1988–89 1
1989–90 6
1990–91 2
1991–92 13
1992–93 2
1993–94 3
1994–95 3 (to date)

Provision of union benefits/facilities
1988–89 1
1989–90 11
1990–91 6
1991–92 11
1992–93 12
1993–94 8
1994–95 4 (to date)

Ballots on union political funds
1989–90 1
1994–95 1 (to date)

Ballots on union executive elections
1989–90 27
1990–91 22
1991–92 21
1992–93 9
1993–94 4
1994–95 2 (to date)

Unlawful use of union funds for party political purposes
1989–90 1
1990–91 1
1991–92 1
1992–93 1
1994–95 1 (to date)

Application of union funds or property
1991–92 8
1992–93 2
1993–94 3
1994–95 3 (to date)

Terms and conditions of employment
1989–90 24
1990–91 28
1991–92 27
1992–93 22
1993–94 23
1994–95 11 (to date)

Constitution or proceedings of a union conference or other body
1990–91 6
1991–92 15
1992–93 8
1993–94 8
1994–95 8 (to date)

Appointment to, or removal from, union office
1991–92 25
1992–93 14
1993–94 17
1994–95 6 (to date)

Union subscription payments
1992–93 2
1993–94 1
1994–95 2 (to date)

Grievance against employer
1992–93 1
1993–94 2

Inter-union membership agreements
1992–93 1
1994–95 3 (to date)

Others not included in above
1989–90 16
1990–91 35
1991–92 35
1992–93 34
1993–94 35
1994–95 24 (to date)

During 1993 and 1994, the Commissioner issued a mailshot to everyone attending the Institute of Personnel Managers Conference and Exhibition in 1992 and 1993 respectively. In 1993, she issued a mailshot to all members of the North West Law Society, and in 1994 to all Members of Parliament. All mailshots were to individuals.

The Commissioner provided neither conclusions nor evidence in her discussion with Mr. Fujikawa, but outlined how her office considers applications for assistance, and supplied him with copies of her annual reports and guides.

All requests from overseas have been for information about the Commissioner's activities and role. In all cases, the individuals making such inquiries were supplied with a copy of the Commissioner's annual report(s), or guides. Inquiries were received from individuals from the following countries:

1989–90 Japan, Canada, Malaysia, Greece, USA, Romania
1991–92 Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Japan, Taiwan, USA
1992–93 Netherlands
1993–94 USA, Germany, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia.

No applicant awarded assistance has been reimbursed by the Commissioner. Legal costs are paid direct to the applicant's solicitor on behalf of the applicant. Assistance has been provided only to individuals. The basis of applications assisted in particular years has been as follows:

Member's right to a ballot before official industrial action
1989–90 2
1991–92 1
1994–95 1 (to date)

Right of access to union accounting records
1989–90 1
1992–93 1
1993–94 2

Use of union funds to indemnify unlawful conduct
1994–95 1 (to date)

Unlawful use of union property by trustees
1988–89 1
1994–95 1 (to date)

Union failure to comply with statutory duties for election to certain offices
1989–90 3
1990–91 3
1991–92 2
1992–93 2
1993–94 1
1994–95 1 (to date)

Breach of union rules for appointment or election to office
1990–91:1
1991–92 2
1992–93 1
1993–94 3
1994–95 1 to date

Breach of union rules for disciplinary proceedings
1990–91 1
1992–93 1
1993–94 2

Breach of union rules on balloting of members
1992–93 1

Breach of union rules on application of funds or property
1994–95 2 (to date)

Breach of union rules on constitution or proceedings of a committee, conference or other body
1991–92 3
1993–94 2

The number of applicants for the Commissioner's assistance who failed to progress their applications is as follows:

1989–90 4
1990–91 2
1991–92 7
1992–93 2
1993–94 1
1994–95 2 (to date).

The costs of assistance provided to particular applicants cannot be allocated to particular operational years. Relevant expenditure by nature of the complaint is as follows:

Member's right to a ballot before official industrial action—£17,627
Right of access to union accounting records—£16,268
Use of union funds to indemnify unlawful conduct—£3,760
Unlawful use of union property by trustees—£103,566
Union failure to comply with statutory duties for election to certain offices—£148,475
Breach of union rules for appointment or election to office—£104,569
Breach of union rules for disciplinary proceedings—£9,793
Breach of union rules on balloting of members—£1,022
Breach of union rules on application of funds or property—£12,441
Breach of union rules on constitution or proceedings of a committee, conference or other body—£39,030.

Formal applications for assistance, and inquiries, received have been as follows:

	Formal applications	*Enquiries*
1988–89	10	37
1989–90	29	324
1990–91	34	233
1991–92	64	345
1992–93	50	473
1993–94	47	502
1994–95[1]	47	281

[1] To date.

Five staff provide support for both the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members and, since her appointment in 1993, the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action. The pay and operational costs, and apportioned costs, of the Commissioner's office have been:

1989–90
Staff salaries: £66,126
Accommodation: £20,896
Fuel and utilities: £1,162

1990–91
Staff salaries: £84,536
Accommodation: £15,693
Fuel and utilities: £4,817

1991–92
Staff salaries: £109,272
Accommodation: £14,555
Fuel and utilities: £4,168

1992–93
Staff salaries: £118,047
Accommodation: £17,938
Fuel and utilities: £4,005

1993–94
Staff salaries: £92,890
Accommodation: £11,362
Fuel and utilities: £5,633

1994–95
Staff salaries: £66,619
Accommodation: £16,216
Fuel and utilities: £3,178

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what was the financial provision from grants in aid from the Employment Department's Supply Estimates to *(a)* the Commission for the Rights of Individual Trade Union Members for each year since 1989 and *(b)* the Commission for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action for each year since 1993.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The estimates provision for grant in aid, and grant in aid actually received from the Department, have been as follows:

Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members

Year	Provision (£)	Actually received (£)
1989–90	800,000	246,000
1990–91	280,000	263,000
1991–92	500,000	291,000
1992–93	514,000	431,000
1993–94	375,000	276,000
1994–95	344,000	[1]257,000

[1] To date.

Commissioner for Protection against Unlawful Industrial Action

Year	Provision (£)	Actually received (£)
1993–94	148,000	88,000
1994–95	191,000	[1]96,000

[1] To date.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Mobile Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what backing he is giving to the development and use of mobile abattoirs.

Mrs. Browning: All slaughterhouses, including mobile abattoirs, must meet the structural and hygiene standards set out in the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992 and have to be licensed by the appropriate Agriculture Department. Officials of the State Vetrinary Service have given, and will continue to give, advice and encouragement to any project to design and establish a mobile abattoir. At present, there are no mobile abattoirs in use in England.

Cheese Production

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the fall in UK cheese production since the demise of the Milk Marketing Board; and what action he plans to take to reverse it and restore the production of quality speciality cheese.

Mr. Jack: Figures for cheese production since 1 November 1994 are not yet available. However, one of the biggest problems for cheese makers under the old milk marketing arrangements was the withdrawal of milk supplies by the MMB at short notice. They now enjoy greater security of supply for their milk.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Ministerial Visits

Mr. MacShane: (1) To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

(2) To ask the Minister without Portfolio what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Mr. Hunt: We have no present plans to do so.

SCOTLAND

M77

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the formal notice of complaint No 95/40005 SG(95)/A/287 from the European Commission, relating to the Ayr road route M77 was received by his Department; and what response has been made.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The Government have received no formal notice of complaint from the Commission.

Legal Aid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when was the last occasion upon which advice was received on the matter of civil eligibility for legal aid from the Scottish Legal Aid Board;

(2) if he will implement advice given by the Scottish Legal Aid Board in 1991 in its response to his Department's consultation paper on eligibility for civil legal aid in Scotland to the effect that the fixed upper limit should be abolished and replaced by some other form of universal eligibility or flexible upper limit;

(3) what representations he has received from the Scottish Legal Aid Board following implementation of the new financial limits for eligibility for legal aid.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has received no representations from the Scottish Legal Aid Board on the question of eligibility for civil legal aid since the advice on proposed changes to eligibility for advice and assistance referred to in my reply to the hon. Members question of 12 February 1993, *Official Report*, columns *849-50*. In setting eligibility limits, the Government must make a judgement as to the correct level, having regard on the one hand to providing access to legal services to those unable to afford them, and on the other to the need to control the level of public expenditure. Against this background, the Government have no plans to abolish the fixed upper eligibility limit.

Abortions

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many abortions were performed in England and Wales, on women resident in each health authority in 1993; and, of these operations, how many were performed in NHS hospitals.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested for 1993 is not yet available. Information on abortions performed in England and Wales is provided by the Office of Population Census and Surveys. This data will be available within the next few months.

Scottish Health Common Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what consultations he had with the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning W. S. Atkins' part in designing Ysbyty Gwynedd hospital, Bangor, Gwynedd, prior to the decision to sell Scottish Health Common Services to the company;

(2) what information he has concerning the level of compensation paid by W. S. Atkins and Partners in 1988 to the Welsh Health Common Services authority in cognisance of the design faults at Ysbyty Gwynedd hospital, Bangor, before his decision to sell Scottish Health Common Services to the company.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* None. The decision to sell the building division of the Common Services Agency for the NHS in Scotland to W. S. Atkins Ltd. followed an extensive competitive tendering exercise.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the occasions during the last five years when his Department or its agencies has taken legal action against a consultancy firm; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* On no occasion during the last five years has my Department or its agencies taken legal action against a consultancy firm.

Health Care International

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who were the members of the Scottish Industrial Development Advisory Committee when Government support for HCI in Clydebank was confirmed; and what is the industrial or commercial background of those members.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* The provision of regional selective assistance for Health Care International was considered and approved by the Scottish Industrial Development Advisory Board, first in April 1988 and subsequently in February 1990.

Listed below are the SIDAB members at the relevant dates:

April 1988	*February 1990*
Y. Ali	Y. Ali
K. Fox	B. J. Fox
T. Johnston	K. Fox
B. F. Lawson	J. J. G. Good
J. M. Little	J. C. G. Halley
D. J. MacLeod	J. M. Little
A. Merrills	D. J. MacLeod
D. M. Paterson	A. Merrills
J. C. Shaw	D. M. Paterson
A. K. Smith	J. C. Shaw
Sir R. Smith	A. K. Smith
R. Thomson	P. Timms

The members represented a range of backgrounds including industry and commerce, banking and finance, and the trade unions.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies House (Sickness)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, columns *552–53*, if he will restate the Companies House sickness absence level on the management control basis.

Mr. Heseltine: Sickness absence rates, expressed as a percentage of contracted hours for each member of staff, were as follows:

Year	*Per cent.*
1991	4.9
1992	5.4
1993	5.3
1994	4.9

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the contingent liabilities and interest generated under section 2 of the Export and Overseas Investment Guarantees Act 1978 and charged to the Consolidated Fund accounts in each year since 1981.

Mr. Needham: ECGD's liabilities under section 2 of the 1978 Act, as notified in the Department's statutory return, were as follows:

Year Ending	*£ thousands*
31 March 1983	21,286
31 March 1984	22,590
31 March 1985	23,641
31 March 1986	21,043
31 March 1987	20,326
31 March 1988	19,442
31 March 1989	20,737
31 March 1990	16,767
31 March 1991	15,096

No record is held of the figure prior to March 1983. Likewise no information is available after March 1991 as the section 2 category lapsed when the 1978 Act was superseded by the 1991 Export and Investment Guarantees Act.

ECGD's accounting records have been maintained on a basis which allows interest earned or charged to the notional section 2 Consolidated Fund balance to be detailed only up to the 31 March 1987. The amounts were as follows:

Year	*£ Million*
1981–82	+53.7
1982–83	+32.3
1983–84	+14.7
1984–85	–3.4
1985–86	–17.4
1986–87	–37.1

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much interest support payments from the Ministry of Defence are shown in the annual accounts of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Needham: The level of contributions from the Ministry of Defence towards interest support payments, as shown in the appropriation accounts of the Export Credits Guarantee Department, are as follows:

Year	*£*
1986–87	894,000
1987–88	972,000
1988–89	1,119,000
1989–90	993,000
1990–91	1,058,000
1991–92	920,000
1992–93	797,000
1993–94	597,000

The above totals relate to the interest support scheme reported under ECGD's export finance assistance vote.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Mr. Heseltine: At present I have no plans to visit Hong Kong during 1995. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade is hoping to make a trade promotion visit to Hong Kong in the autumn.

Lebanon

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the involvement of the British Government in the promotion of British business interests in the reconstruction of central Beirut.

Mr. Needham: Working in close collaboration with the British embassy in Beirut we have, through a series of promotional events and other activities, ensured that United Kingdom business is fully aware of the opportunities arising from the reconstruction of Beirut. This has included support for trade missions, the "Rebuild Lebanon", and other exhibitions, which have the reconstruction of Beirut as one of their themes. British commercial interests have also been promoted during ministerial visits which have included business men from the UK construction sector.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on economic relations between the UK and Lebanon.

Mr. Needham: Since the end of the civil war, our trade and economic links with the Lebanon have grown steadily; in 1994 our exports reached £138 million. The Lebanese Prime Minister visited the UK in January 1994 and there are regular contacts at ministerial and official level involving economic and trade issues. I look forward to the continuing and mutually beneficial growth in these links.

Inward Investment

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much inward investment there has been in Britain by Taiwanese firms in the past five years by value, number of projects and number of jobs created; and how much has gone to Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Eggar: All but one of the manufacturing investments by Taiwanese companies in Europe are in the UK. Since 1990, four companies have set up manufacturing operations in Britain creating or safeguarding nearly 700 jobs. All these investments are located in England. Two further companies have announced their intention to invest in Northern Ireland and one in Wales.

I am unable to release the figure for the value of the investments as it is commercially sensitive.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *557*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* I am currently responsible for a total of over 630 public appointments. In 1994, a total of 212 appointments, including re-appointments were made.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Expenditure on advertising from my Department's central publicity budget since 1979–80 at 1994–95 prices is as follows:

Year	*£000*
1979–80	3,892
1980–81	7,677
1981–82	7,546
1982–83	6,105
1983–84	6,701
1984–85	8,219
1985–86	7,797
1986–87	45,769
1987–88	15,256
1988–89	27,061
1989–90	13,166
1990–91	7,601
1991–92	1,056
1992–93	1,197
1993–94	800

I have asked chief executives of DTI agencies to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Hobday to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 February 1995:

I refer to your question to the President of the Board of Trade concerning expenditure on advertising.

The Accounts Services Agency have spent £995 exclusive of VAT during the current financial year. This is the first year since the Agency's creation in October 1991 in which expenditure has been incurred.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 February 1995:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question asking about the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by Departments and Agencies since 1979, in 1994 prices.

Following the answer given by the President of the Board of Trade, I am replying as Chief Executive of Companies House which

became an Executive Agency of the Department of Trade and Industry in October 1988.

Companies House Executive Agency advertising expenditure at 1994/95 prices is as follows:

1989–90 £380,265
1990–91 £260,288
1991–92 £207,670
1992–93 £348,932
1993–94 £206,040
1994/95—£174,000 year to date

These figures include expenditure on advertising to raise the awareness of Late Filing Penalties and inform and remind companies of the due dates for filing.

I hope this is helpful to you.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 February 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about Insolvency Service expenditure on advertising.

The Insolvency Service, which became an Executive Agency in March 1990, does not place advertisements of its business. Official Receivers of The Service are required to place in newspapers and other journals notices concerning specific matters relating to individual insolvencies, for example notice of the making of a bankruptcy order. The cost of these notices are a charge on the estates of bankrupts and companies in compulsory liquidation.

Letter from R.D. Worswick to Mr. Malcolm Bruce dated 15 February 1995:

PQ ON ADVERTISING

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to write to you about the advertising spend by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC).

LGC's spend on external advertising is concentrated in the trade press to promote seminars and other similar scientific events. We also spend modest amounts on recruitment advertising but this is not included in the figures below.

Information before 1991 is not readily available but I am not aware of any reason to believe that the spend over the last couple of years is not typical of our expenditure in earlier years. In 1991/92 we spent £3,000, in 1992/93 we spent £6,000 and in 1993/94 we spent £4,000 on all forms of advertising (all figures in 1994 prices).

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. Malcolm Bruce dated 17 February 1995:

I refer to your question to the President of the Board of Trade on the subject of the expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry and its Agencies on all forms of advertising. The expenditure by year in 1994 prices since the vesting of NEL as an Agency on 6 October 1990 is as shown on the attached schedule.

I trust you will find this information satisfactory for your purposes.

Expenditure by Nel on all forms of advertising

	£(1994)
FY 90/91	[illegible]932
FY 91/92	[illegible]745
FY 92/93	23,796
FY 93/94	10,511
FY 94/95 (to date)	5,844

Letter from Peter Clapham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 February 1995:

I am writing in response to your question to the President of the Board of Trade about expenditure by his department and its agencies on advertising.

NPL became an Executive Agency in July 1990, but advertising (other than recruitment advertising) was covered by the department's central publicity budget until 1991/92. Since then expenditure (including recruitment advertising) has been as follows (including VAT) in 1994 prices:

1991–92 £82,000
1992–93 £46,000
1993–94 £45,000.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 February 1995:

EXPENDITURE ON ADVERTISING

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about expenditure on advertising.

While NWML takes every opportunity to bring its activities to the attention of interested parties, the use of paid advertising is rare and there has been no such expenditure since 1992. Expenditure in previous years, for which figures are not readily available, was limited to occasional advertisements in specialist journals.

Letter from P.R.S. Hartnack to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 February 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to provide you with information relating to the Patent Office, as part of the reply to your question on advertising expenditure in the DTI and its agencies since 1979.

The figures for advertising expenditure by the Patent Office are supplied below, covering the years 1990/91–1993/94 (at 1994/95 prices and inclusive of VAT) since the Patent Office became an Executive Agency in 1991. Any advertising expenditure on intellectual property prior to 1990/91 will have been subsumed in general Departmental advertising.

Advertising expenditure in the Patent Office

1990–91 £57,000
1991–92 £54,000
1992–93 £410,000
1993–94 £417,000

I hope this information is helpful to you.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 17 February 1995:

ADVERTISING COSTS

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about advertising costs for this Agency.

Since becoming an Agency in 1990 the Agency has spent the following on publicity:

1990–91 £171,426
1991–92 £216,166
1992–93 £289,222
1993–94 £244,953

Publicity includes a wide range of information distributed by the Agency which is not wholly 'advertising'. Although we do not have separate figures for advertising as such we estimate this represents around 30 per cent. of the annual outturn figures above.

Prior to 1990, the then Radio Regulatory Division's advertising costs would have been contained within the overall DTI figures which you have.

EDUCATION

Secondary Schools (Spending)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the average spending per pupil is in secondary schools in the northern region; and what the figure was in 1978 at current prices.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table below shows expenditure by 32 LEAs in the north of England on secondary pupils, for 1978–79 and 1992–93, the latest year for which final information is available, in 1994–95 prices. The average is an increase in real terms in 54 per cent.

Secondary schools	Northern region Cost per pupil 1978–79 in 1994–95 prices £	Cost per pupil 1992–93 in 1994–95 prices £
Bolton	1,470	2,396
Bury	1,434	2,071
Manchester	1,876	2,550
Oldham	1,450	2,600
Rochdale	1,645	2,294
Salford	1,558	2,221
Stockport	1,446	2,405
Tameside	1,509	2,281
Trafford	1,430	2,396
Wigan	1,540	2,403
Barnsley	1,573	2,261
Doncaster	1,416	2,294
Rotherham	1,517	2,402
Sheffield	1,637	2,325
Bradford	1,416	1,915
Calderdale	1,505	2,274
Kirklees	1,402	2,313
Leeds	1,252	2,520
Wakefield	1,407	2,179
Gateshead	1,534	2,400
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,779	2,243
North Tyneside	1,570	2,332
South Tyneside	1,613	2,310
Sunderland	1,569	2,246
Cheshire	1,527	2,178
Cleveland	1,520	2,644
Cumbria	1,541	2,424
Durham	1,472	2,169
Humberside	1,480	2,342
Lancashire	1,477	2,439
North Yorkshire	1,487	2,376
Northumberland	1,489	1,966
Total (average)	1,504	2,321

Schools, Bolton

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much money is held in reserves by schools in Bolton.

Mr. Robin Squire: Some £2.291 million, net, at the end of the financial year 1993–94. This figure relates to schools then covered by the local education authority's scheme for the local management of schools. Information relating to financial balances held by grant-maintained schools is held by the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member.

Incorporated Colleges

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the proportion of spending on staffing of the total of each incorporated college's expenditure; and what is the proportion of total expenditure on teaching staff for each college, in the first accounting period.

Mr. Boswell: This information is not collected by the Department.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for many pupils *(a)* in the Northern Region of England and *(b)* in each school in the region received assistance under the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Robin Squire: There were 9,382 pupils holding assisted places in the Northern Region of England in academic year 1993–94, the latest year for which complete figures are available. The number of assisted pupils in each school in the region is given in the following table.

Assisted places scheme 1993–94 academic year

School name	Number of assisted place holders
Ackworth	20
Arnold School, Blackpool	80
Ashville College	11
Austin Friars	12
Barnard Castle	20
Batley Grammar	257
Belvedere GPDST	173
Birkenhead	196
Birkenhead High GPDST	243
Bolton School Boys	263
Bolton School Girls	256
Bootham, York	25
Bradford Girls Grammar	62
Bradford Grammar School	230
Bury Grammar Boys	204
Bury Grammar Girls	251
Casterton	52
Central Newcastle High GPDST	130
Cheadle Hulme	132
Dame Allan's Boys	119
Dame Allan's Girls	129
Durham	36
Giggleswick, Settle	17
Harrogate College	17
Hipperholme Grammar	12
Hulme Grammar Boys	213
Hulme Grammar Girls	188
Hymer's College	144
King Edward VII Lytham	221
King's, Chester	95
King's, Macclesfield	173
King's, Tynemouth	20
Kirkham Grammar	80
La Sagesse Convent	155
Leeds Girls High	87
Leeds Grammar	178
Liverpool College	183
Loreto Convent Grammar	48
Manchester Grammar	261
Manchester High	171
Merchant Taylors Girls	192
Merchant Taylors, Liverpool	226
Mount Carmel, Cheshire	25
Mount, York	24
Newcastle upon Tyne Church High	24
Pocklington	149
Polam Hall	35
Queen Elizabeth, Blackburn	261
Queen Elizabeth, Wakefield	130
Queen Mary, Lytham	231
Queen's School, Chester	63
Rossall	45
Royal Grammar, Newcastle	215
Scarborough College	26
Sedbergh	45
Sheffield High GPDST	99
Silcoates	12

Assisted places scheme 1993–94 academic year

School name	*Number of assisted place holders*
St. Ambrose College	58
St. Anselm's College	206
St. Bede's College	220
St. Bees	72
St. Edward's College	398
St. Mary's College, Crosby	251
St. Peter's, York	107
Stockport Grammar	236
Stoneyhurst College	34
Teesside High	19
Upton Hall Convent	168
Wakefield High	149
Westholme	25
William Hulme Gramnar	220
Withington Girls	79
Woodhouse Grove	137
Yarm	37

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many full-time students currently attend first degree courses in the North-East; and how many were doing so in 1978–79, listing by each individual institution.

Mr. Boswell: The available information is shown in the table:

Full-time and sandwich undergraduate[1] students in publicly funded FHE institutions in the North East region[2] of England

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1992/93*
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	n/a	4,759	5,025	9,390
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	6,331	6,460	6,600	9,028
University of Sunderland	n/a	2,759	2,929	8,647
University of Durham	3,701	4,083	4,157	5,863
University of Teesside	n/a	1,758	1,885	5,791
Newcastle College of Art and Technology	n/a	102	117	935
New College Durham	n/a	324	441	600
South Tyneside College	n/a	313	267	563
Cleveland College of Art and Design	n/a	0	0	202
Darlington College of Technology	n/a	20	18	104
Kirby College of FE	n/a	0	1	87
Northumberland College of Art and Technology	n/a	42	42	76
Peterlee College	n/a	0	0	66
Hartlepool College of FE	n/a	0	0	45
Durham College of Agriculture and Horticulture	n/a	0	0	27
North Tyneside College	n/a	0	1	19
Wearside College of FE	n/a	0	0	16
Bishop Auckland Technical College	n/a	0	0	10
Derwentside Tertiary College	n/a	0	0	8
Monkwearmouth College of FE	n/a	0	0	7
Gateshead Technical College	n/a	11	21	0
Total	n/a	20,631	21,504	41,484

Notes:

[1] Information is not available for institutions in the FEFC and former PCFC sectors in the form requested.

[2] Institutions shown above are those situated in NE region as defined within LEA's Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland and within counties Cleveland, Durham and Northumberland.

Source:

University Statistics Volume One: Students and Staff: 1980, 1992–93 and 1993–94 USR, Cheltenham. Statistics of Education: Universities, Volume 6: 1978 and 1979.

Higher Education Institutes

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether provision exists for higher education institutions that under-recruit on planned student numbers due to exceptional circumstances to be given exemption or relief from fiscal penalisation by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Higher Education Funding Council for England and I am asking the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances the habitual residence test is applied to asylum seekers.

Mr. Roger Evans: It was and remains Government policy that the habitual residence test should not apply to asylum seekers. The independent adjudicating authorities considered that the test applied to all income support claimants since its introduction in August 1994, including asylum seekers, but have now revised their position and concluded that the test does not apply to claimants who are already defined as "persons from abroad" in the income support rules.

Income Support

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the net gain for a person who is on income support and has worked at £3.20 per hour for *(a)* eight hours and *(b)* 16 hours, showing calculations in each case.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information for a single person is shown in the table.

As part of our plans to make work pay, we aim to pilot new help similar to family credit, but aimed at couples and single people without children. This in-work benefit will be tested in eight pilot locations over a three-year period from October 1996. A consultation document in April will provide more information on the scheme and the proposed pilot locations. If the pilot shows that a national scheme would be effective, the gain from work would increase for childless people with low or modest earnings.

Gain from work at £3.20 per hour

Hours worked	*Pay*	*Income Support*	*Rent*	*Housing Benefit*	*Council Tax*	*Council Tax Benefit*	*Total Net Income*	*Net Income after payment of rent and council tax when in work*	*Net Income after payment of rent and council tax when not in work*	*Net gain from work*
8	25.50	25.10	30.91	30.91	6.60	6.60	88.21	50.70	45.70	5.00
16	51.20	—	30.91	30.59	6.60	6.50	88.29	50.78	45.70	5.08

Notes:

1. The person is assumed to be single, aged 25 or over, living in local authority accommodation and liable for average council tax and local authority rent.
2. The person is assumed to take-up full entitlement to income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit.
3. Tax and national insurance contributions are not payable at the earnings levels shown.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of non-employed youth trainees who currently receive a top-up on their allowance and who are *(a)* liable for income tax, *(b)* liable for national insurance and *(c)* credited with national insurance contributions.

Mr. Roger Evans: Non-employed young people participating in youth training are eligible for an income support top-up if their allowance is less than benefit levels. The youth training allowance does not attract income tax or national insurance deductions; neither does income support paid to someone who is not required to register for work.

For retirement pension and widows' benefits purpose, all young people are automatically awarded class 3 national insurance credits in the tax year in which they attain their 16th birthday, and the two succeeding tax years.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, if Irish nationals are eligible to receive income support during the child benefit extension period; and what are the eligibility requirements.

Mr. Roger Evans: Income support may be claimed by unemployed young people aged 16 or 17 during the child benefit extension period if they have good reason for living away from the family home and they are registered for employment/youth training.

Unemployed Irish nationals aged 16 or 17 who are forced to live independently, with no established entitlement to child benefit in Great Britain, can claim income support under the severe hardship provision if there is no other means of support and providing they are registered for work/youth training.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give for the last five years for which figures are available the number of claims for severe hardship payments which have been *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful following review of an unsuccessful claim.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many YT trainees living away from home receive an income support top-up.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *820–21*, if he will list the sub-headings under which the Child Support Agency reports monthly performance to Ministers on *(a)* targets, *(b)* recovery plan implementation and *(c)* other issues.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Frank Field, dated 17 February 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the sub headings under which the Child Support Agency returns data to Ministers.

The sub-headings are as follows:

a) Targets; maintenance arrangements, accuracy of assessments, benefit savings, age of cases, speed of clearance, maintenance collected, fees received, and milestones (for example improving information systems).

b) Recovery Plan Implementation; generic Child Support Agency (CSAC), improved management information systems, extending information technology (IT) to Field offices, centralisation of CSAC telephone services, improved IT effectiveness, improved key processes, recruitment and deployment of additional staff, centralisation of appeals, reduced intake, Parliamentary business improvements, and review of operational accounting.

c) Other issues; specialist tracing, paternity, requirement to co-operate, and special payments.

I hope this is of help.

TREASURY

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *595*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* Some 84 appointments were made in 1994.

European Central Bank

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much the United Kingdom has agreed

to pay towards the establishment costs of the European central bank and what is the value of this sum in pounds sterling; and what legal requirement there was for the United Kingdom to make this contribution under the provisions on monetary union in the treaty of Maastricht;

(2) if he will make a statement about the basic purpose of the proposed European central bank;

(3) under what legislative provision he intends to make a payment towards the establishment costs of the European central bank; and if the decision will be subject to the approval of the Houses of Parliament.

Mr. Nelson: The UK has made no contribution towards the establishment of a European central bank. Nor would any contribution by any member state be made unless there were a decision to move to stage 3 of EMU as set out article 1091(1) of the EC treaty.

The objectives and tasks of a European system of central banks—comprising the ECB and the member states' national central banks—and the arrangements for subscribing capital, are set out in articles 2 and 6, and 28 to 29, of the protocol on the statute of the ESCB and of the ECB, annexed to the EC treaty.

Cuba (Debt)

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is Cuba's external public debt; and how much is owning to Her Majesty's Government or agencies thereof.

Mr. Nelson: We have no reliable estimate of Cuba's total external public debt. The OECD estimates Cuba's total external debt at $35 billion—end 1993.

A total of £54.6 million is currently owed to HMG under four bilateral debt rescheduling agreements. A further £17.1 million, plus late interest, remains outstanding under contracts insured by HMG through the Exports Credits Guarantee Department.

Government Expenditure

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column 1200, if he will give a break down of the identifiable Government expenditure per head in 1993–94 in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Aitken: A detailed breakdown of the identifiable Government expenditure per head in 1993–94 in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be published in the statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96" on 24 February 1995.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since its establishment in 1994 prices.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The estimated annual spend, in 1994 prices, on all forms of advertising for my Department and its two agencies is shown in the following table.

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £
DNH	[1]32,902	37,539	14,388
Historic Royal Palaces	548,299	710,750	527,238
The Royal Parks	[2]—	244	15,827

Notes:
[1] DNH took on responsibility for its own expenditure in August 1992 and this figure represents the period August 1992 to March 1993.
[2] The Royal Parks was established as an agency in 1 April 1993.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Zaire

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much food is currently needed for the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire; and how much is currently being delivered.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* Emergency food needs for Rwandan and Burundian refugees in Goma, Bukavu and Uvira in eastern Zaire are estimated by the World Food Programme to be 24,200 metric tons per month. Approximately 26,000 metric tons of food was delivered to the camps in January 1995. This supplemented stocks of approximately 5,000 metric tons already available in the camps at the beginning of the year.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what difficulties are being experienced by the World Food Programme in crossing Rwandan territory on their way to Rwandan refugees in Zaire.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* We understand that the Rwandan authorities are imposing limits on axle loads at Gatuna on the Uganda/Rwanda border and are delaying trucks crossing at Gisenyi on the Rwanda/Zaire border. The World Food Programme is currently in discussion with the Rwandan authorities to try to resolve these matters.

WALES

Cycling Accidents

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many accidents between cyclists and pedestrians occurred in 1994; and how many prosecutions there were for cycling on the footway.

Mr. Redwood: Road accident data is not yet available for the whole of 1994. Provisional data shows that there were seven accidents between cyclists and pedestrians in Wales between January and September 1994. Details of prosecutions for cycling on the footway during 1994 are not yet available.

Rail Freight

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (i) what grants are available for rail freight infrastructure development in Wales; and how much was given for each year since 1990; (ii) what incentives are currently offered for freight users to use rail as opposed to road transportation.

Mr. Redwood: The freight facilities grant scheme provides financial assistance towards the cost of providing rail freight facilities. This is an environmental grant available from the Welsh Office to encourage firms to take heavy lorries off the roads. Grant assistance of up to 50 per cent. of the capital costs of rail freight equipment is available although schemes of exceptional environmental benefit may attract a higher rate. The amount of grant paid since 1990 is as follows:

	£ million
1990–91	nil
1991–92	nil
1992–93	0.4
1993–94	0.7
1994–95	1.6

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if stone may be transported from the Tonfanau quarry into England by train using the Cambrian line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I understand from the railway operators that while it is technically feasible to transport stone on the line, the track will not bear high axle weights and loading figures would be poor.

Rail sidings which would also be required may be eligible for assistance under the Department's rail freight facilities grant scheme.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has been taken to employ load-spreading techniques on trains and tracks in Wales since 1990.

Mr. Redwood: I understand that British Rail has not used such techniques.

I hope that the privatised freight companies will consider all technologies which will enable them to expand the opportunities for attracting more freight off the roads.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals or plans he has to improve rail freight services in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: Freight services in Wales will benefit by measures provided for under the Railways Act 1993. These include improved rail freight grants, the transfer of freight services to the private sector and open access to the network for private operators. In addition, the Welsh Development Agency has been asked to consider providing a rail freight option at industrial estates, wherever practicable.

Rail Infrastructure

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what infrastructure work is currently being done on Welsh railways.

Mr. Redwood: Infrastructure works are an operational issue for Railtrack, which has a programme of investment to maintain and improve the quality of the rail infrastructure in Wales.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he will implement to locate and assist younger people who suffer from Alzheimer's disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Local and health authorities have responsibility for assessing the needs of their residents and to plan services with the resources available to them. This includes individuals who have Alzheimer's disease.

Organ Donor Register

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the NHS organ donor register was launched in Wales; and when the advertisements inviting donors to register first appeared.

Mr. Richards: The NHS organ donor register was launched on a UK-wide basis on 6 October 1994. Advertisements inviting potential donors to register appeared the following week.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the registration forms for the NHS organ donor register were made available in Wales.

Mr. Richards: A bilingual version of the new organ donor card is being produced and will be dispatched as soon as possible. In the meantime, registration forms can be obtained from the United Kingdom Transplant Support Services Authority in Bristol or alternatively it is possible to register with Lifeline Wales.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many individuals in Wales have registered with the NHS organ donor register since its launch.

Mr. Richards: Facilities do not currently exist for extracting complete lists of the nationality of potential donors from the NHS organ donor register. Details of registrants from Wales are not currently available.

Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *535*, which Glamorgan health area is referred to in the figure of 53.53.

Mr. Redwood: South Glamorgan.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made on the introduction of incentive prescribing schemes for non-fundholding practices; which family health service authorities have incentive prescribing schemes in place or definitely due to start on 1 April; and how many practices and list patients will be covered.

Mr. Redwood: All Welsh FHSAs now have prescribing incentive schemes in place. The number and list sizes of practices participating in the scheme is a matter for individual FHSAs. Payments are being authorised on an extra-statutory basis to those practices who succeed in meeting their targets. The total amount paid on this basis—estimated at £40,000 in 1994–95—will be included in FHSA summarised accounts.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his answers of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *66*, 26 January, *Official Report*, columns *379–80* and 30 January, *Official Report*, column *535*, if he will

give for each of the dates specified *(a)* the aggregate numbers of practices in the fundholding and non-fundholding categories, the total numbers of general practitioners in each category on a full time equivalent basis and the number of list patients covered, *(b)* the average prescribing costs per 1,000 patients in (i) fundholding and (ii) non-fundholding practices and *(c)* the aggregate percentage figure for all fundholders and non-fundholders in respect of brand name and generic prescribing.

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows:

(a) Aggregate numbers of practices

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
GP Fundholders	26	74	117
Numbers of list patients	294,442	706,634	967,346
Non-Fundholders	519	471	428
Numbers of list patients	2,627,100	2,247,235	2,007,724

Information regarding the numbers of full-time equivalent general practitioners in each category is not held centrally.

(b) Prescribing costs per 1000 patients

	October 1993 £	*October 1994* £
GP Fundholders	6,288	6,885
Non-Fundholders	6,866	7,331

(c) Aggregate percentage cost

	October 1993		*October 1994*	
	Generic	*Brand*	*Generic*	*Brand*
GP Fundholders	49.00	51.00	51.23	48.77
Non-Fundholders	42.39	57.61	44.55	55.45

Information in respect of October 1992 is not available.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish details of companies which have previously provided services to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and which his Department has instructed the authority not to use *(a)* at all and *(b)* except in exceptional circumstances; on what date each company was listed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Health Common Services Authority has not been instructed to avoid using any companies which had previously provided services to it. It was advised on 22 September 1988 that it should notify my Department before appointing W. S. Atkins and Partners to any major contract. On 4 January 1991, this instruction was revoked. No other companies have been subject to such notification.

Toy Libraries

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local authority the toy libraries for which he *(a)* provides and *(b)* does not provide specific grants.

Mr. Richards: No toy libraries are currently funded directly through the Department's child and family services grant scheme. Grant awards in respect of 1995–96 under this scheme will be announced shortly.

Toy libraries may apply for funding to county voluntary bodies, to which the Department awarded £59,850 in 1994–95 under the "small grant" element of the child and family services grant scheme.

Financial Allocation

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the financial allocations made by his Department to each of the health authorities in Wales in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows. It is not comparably based for the reasons explained in the footnotes to the table.

£million

	1993–94[1]		*1994–95*[2]		*1995–96*[3]	
	Revenue allocation	*Capital allocation*	*Revenue allocation*	*Capital allocation*	*Revenue allocation*	*Capital allocation*
Clwyd	161.110	1.634	171.322	0.082	199.762	0.010
East Dyfed[4]	105.145	2.207	102.600	0.166	175.555	0.010
Gwent	182.785	2.211	193.602	0.020	213.418	0.010
Gwynedd	113.188	10.333	115.192	0.120	124.524	0.010
Mid Glamorgan	246.218	6.899	254.127	2.458	276.713	2.462
Pembrokeshire	48.455	—	49.466	0.020	—	—
Powys	58.543	—	58.144	0.020	67.824	0.010
South Glamorgan	217.273	14.623	211.441	14.326	231.339	0.010
West Glamorgan	154.739	8.738	152.314	2.449	178.989	0.010

Notes:

[1] Final cash allocation including capital charges but excluding transfers to GP fundholder budgets for their purchase of certain hospital and community health services for their patients (source 1993–94 annual accounts of health authorities).

[2] Notified allocation as at 15 February, 1995, including capital charges but excluding transfers to GP fundholder budgets for the purchase of certain hospital and community health services for their patients (source Welsh Office).

[3] Initial cash allocations for 1995–96 announced on 2 February inclusive of capital charges and funding to be transferred to GP fundholder budgets for the purchase of certain hospital and community health services for their patients (source Welsh Office).

[4] Allocation for 1995–96 represents the funding available to the new Dyfed health authority.

DEFENCE

Christina Menzies

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Military police are looking for anyone else following the not guilty verdict on Corporal Fisher in respect of the murder of Christina Menzies in 1993; what the victim's father has been told and for what reasons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Without a conviction in this case, the inquiry cannot be closed. Any new evidence or avenue of inquiry has been and will continue to be thoroughly pursued, although at present neither the German civil police nor the special investigation branch of the Royal Military police are conducting active inquiries in connection with Christina's murder. Staff Sergeant Menzies has been advised accordingly.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will call for an inquiry into the conduct of the prosecution in the murder case against Corporal Fisher cleared of the murder of Christina Menzies.

Mr. Soames: No inquiry is considered necessary or appropriate. The prosecution was properly brought and conducted by an experienced senior legal officer of the Army legal services.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made as to the propriety and competence of the military police investigation into the murder of Christina Menzies at RAF Gütersloh in 1993.

Mr. Soames: The body of Christina Menzies was found at Spexard, approximately 10 k south-east of RAF Gütersloh, now Princess Royal barracks Gütersloh. The Home Office forensic pathologist confirmed that Christina was killed at the scene where her body was discovered. The investigation by the special investigation branch of the Royal Military police into the murder of Christina Menzies was one of the most comprehensive inquiries ever mounted by the SIB in Germany: a major incident inquiry team was established, and worked in close liaison with the German civil police; wide-ranging and extensive avenues of inquiry were rigorously pursued; more than 300 service personnel, dependants and civilians were interviewed; and extensive searches, forensic examinations and appeals for information were made. The investigation team included several Home Office-trained individuals with a wide experience of such serious investigations.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many prosecutions for serious crimes had been undertaken by the military prosecutor who conducted the case against the man accused of the murder of Christina Menzies on a British military base in Germany in 1993; and what verdicts were returned on those cases.

Mr. Soames: The Army senior legal officer who prosecuted at this general court-martial has prosecuted at 12 general courts-martial and 19 district courts-martial since February 1989. A total of 21 accused were found guilty.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military police inquiries are ongoing into the murder of Christina Menzies at RAF Gütersloh in Germany in 1993.

Mr. Soames: None at present. Although some avenues of inquiry were pursued following the trial, in the absence of further evidence which would implicate anyone other than the then prime suspect who was originally brought to trial, no active inquiries are being made. The case is subject to review, however, and any new evidence will be investigated.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make available, without charge, the full transcript of the trial of the case of the murder of Christina Menzies, to the lawyers of Staff Sergeant and Mrs John Menzies.

Mr. Soames: If Staff Sergeant and Mrs Menzies' lawyers require a transcript of the trial they should apply to the office of the Judge Advocate General, 22 Kingsway, London WC2B 6LE.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the German police requested that they should conduct the investigations into the murder of Christina Menzies in Germany in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The body of Christina Menzies was discovered in a German civil area and the German police were properly involved at the beginning of the inquiry. Once her identity was established as that of a British forces dependant, joint inquiries between the German civil police and the special investigation branch of the Royal Military police were conducted. Subsequently, a British service man was arrested on suspicion of Christina's murder. In view of the status of both the victim and the suspect, prime jurisdiction for the prosecution of the service man was passed by the Germany civil authorities to the British military authorities.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who decided that the British military police and not the German civilian police should investigate the murder of Christina Menzies in Germany in June 1993.

Mr. Soames: Although the German civil police were involved in the investigation into Christina Menzies' murder, jurisdiction was passed to the British service authorities after the suspect's arrest. The NATO status of forces agreement and supplementary agreement permits the German public prosecutor to waive the primary right of jurisdiction, which then passes to the sending state. In this case it was decided between the chief police adviser of the British service liaison organisation, the German public prosecutor and the service authorities that the case would proceed to court-martial.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the competence of military police to handle complex forensic and scientific investigation into serious crime.

Mr. Soames: Royal Military police special investigation branch major inquiry teams include Royal Military police and Home Office-trained investigators and scenes of crime officers of the highest competence. Special investigations branch investigators may on occasion be required to work alone, unsupervised and without immediate support and therefore are well trained in a wide range of investigative techniques.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the military police

investigation into the murder of Christina Menzies on the base of RAF Gütersloh in Germany in June 1993.

Mr. Soames: A large-scale joint investigation was carried out by the German civil police and the Royal Military police, involving the most senior and experienced special investigation branch investigation officers. Given the complexity of the investigation, which involved every conceivable avenue being pursued and the deployment of all available resources, it is concluded that the Royal Military police investigation was carried out thoroughly.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will call for a report from the officer commanding the military police into the police investigation of the murder of Christina Menzies, at RAF Gütersloh, Germany, in 1993.

Mr. Soames: No. On completion of inquiries into this case, a comprehensive report detailing the action taken by the investigation team was prepared. In view of the verdict of not guilty, the procedures were reviewed by the special investigation branch, Royal Military police and were found to be sound. No further report is considered necessary.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many prosecutions for *(a)* murder and *(b)* other serious crimes have been prosecuted by military prosecutors in courts martial over the last 20 years; and what verdicts were returned.

Mr. Soames: Since February 1989, 146 accused have been tried by Army general courts-martial and have been prosecuted by legal officers of Army legal services, including 11 prosecutions for murder and five for manslaughter. At these courts-martial, 116 accused have been found guilty and 30 have been acquitted. Statistics for earlier years could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the competence of military prosecutors to prosecute serious crimes involving forensic and scientific dimensions at courts martial.

Mr. Soames: The competence of the officers in question is not in doubt. The findings and conduct of Army courts-martial are continually reviewed by the director of Army legal services, by the Judge Advocate General and, where an appeal has been lodged, by the Courts-Martial Appeal Court.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations his Department has carried out on those service-personnel who took part in the Gulf War and who are now suffering from the so-called desert-fever syndrome in respect of possible damage to the immune system resulting from the precautions they were instructed to take; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The only such precautionary measure service personnel in the Gulf were instructed to take was the self-administration of one 30mg pyridostigmine bromide tablet every eight hours from their nerve agent pre-treatment sets on order from the local chain of command as a protection against the threat of nerve agent attack. The body of medical evidence from over four decades of medical use of pyridostigmine, the specific research into pyridostigmine as a nerve agent prohylaxis and the Department's current Gulf war medical assessment programme all indicate that pyridostigmine does not damage the immune system. Nor is there any biologically plausible rationale to suggest that it could do so.

Various vaccines were administered during the Gulf war on a voluntary basis. Again, the body of medical evidence shows that vaccines do not produce immune system dysfunction.

The Department's Gulf war medical assessment programme uses well-established screening investigations, which include a full blood count, differential white cell count and erythrocyte sedimentation rate. Any individual patient with suspected immune dysfunction undergoes immunoglobulin assay, tests for autoantibodies and a variety of imaging investigations. If this whole screening process reveals a possible immune system abnormality, more detailed investigations are ordered.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if complete medical records, including all substances and innoculations administered during the Gulf war to any member of the armed forces, will be made available to him or her or their general practitioner on request.

Mr. Soames: Service medical records are the property of the Department but, in common with civilian medical records, individual access to them by the patient concerned is allowed in accordance with the Access to Health Records Act 1990. Under the provisions of this Act, medical records are normally released to the individual concerned only if they were compiled after 1 November 1991, which post-dates the end of the Gulf conflict. However, for service medical records of former personnel compiled before this date, it has long been my Department's policy to release them upon request to the individual's general practitioner when they are required for the management of a particular case. These records include details of the medications and vaccinations given to the patient. However, in the operational situation pertaining during the Gulf conflict it is possible that not all such details were transcribed from field records on to personal medical records. The Defence Medical Services is happy to give advice to GPs in individual cases of doubt. Nerve agent pre-treatment sets were issued to all personnel in the Gulf but are not recorded on personal medical records as they are self-administered on order from the local chain of command, depending on the assessed threat of nerve agent attack, and not given as a medicinal product.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what terms of reference the members of the Royal College of Physicians are conducting their independent verification of his Department's Gulf war veterans medical assessment programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The purpose of obtaining the assistance of the Royal College of Physicians is to gain an independent opinion of our Gulf war medical assessment programme. It is for the Royal College of Physicians to determine the terms of reference.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will identify by name the members of the Royal College of Physicians who will oversee examinations under his Department's Gulf war veterans medical assessment programme.

Mr. Soames: The purpose of obtaining the assistance of the Royal College of Physicians is to gain an independent opinion of our Gulf war medical assessment programme. The selection of members to oversee the programme is a decision for the Royal College of Physicians.

Phoenix Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify the technical problems which have developed with the Phoenix remote-controlled surveillance aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: MOD flight trials held in the course of last year highlighted a number of areas requiring further work, including the degree of damage sustained by air vehicles on landing, sensor focus drift, propeller performance and supportability issues.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what other options his Department is considering in relation to the Phoenix remote-controlled surveillance aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: The way ahead on the Phoenix project is currently under consideration. The Department also continues to review the capabilities of alternative systems, in accordance with normal procurement practice.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the original estimated cost of the Phoenix remote-controlled surveillance aircraft at current prices; and what is the total amount spent to date at current prices.

Mr. Freeman: The original estimated cost of the Phoenix project at current price levels is £218.2 million, including VAT. The total amount spent to 31 December 1994 is £168.99 million, including VAT at current price levels.

Lieutenant Commander Chris Parke

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if Lieutenant Commander Chris Parke of the Royal Navy pensions and payroll department, HMS Centurion, Portsmouth, sought permission from the civilian management and conditions of service division within his Department to permit him to join the data supply company Informix;

(2) on which date Lieutenant Commander Chris Parke, of the Royal Navy pensions and pay roll department, HMS Centurion, Portsmouth *(a)* ceases to be in the employ of the Royal Navy *(b)* ceases to be in the employ of his Department and *(c)* commences employment with the data supply company Informix.

Mr. Soames: Lieutenant Commander Christopher Parke RN will cease to be employed by the Royal Navy on 26 February. Between 9 and 29 January he worked, unpaid, with Informix under normal resettlement arrangements. From 30 January, he was on terminal leave and entitled to take up full-time employment, and I understand that he has worked full-time for Informix since that date. Service instructions require Lieutenant Commander Parke to seek permission to take up employment with Informix and this has now been sought retrospectively. I cannot speculate on the likely outcome of his application.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the role of Lieutenant Commander Chris Parke, of the Royal Navy pensions and pay roll department, HMS Centurion, Portsmouth, in the awarding of contracts on behalf of the Royal Navy to the data supply company Informix.

Mr. Soames: Lieutenant Commander Christopher Parke RN provided technical and administrative support to those responsible for the decision to award a contract for a relational database management system to Informix in April 1994.

Official Service Residences

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the expenditure for each of the official service residences in each of the previous five financial years before 1991–92.

Mr. Soames: Information prior to financial year 1991–92 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to close the RNAS base at Portland; and where he plans to relocate the search and rescue helicopters currently based there.

Mr. Soames: It is our intention to close RNAS Portland by 1999. The Royal Navy Sea Kings, which currently provide daytime-only search and rescue cover, are planned to join the Sea King Mk IV fleet at HMS Heron at Yeovilton. In the light of their planned withdrawal, future search and rescue coverage in the region is currently being considered with the coastguard.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to base search and rescue helicopter operations at RAF St. Athan in the next three years.

Mr. Soames: There are no plans to base search and rescue operations permanently at RAF St. Athan. However, the station is often used as a temporary operating base and this practice is expected to continue.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Japan (Princess of Wales Visit)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the cost to public funds of the visit of HRH the Princess of Wales to Japan; on which vote it is met; and for what reasons.

Mr. Baldry: The costs of different activities related to this visit were borne by the Departments whose responsibilities they were as follows:

(i) The cost of the princess's travel to and from Japan was a charge—as for all air travel, whether official or unofficial, by the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Queen Mother and the Prince and the Princess of Wales—to the Ministry of Defence.

(ii) The cost of the personal protection office who accompanied the princess was met by the Metropolitan police.

(iii) The visit involved some costs to the embassy in Tokyo on entertainment, transport and staff time. These are part of the normal functioning of an embassy.

(iv) The cost of travel for reconnaissance visits undertaken by the princess's private secretary and a press secretary—necessary to ensure the visit was properly prepared in relation to security and other aspects—was met by the FCO

and amounted to £6,568—that is two business class return fares. The two officers were accommodated by embassy staff.

UN Social Summit

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Heads of State or of Government have indicated they will attend the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Goodlad: Over 90 Heads of State/Government have confirmed their attendance at the Summit. Several countries, including Japan, Canada, New Zealand, Austria, Ireland and Greece have not yet decided who will represent them.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Ministers who have represented the United Kingdom at preparatory meetings for the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Baldry: The four preparatory committee meetings held in New York to prepare the documentation for the summit have been attended by officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Overseas Development Administration, the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment. The vast majority of countries, including all our European Union partners, felt that ministerial attendance was not appropriate.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom will support the common European position at the forthcoming United Nations social summit in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Goodlad: Yes. United Kingdom and European Union policies on the summit are in line. The United Kingdom has played a full part in European Union co-ordination during preparations for the summit.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the European Union policy to be presented at the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Goodlad: We are content with the European Union's position in relation to the summit. It is the result of active EU co-ordination in New York and Brussels during which many of our suggestions for strong texts on the three core issues were incorporated into the overall EU position.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will include representatives of the Confederation of British Industry and Trades Union Congress in the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Goodlad: The United Kingdom delegation to the summit will not include representatives of non-governmental organisations. However, the Trades Union Congress, along with several other UK-based NGOs are planning to send representatives to the summit.

Chatham House Conference

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public or private institutions will be invited as full participants in the forthcoming Chatham House conference on promoting British values, civilisation and the English language.

Mr. Baldry: The conference on "Britain in the World" is being organised by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, in association with Her Majesty's Government, as part of the institute's 75th anniversary celebrations.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will give the opening speech. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will give a lunch-time address. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) will also speak. Other contributors will include Dr. Henry Kissinger; Mr. Peter Bonfield, Chairman of ICL; and Dr. Josef Joffe, foreign editor of the "Süddeutsche Zeitung". The programme has been agreed jointly with the RIIA, which is inviting people from all walks of British life who will represent a wide range of interests and viewpoints. There will also be a smaller number of foreign guests.

Israel

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Israel concerning the treatment of Lebanese detainees being held in Khiam prison in southern Lebanon.

Mr. David Davis: We regularly raise our concerns about the treatment of Lebanese detainees being held in Khiam prison with the Israeli Government. We welcome recent reports that detainees are now being allowed visitors. However, we remain concerned about continued reports of ill treatment of detainees and urge those responsible for Khiam prison to grant the International Committee of the Red Cross full access.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the United Kingdom is taking, together with the other European Governments, to persuade Israel to withdraw its forces from southern Lebanon, in compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution No. 425.

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom has repeatedly called for the full implementation of Security Council resolution No. 425 and the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Lebanese soil. The Israeli Government are well aware of our views.

Russian Federation

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations between the Western European Union and the Russian Federation.

Mr. Baldry: A range of informal links have been developed between the Western European Union and the Russian Federation. Foreign Minister Kozyrev addressed the Assembly of the Western European Union on 1 December last year.

UN Peacekeeping Missions

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what circumstances it is the practice in a United Nations peacekeeping mission to install a radio station to communicate accurate information to the local population; and if he will make a statement on conclusions drawn on the desirability of such an action after the experiences of Rwanda and Somalia.

Mr. Baldry: The United Nations has no set criteria for the establishment of a radio station in any peacekeeping operation. It is clear to the UN Secretary-General, however, that peacekeeping operations need an effective information capacity to enable them to explain their mandate to the population and, by providing a credible and impartial source of information, to counter misinformation disseminated about them. We agree with his view that radio is the most effective medium for this purpose.

Iran

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, columns 519–20, what are the two exceptions which have received licence application approval for significant nuclear items destined for Iran; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: The two exceptions for export licence approval for Iran were set out in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Secretary's reply to the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) on 1 March 1993, *Official Report*, column 8, namely that we should not approve licences for any goods or technology on the military or atomic energy lists—schedule 1, part 3, group 1 and 2—of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992 (as amended) unless they are:

(a) goods essential for the safety of civil aircraft and air traffic control systems;

(b) radioactive material in the form of sources for medical equipment and deuterium labelled compounds for medical use.

Iraqi British Interest Group

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if British officials in Amman have had meetings in the last 12 months with the Iraqi British Interest Group; and if British officials in Amman have assisted representatives of the Iraqi British Interest Group in the last 12 months.

Mr. David Davis: Officials in the embassy in Amman last had contact with the current head of the Iraqi British Interest Group, Mr. Stephen Crouch, in a private capacity in September 1994. They have not knowingly given any assistance to representatives of the Iraqi British Interest Group. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has only become aware of the existence of the group in the last few months.

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

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Abbreviations

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